

**Kinship, Marriage, and
Womanhood Among the
Nagarattars in South India**

Yuko Nishimura

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Yuko Nishimura

A thesis submitted for the Ph.D. degree

London School of Economics

University of London

1993

Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to explore the caste culture of the Naattukoottai Chettiyars or Nagarattars, a South Indian mercantile caste. Chapter 1 includes a brief history of the Nagarattars and discusses their kinship oriented entrepreneurship. Chapters 2 and 3 discuss the Nagarattars' caste and kinship structure in detail and also their system of strict endogamy which serves to preserve wealth within their community. Chapter 4 examines the auspiciousness of the *sumangali* (married woman), describing the celebration of *saandi* held on the husband's 60th birthday. Chapter 5 examines the economic transactions of marriage in detail. A unique feature of this community is the three detailed marriage contract forms (*murai chittai*, *moi panam eludal*, *isai padimaanam*). Bilineal property transfer, as practised by the Nagarattars, leaves considerable moveable assets to women. Property transfer to women--especially in the form of money, gold, and *saamaan* (bridal goods)--as well as the reciprocal gift exchange between the bride's and groom's families, are discussed in detail. Chapter 6 focuses on two aspects of marriage rituals: first, the analysis of auspiciousness in relation to ritual items such as money, lamps, carpets, and the *taali* (marriage pendant), and second, the status transformation of a woman from a girl to a wife. The final part of the thesis deals with gift exchanges at funerals, and the economic morality of the Nagarattars. It is argued that their unique economic rationality is observable in their strong emphasis on auspiciousness rather than purity, as well as in exchange. All this contrasts with the Brahmanical model of religiosity, since Nagarattar morality strongly stresses the value of worldly economic activity.

Acknowledgement

This thesis is based on the fieldwork conducted for 11 months between January 1991 to November 1991 in Southern India and was funded by the Central Research Fund (University of London) and Yanagawa Memorial Research Award (University of Tokyo) and I express my gratitude to these two funds which enabled me to conduct my fieldwork. I was also helped by the ORS Award while I was writing up the thesis.

I would like to express my gratitude to those who encouraged me to come to London to complete a Ph. D. During my stay in London, two professors passed away in Japan. I would like to express thanks for the encouragement they gave me; Professor Keiichi Yanagawa of Tokyo University and Professor Tadahiko Hara of Tokyo University of Foreign Studies. They guided me while I was a postgraduate student of Religious Studies in the Graduate Division of Humanities at Tokyo University.

I also want to thank those professors in Japan, Noboru Karashima, Muneo Tokunaga, Hiroshi Ishii, Masako Tanaka, and Hiroko Hara for their encouragement to pursue higher studies.

In India, I am deeply indebted to Dr. P.V. Krishnamoorthy and his wife Raj as well as Sandya Narasimman and her family who looked after me while I was in Chettinadu in South India. I express my gratitude to all the Nagarattars I met there, especially to the women with whom I have developed long lasting friendships. However, I

dare not mention their names as their privacy must be protected. This thesis was written by me, but the Nagarattar women are my collaborators, as it is about their lives and marriages. (When necessary, I have used aliases in order to protect their privacy.)

Similarly, I should name another collaborator, Liz Mitchell who helped me with the last stage of my thesis writing. She understood my problem with English, and helped me to tackle it. Although it is quite difficult to write in a foreign language, it nevertheless gave me much pleasure as it was through this struggle, that many of my ideas became clear.

I would also like to express my thanks to Pat Caplan, who put me up in her house for a few days when I first came to London for an interview at LSE. I have been lucky to become one of the women who were inspired by her moral support and encouragement in academic studies.

Academically, I am deeply indebted to the Department of Social Anthropology at LSE and those academics I came across who stimulated me and made me decide to pursue this path. My experience at the Department will always be treasured in my memory.

During my study at LSE, Dr. C.J. Fuller trained me with amazing patience. Without his in-depth criticism and academic discipline, I would not have been able to finish this thesis. The training he has given me made me realize how difficult but important it is to be sincere in my academic work.

In Tokyo, I have been supported by my long time friend, Malini Subramaniyam and her family. To me, she is almost the embodiment of the soul of South Indian culture, and without her encouragement, I would have given up this path long ago.

Lastly, I thank Noboru, my husband. Without his understanding and support and sharing of my experiences, this thesis would never have been written and in this sense, he is a co-author of this work. He also helped me drawing most of the nicest illustrations which appear in this dissertation.

Yuko Nishimura

London

March, 1993.

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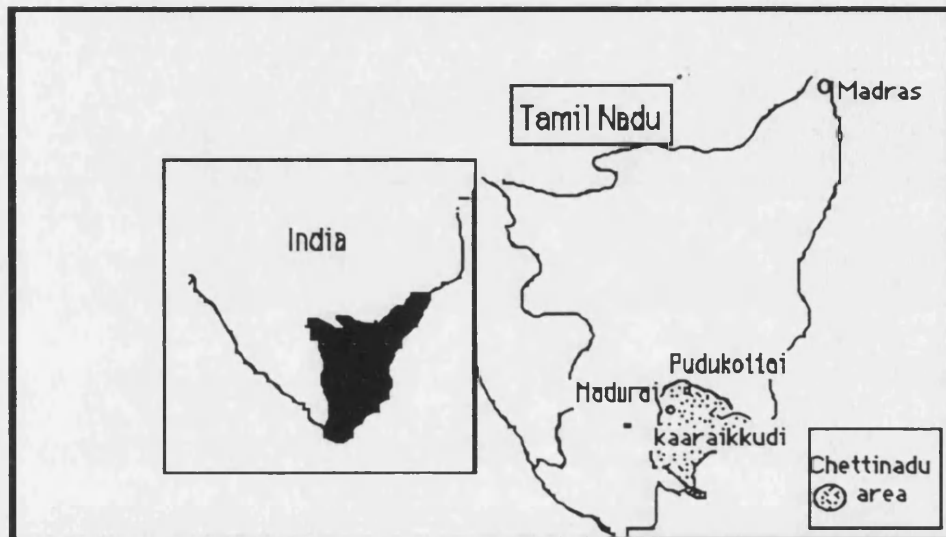
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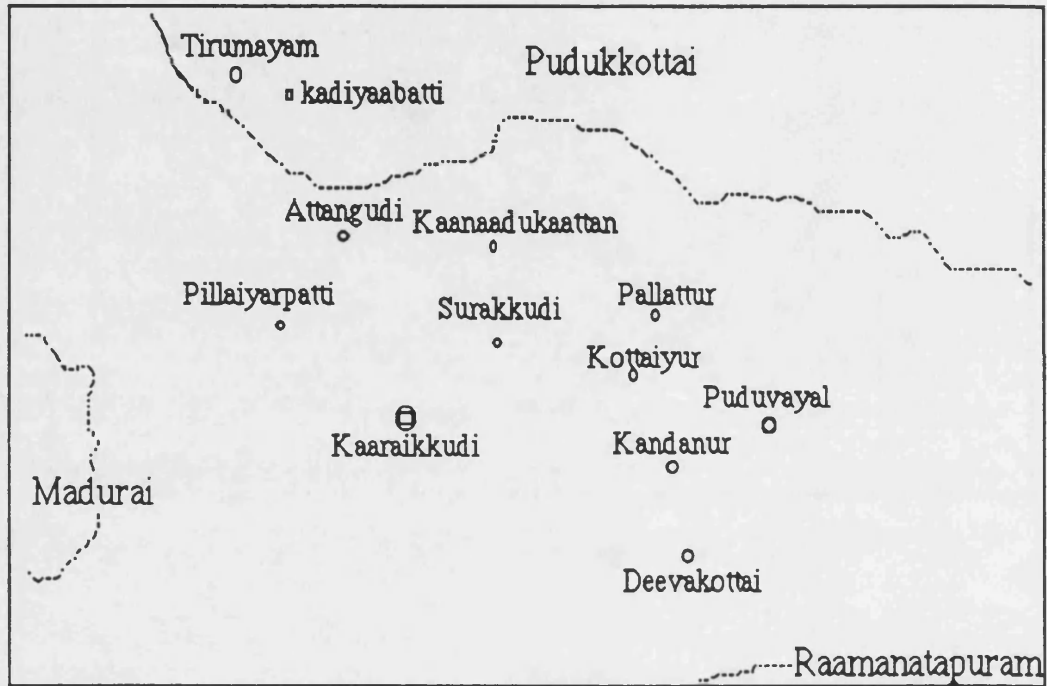
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Map 1 Tamil Nadu and Chettinadu area



Map 2. Pasumpon-Thevar Thirumangan District



1

Introduction**1-1 The beginning**

My initial encounter with the Nagarattars took place in 1985, as I was on the brink of completing my first stint of long-term fieldwork. I had been staying in the village of Mahaamai Puram, near Tirumayam in the Pudukottai District of Tamil Nadu. Dozens of the local castes congregate annually in this particular village to worship in the temple dedicated to the mother goddess, Maariyamman. The Nagarattars, along with other local castes such as the Pallars, Parayas, Mukkulatturs, Daasaris, and Pandaarams, traditionally have one *mandahappadi* day¹ during the twelve days of the festival.

On the festival's third day the *mandahappadi* fell to the Nagarattars of the village Kadiyaabatti, near Mahaamai Puram. Kadiyaabatti, one of the Chettinadu villages had an abundance of magnificent Nagarattar houses, which were beautifully decorated with exotic carvings and statues. These abodes seemed palatial: I had become accustomed to mud houses and thatched huts without tap water or toilets. The Nagarattars differed greatly from the other castes who lived in the area. Their grand houses were indicative of a different life-style and their attitude towards their *mandahappadi* day illustrated their aloof disposition. The third *mandahappadi* day

¹When it is a particular caste or group's *mandahappadi* day, that group is responsible for all expenses incurred, including the *puja* (rituals) and the entertainment. In return, the group has the honour of being the first to receive the blessing from the deity.

had fallen to the Nagarattars, but they did not attend, instead appointing a non-Nagarattar caretaker to receive the honour on their behalf. It became apparent that the Nagarattars' payment for their *mandahappadi* had been automatically drawn from the common bank account designated for charity.

On arriving in Kadiyaabatti via Tirumayam, I was astonished at the sight of this settlement. Architecturally these beautiful and unusual houses combined western and Hindu styles - the tops of the mansions were decorated with western angels and figures reminiscent of the Virgin Mary, intermingled with Hindu deities, and the windows were decorated with stained glass. However, my astonishment turned to puzzlement when it appeared that these beautiful houses stood in a ghost town. There were very few pedestrians and many of the mansions seemed deserted. It was explained to me that Kadiyaabatti had its time of greatest success and prosperity during the 1920's when the village teemed with construction workers building these Nagarattar houses with the teak wood transported from Burma. However, when the Burmese government severed all links with the Nagarattars their prosperity collapsed. I was told that nowadays, most of the Nagarattars who had ancestral homes in Kadiyaabatti lived in cities such as Madras and Madurai and that they seldom returned to the village other than on ceremonial occasions.

While I had been staying in Mahaamaipuram, one day, I was invited to lunch by an old Nagarattar woman who lived in one of the grandest mansions in Kadiyaabatti. I imagine that she became curious on discovering that a Japanese woman was researching the Maariyamman festival while living in a hamlet of low castes. In any case, she sent her servant to invite me to her house. This was an

unusual event in Tamil Nadu where the women were rarely so bold or independent as to invite a stranger to their house, even if the stranger was a foreigner and female - and so her curiosity was matched by my own.

On learning of my invitation, my neighbours, Daasaris and Pandaarams, said that I should find the food to be of a good quality since I was visiting a Nagarattar house. It was with these thoughts in mind that I went to meet an '*aacchi*' (a married Nagarattar woman) for the first time.

The house was a fabulous church-like mansion, protected by high walls and several thick, heavy teak doors. The *aacchi* gave me a guided tour of the whole house pointing out the rows of cupboards where she stored vessels, bed linen, silver goods etc., which were to be used in the event of a wedding. In the spacious attic, a wardrobe that stretched from floor to ceiling had been installed to store mattresses and pillows alone.

The vast difference between the lifestyle of this woman and that of the people in the village in which I was staying, where there was no tap water nor even a toilet, was striking. No one in the village owned a fridge, there was no gas for cooking, no toilet, and of course, no one had a car. The huge gap shocked me, and left me baffled as to how castes in such diverse circumstances could share the joy of the same village festival.

This *aacchi* was surrounded by servants including a male cook, a maid and 'agents', or domiciliary managers who dealt with most of the domestic affairs. Having male servants at home is quite unusual by South Indian standards, since sexual segregation is quite strict, and women are not supposed to talk with males unless they were close kin. The *aacchi* seemed to have been living there alone,

receiving her relatives, her husband (who lived in Bombay), her children, and grandchildren, as occasional visitors. They all lived in cities such as Bombay, Madras, and even in the U.S. , and came back occasionally to see her. (In fact, when she invited me on another occasion, one of her young granddaughters was visiting her from Madras.)

This lifestyle was anomalous amongst the Indians, most of the village women that I encountered would have regarded being away from their family for even just one day as exceptional. The old *aacchi* said that she even went to visit one of her daughters in Los Angeles, but added that life in the U.S. was not attractive. "There, you have to do everything yourself. You have to cook, prepare tea, and do the dishes. What a labour! I need servants. The life there was not at all comfortable to me."

The huge, high ceilinged entrance hall was decorated with magnificent stained glass, fine Italian chandeliers, Burmese teak and rosewood furniture, foreign porcelain collections and big sofas, covered with white sheets to protect them while they were not being used. Passing through these westernized rooms, I was guided to the women's quarter, where they had a *walavu waasal* , an open space, in which they were drying chilies in a basket. Here, an old female servant in a worn and threadbare cotton *saree* was eating cold rice from a plantain (banana) leaf beside a water-tap. This sight is quite common in most Hindu houses, yet the contrast between the imposing, spacious, westernized rooms and the daily routine life of drying chiliies and eating cold rice which was taking place in the *walavu waasal* left a deep impression on me. The juxtaposition, in one house, of two such contradictory lifestyles was baffling.

On the walls of the corridor surrounding the *walavu waasal*

hung the photographs of ancestors and foreign visitors, who had lived in the 19th century. Again I noted with interest that some of the men were in western dress while the Nagarattar women wore blouses with puffed sleeves underneath their sarees. I later surmised, judging by the background which did not resemble India at all, that some of the photographs must have been taken in Burma.

In a smaller dining room, I had a delicious vegetarian lunch with the *aacchi*, who had been quite friendly from the beginning. She was well over 60, and spoke some English, although she said she had attended school for only six years.

She gave instructions to her servants in Tamil; her manner was brisk and her instructions were indicative of a well organised mind. Good organization is central to the Nagarattar caste character as they are very financially conscious and this has been the basis of their wealth and prosperity. This view was shared by lower and upper class Nagarattars alike. As soon as we had finished our meal, the *aacchi* asked each of her servants how many *chapattis* they would want for their next meal, and, adding it to the number she wanted, she ordered the cook to make the precise amount. She had no difficulty in thinking ahead: though she had just finished eating, she was perfectly capable of planning the next meal.

Later, I ascertained that what I had noticed in her was typical of the Nagarattar character: they are parsimonious and excellent organisers. It was generally said that the Nagarattars are rich because they know how to save money, eking an existence out of very little. It was also said that the first test a mother-in-law would give her daughter-in-law was to observe the quantity of salt the daughter-in-law put on her banana leaf - she should be careful not to use too much. They are also meticulous in checking the conduct of

their servants: the first test is to leave out a small amount of money while a newly hired servant is cleaning the house. If she does not touch the money, or if she informs the *aacchi* of its whereabouts, the servant passess the test. I was told that this testing continues for several months.

The Nagarattars are friendly to non-Nagarattars and always honour guests with good food. That which was served to me was of a quality that showed the high standard of their food culture. Although I often ate with non-Nagarattar castes, the standard of food used to vary, while the Nagarattars, whether rich or not, normally served good food. Even if they were financially stricken, and ate cold rice and chutney every day in order to save money, they would be too proud to show it, and so, would pour kerosene over the banana leaf before throwing it away outside, to mask that they could not afford to pour *ghee* (purified butter) over the rice. The measure of wealth in a Nagarattar family was regarded as the indication of family status, and a decline would affect both their alliances and business opportunities. Later, I became familiar with the marked contrast in the big Nagarattar houses - there was an appearance of opulence but in reality there was often much poverty.

The Nagarattar woman I met for the first time was very economical with money and would not waste food, but she was also very proud. She, like other rich Nagarattars, was interested in religious and charitable donations. I had heard from the Maariyamman temple trustee that her father built a hospital to treat local people free of charge and she still maintained the hospital from the fund left by her father. During the Maariyamman festival which I researched, the local leaders of the festival visited her and asked for a donation to repair the wall of the temple. She gave them rs.

5,000 instantly, from her own pocket². I was impressed with the independence that was indicated by her making such a quick decision without consulting her husband. In South India, women cannot usually give away large sums of money without first consulting their husbands. In fact it is quite rare for non-Nagarattar women to be so financially independent, even if they are rich. However the villagers also suggested that the Nagarattars' donations to the temple are made partly out of the desire to impress others.

Since the invitation to lunch was extended by a woman to a complete stranger I turned over in my mind the notion that there might be some cultural tradition amongst her caste that allowed such freedoms to their women. My curiosity was increased by the fact that adjacent to the mansion in which she lived, was another which belonged to her husband and his *pangaalis* or patrilineally connected male relatives (see chapter three). Several *pangaalis* lived with their nuclear families (*pullis*) within the house and each family had its own hearth which appeared to be an indication of their economic independence from the joint family housed under the same roof.

While I was dining with her, she answered my questions and talked about her caste, explaining that there were nine clan Shiva temple divisions which functioned just like Brahmanic *gootras* as marriage regulators. However, she said that they worshipped *kula deivams* (lineage gods) more ardently than Shiva, although these deities were mostly local minor deities and non-vegetarian gods such as Karuppan, Madurai Veeran, Maariyamman, Selliyamman, and Kaaliyamman. She talked about her father's *kula deivam*, a goddess called Adai Kaattaa, who was a widow and the ancestress who

²At this time the salary of a college professor, or a bank branch manager, was rs. 2,500 per month, thus her instant donation of rs. 5,000 astonished me somewhat.

started the line.

By the time I left the Nagarattar woman's house, I was determined to study her caste, especially the *aacchis*, as my next research topic.

1-2 The fieldwork

In late January 1992, I went back to Tamil Nadu, and started fieldwork in the Chettinadu area. I stayed in Kaaraikkudi, a town situated in the north of Madurai, in the heartland of Chettinadu, until October '92. After 9 months, I moved to Madras and stayed there for one and half months until the beginning of December to clarify a few field data before I went back to London. My data was collected mostly in Kaaraikkudi and nearby Chettinadu villages such as Kadiyaabatti, Pallattur, Kaanaadu Kaattaaan, Kandanuur, Naattassaan Koottai, Pillaiyaarpatti, Paadaraakkudi, Tulavuur, etc. I also frequently travelled to several cities, especially to Madras to attend ceremonies and interview people.

The data was all collected by participant observation. I hired a local research assistant, a Brahman girl, who introduced me to the Nagarattar women who mostly belong to lower-middle class and middle-class level of income. We frequently visited them in their houses to interview them. The initial period of my research was also conducted at a local women's college although the data I collected here was mostly unused. The initial interviews with young Nagarattar women supported the data which I obtained in the later stages of my research.

Initially, the data was collected with the help of a research assistant, a Brahman girl. As a whole, she covered about one third

of the research period with me. My assistant's role as an interpreter was crucial in collecting technically 'sophisticated' information such as ritual procedures. Being a Brahman, she could also cope well with Brahman priests and their wives. Translation of bridal lists were also done with her help and also with several local people, mainly the Nagarattar women. The vocabulary and content were unique to the Nagarattars in many cases, and I had to visit them a number of times to clarify certain items.

Those whom I interviewed were from different economic levels-- lower-middle, middle, upper-middle and upper. Some senior *aacchis* and their families were quite helpful in introducing me to local Nagarattar houses. Help from such 'respectable and powerful' *aacchis* was crucial in conducting extensive interviews.

I also collected data from both from the Nagarattars and non-Nagarattar men. Through local 'clubs' (i.e. Lion's club, Rotary Club, etc.) which were closely connected to well-to-do merchants and businessmen, some of whom asked me to attend and give a speech. I was introduced to the locals as a 'proper scholar' who was keen to study the manners and customs of Nagarattar women. Such formal introductions were necessary to make them talk frankly about their privacy, especially because the Nagarattars had to be sure that I had not been sent by the local tax office to investigate their assets! I had to explain to some Nagarattars that my thesis would be submitted in London in English, and so there would be no chance for local people or tax officers to read it.

The choice of staying in Kaaraikkudi was originally suggested by one Nagarattar journalist in Madras. Through him, I discovered that there was a woman's college in Pallattur which had been established by a Nagarattar. I interviewed 3 to 5 girls from this

college every morning while in the afternoon and evening, I visited Nagarattar households in the nearby area. I prepared lengthy interview questionnaires, although they were only used for asking questions verbally in Tamil. The interviews with the college girls continued for 4 weeks and by the end of that time I had talked to nearly 40 girls in total. I spent about 30 minutes to an hour asking about their thoughts on marriage, education, family, religion, etc. I did not use the materials I collected in this way for this thesis, yet the data has become part of the backbone which supports the data I obtained through the interviews with much older Nagarattars.

I regularly met and interviewed around 30-40 people. They were mostly Nagarattars, except for a few non-Nagarattars who regularly provided me with crucial information. Meeting regularly, sharing meals, and gossiping was useful in making me feel part of their culture. However, I was not usually able to take notes at such times without it seeming inappropriate.

Regular visits were also necessary for me since my knowledge of Tamil was not good enough to pick up information in one or two visits. Taking down notes on rituals and ceremonies was essential, as well as studying genealogy, although I was never good at it. I also used to exchange opinions with local people about the Nagarattars, comparing them with the Brahmans and non-Brahmans in the Chettinadu area. Quite a lot of them were frank with me and made critical comments about the Nagarattars partly because I was not a Nagarattar -- a foreigner, an alien, who could not possibly pass such an information to local people.

My research assistant's house was a walkable distance from my house, a quite important factor for both, since in an orthodox area like Chettinadu, a girl's conduct is under the scrutiny of her

neighbours. I used to send my research assistant home at night in order to avoid a scandal. My sex also gave me an advantage in getting a woman research assistant. She said to me one day: "Of course, I would never have worked with you if you were a man!"

Having a woman research assistant has a few disadvantages: because of cultural constraints, she has to be home before supper, she cannot accompany trips, and she is often unavailable for other domestic work assigned to her. However, in spite of such inconveniences, a woman assistant was still a bonus especially because I was focusing on the life of woman.

To be a foreigner was also a plus, since I could accompany men as an exceptional case: I could go to the cremation ground with them, could sit in the men's quarter, eat with them, and give a speech at their meeting, since I was not exactly 'a woman', but 'a foreigner' from their point of view.

1-3 The Nagarattars: a History

The Nagarattars call themselves '*chettiyars*' (merchants). The name *chetti* is used to denote mercantile castes, as a more or less honorific title (Thurston 1909, vol.2: 91). According to Thurston (1909, vol. 5: 249), the word Nagarattar is derived from their word for 'fort', which is where their ancestors lived.

Annaamalai Chetti(1982) gives a similar explanation concerning this point: since many of the Nagarattar chettiyars lived in big houses resembling forts, they came to be called 'Naattukottai Chettiyaars'. 'Naattukottai' translated literally, means 'fort in the country'. According to Somalay, the term is derived from the word 'nagaram', a town. Since the term *nagaram* means town, those who

came from the *nagaram* were known as the Nagarattars (Somalay 1953: 15-6).

Thurston names four of the best known Chettis: the Beri Chettis, the Nagarattu Chettis, the Kasukkar Chettis, and the Naattukottai Chettis (Thurston vol.2 : 92). Venkatarama Ayyar, in the *Pudukottai Manual*, mentions the Naattukottai Chettis, and also a few other Chettis claiming that both Sundaram Chettis and the Naattukottai Chettis must have derived from the Ariyur Chettis (Ayyar 1938: 120-121), though, at the moment, no connection has been made between these three castes. With regard to wealth, the Nattukottai chettis are the most prominent Chettiyars in South India, and have attracted most attention.

The homeland of the Nattukottai Chettiyars is in the area called Chettinadu, or the land of Chettiyars, which is bound on the north by the Vellaru river, in the south by the Vaigai river, in the west by Piramalai and in the east by the Bay of Bengal (Somalay 1953: 12). They are distributed among 78 villages, 58 of which are located in the Ramanathapuram District (which is now split into Ramnad District and Pasumpon-Thevar Thirumagan District), the other 20 are in the Pudukottai District.

According to legend, they started as jewellery merchants, and had moved to Kanchipuram by 7th-8th century B.C. Sometime during the 7th century, 8,000 families were compelled to commit suicide in protest, as the king had illegally imprisoned several (ten to twenty) of their women. Only 1,502 boys were saved and they later married local Vellalar (the agricultural caste) girls, creating a new caste which is the foundation of the Nagarattars of today. In connection with the marriage to the Vellalar girls, the founders of the Nagarattars made several mutual agreements with the original

three Vellalar castes from whom they had taken the girls. First, the Vellalar parents would give dowries for the girls so that they could maintain their maidservants after marriage. Second, the Vaisya (mercantile caste) men would not give their daughters to the Vellalars, and thus the marriage rituals performed by the girls' brothers and relatives would not be performed until after one or two generations. This means that the Vellalar girls' natal families would not remain as affine to the Vaisya families. As I explain in chapter 6, the wedding ritual performed by the maternal uncle and other kin on the girl's side is a symbol of the reconfirmation of reciprocal exchange of women between the kin and the affine in the following generations. Refusal of this ritual leads to the cessation of this relationship. Thirdly, the girls were to be given separate *madams* (religious institutions) for gaining the initiation for becoming a Shaiva from their own *guru*. This *madam* still exists in Tulavuur and gives initiation exclusively to women of the Nagarattar community. As a tradition, the *guru* is of Shaiva Vellalar caste, belonging to the lineage of the *guru* who was the first mentor for Nagarattar women.

Early in the 8th century, the Nagarattars migrated and settled in Pandya country following the request of the Pandya king. This area (where they still remain) is now called Chettinadu, the land of the Chettiyars (merchants) (Thurston vol.5: 249) .

As the legend maintains, they were already Shaivas (worshippers of Shiva) well before the 8th century, having their own religious *madam* with their own *gurus*. At present, there are two *madams* which were installed for the purpose of initiating caste members; the one exclusively for men, is located in Paadarakkudi and the women's is located in Tulavur. Another *madam* which has a

guru of the Nagarattar caste was established in Kooviluur in the 17th century. The Nagarattars have numerous religious institutions in almost all the renowned pilgrimage spots in India, including Benares. Therefore, their prestigious status as the 'high and religious caste' seems to have been established through long-term capital investment in religious institutions. Both Price and Rudner also point out that some powerful Nagarattars even purchased the title of the local Zamindar (chieftain) (Price 1979:195-6, Rudner 1985:114-6).

Indigenous historical records kept at Palani temple and collected by Rudner confirm the Nagarattar oral tradition that the caste was primarily involved in salt trade in a small area around their Chettinadu homeland, in the seventeenth century (Rudner 1985: 48). In order to get prestige, the Nagarattars were continually investing in religious institutions. However, as Mahadevan (1978) and Dirks (1987) have shown, most of the assets of the Nagarattars were first established abroad. In Ceylon, Malaya, and Burma, they earned huge sums as agents for British firms, middlemen for local investment, as well as in their traditional role as money lenders. And, as I mentioned earlier, they built grand houses (Dirks 1987: 370):

Armed with huge sums of money made overseas, the *cettiyar* men returned to their native villages where they had always maintained their home base, kept their women, celebrated their marriages, and in general continued their tightly knit social and religious life. There they built large and impressive houses, importing tons of Burmese teak and rare Ceylonese satin wood to support and decorate these new palatial structures. The *cettiyars* also tried to buy land, which became increasingly possible because of the new market in land created by the settlement of the latter half of the (19th) century. In particular, the *cettiyars* cornered the market on *brahmadeyas*, buying whole Brahman villages after the Inam Settlement of 1888. The *cettiyars* were particularly interested in buying these lands because they were among the most fertile, came in large packages, and had very low tax assessments through the

provisions of the Inam Settlement. The brahmans sold these lands because their holdings had fragmented with each new generation, more and more of them having mortgaged their lands already for cash in what became an escalating move to the towns and cities, where they could obtain education, and then government employment as office workers and bureaucrats.

The *cettiyars* also invested their money in temples. Here they ran into major resistance. For the *cettiyars* invested in temples not only out of religious fervour, but to secure higher honours in important regional temples, if possible displacing or at least superseding the regnant *nattars*. Not that religious fervour was unimportant; the *cettiyars*, like other groups of Indian merchants, saw a direct relationship between their temple worship and business success. (Dirks 1987: 371)

Concerning the influence of the Nagarattar capital on the Burmese economy, Siegleman (1962) claims that the vast fertile lands of Lower Burma were created by the funds provided by the money lenders of the Nagarattars, thus making the Nagarattars' involvement in the local economy a positive one:

The first [cause] is the series of British attempts to fill the wastelands of Lower Burma with population; it was this population and the immigrants from Upper Burma that provided the clientele for Chetty's early economic administrations. The second is the expansion of cultivated area in Lower Burma; it was in this conversion of millions of acres from jungle to paddy fields that Chetty capital played such an indispensable role. (Siegleman 1962: 82)

However, Siegleman also contends that such a heavy investment together with the economic squeeze on the local farmers created much tension between the Nagarattars and the Burmese, which eventually forced the former to retreat from Burma in the late 1930s. Moreover, Mahadevan (1978) claims that the conflict between the Nagarattars and the local farmers was unavoidable since the former exploited the latter, especially when the world economy was suffering from the depression. Mahadevan quotes from the

report of the Madras Banking Enquiry Commission of 1929 and concludes:

The chettiyars obtained 50 per cent of the crop of the agriculturist in return for the loan advanced. Mahadevan further stated that by acquiring paddy in this way and selling it, they could, given the upward trend in the prices of paddy, easily secure repayment of their loan and the interest. (Mahadevan 1978: 351)

Siegleman argues that the Burmese were the largest rice exporters in the world market during the 1920's-30's, and that this was made possible by the capital provided by the Nagarattars (1962: 97). However, Mahadevan points out that the Nagarattars also made huge profits by providing funds for the farmers, demanding high interest and then repossessing or purchasing the land from the impoverished farmers. They then became landlords and exploitation became so acute that the local government had to intervene.

With the money acquired, the Nagarattars entered into business with other enterprises such as rice mills and rubber estate, while also continuing with their tradition of lending money to mid and small scale farmers in Burma. The conflict between the landlord - cum - money lender Nagarattars and the local Burmese increased as the anti-Indian sentiment grew. Mahadevan claims that by 1929-30, the Chettiyars owned as much as 570,000 acres of fertile land in the thirteen main districts of lower Burma, and this was 6 per cent of the total occupied land, which was 'no mean figure by any standard' (Mahadevan 1978: 353). By the 1930s, the conflict between 'the Chettiyar and the Burmese cultivators had entered into its final, most acute stage' (Siegleman 1962: 298). In the depression, the price of rice and land plummeted in the world market. And European banks, which began calling in the loans they had advanced to the big Nagarattars and the north Indian merchants (Marvari firms),

intensified the crisis. In 1941, the land purchase act was effected by the Burmese government to purchase the lands held by the Nagarattars at a minimal cost, in order to redistribute the land to the impoverished Burmese farmers. The result of this was that the Nagarattars finally had to leave Burma, losing as they went, a huge amount of investment.

The Nagarattars after the 1930's

According to Ito, most of the Nagarattars' community assets (i.e. about three-fifths of their working funds invested abroad) were in Burma. Yet because of the depression, the invasion of the Japanese army, and the subsequent independence of Burma, they lost it all. However, in spite of such a huge loss, the community as a whole survived and were re-established as the 'modern capitalists in their own country' (Ito 1966: 372). Ito locates the bankruptcy of the Nagarattars' traditional economic activities and the shift towards modern capitalistic activities at a point which coincided with the period of the 1930s-40s, when India's capitalism was gradually expanding. Nowadays, they are most closely connected with the cotton textile industry and one-fifth of the total spindlage of the four states of Southern India is owned by the Nagarattars. In addition, they control four banks of various sizes, and hold a quarter of the total bank deposits in southern India (Ito 1966: 372). A few of them entered other industries such as the metal and engineering industry, the sugar industry, and the fertilizer and other chemical industries.

The chief business combines (business conglomerates) which have been extremely successful are the Rajah Sir Group (now divided into the Raja Sir Muttiah, M.A. Chidambaram, and M. Ct. M groups), Tiagarajan group, and the A.M.M. Group (TI cycle).

Ito, comparing the Nagarattar groups with other major North Indian business combines such as the Tatas and Birlas, the Mafatlals, the Walchands, and the Mahindras, claims that excepting the first two (i.e. the Tatas and Birlas), the combined figures of the above mentioned Nagarattar groups exceed the other big North Indian business combines both in scale and in assets.

1-4 Entrepreneurship And Kinship

Ito claims that the motivation of profit-making of Indian entrepreneurs is 'not the individual as in western Europe, but the minimum unit of enterprises is the joint family' (Ito 1966: 368). He also claims that part of the strength of the Nagarattar entrepreneurship exists in the minimum nuclear unit (*pulli*) which consists of a husband, a wife and their unmarried children. According to him, for each *pulli*, autonomous economic activities are encouraged, which helps each *pulli* take quick decisions, without consulting the head of the joint family. For example, Ito cites the TI group as consisting of a total of six nuclear families including those of two brothers, a son, and three nephews who are formally separated but in fact have jointly built up a group of companies called the AMM group³. In order to compete with the big business combines in North India such as Tata and Birla, Ito claims that competition as well as cooperation are encouraged. It is increasingly necessary for the Nagarattar business combines to unite, since:

Mobilization of funds for the enterprises in the group from sources

³ The AMM and the Raja Sir Annaamalai groups are *pangaalis* (patrileneally related male members and their families). I shall discuss the details of their kinship relationship in chapter 3.

both inside and outside the group by means of the group's own banks, investment companies, managing agents, etc. is an extremely profitable mechanism under the conditions of an economy in which investment requires immense funds in the light of present levels of technology and in which capital accumulation is lagging behind. (Ito 1966: 378)

Contrary to the encouragement of the economic autonomy of nuclear households, this does not lead the Nagarattars to start up enterprises individually that are then managed separately. According to Ito, the tendency is that the familial bonds, i.e. the joint family organizations, are strengthened. As an objective result, the allocation among the families of the management of the various enterprises included in the group is more or less fixed, and important decisions are made jointly under the leadership of their head, usually the eldest. In other words, Ito's argument claims that the combination of the economic autonomy of the nuclear household and the power of the joint household creates a potent force.

This fits into Somalay's (1953) description of the process of how they built the large ancestral homes with the money earned abroad. According to him, it was normally *pangaalis*, i.e. father, his brothers, and their sons etc. who would share the cost, and build the house and its extensions. The rest of the money sent by each earning member is usually pooled as joint property, although the man would regain his share when he left the joint house to get married. Therefore, although the house was jointly made so that it would impress others as the business firm, and the capital of individuals was pooled, they nevertheless kept individual accounts within the house.

The joint ancestral house existed as a symbolic unity, and each member kept their share of the joint house, in the form of a small store room (*ul viidu*), which would be handed down to their children. When the store room gets too small, the next generation

may also build a house for their own family so that they would be able to give one room of this house to each of their own children. In this way, the joint houses of the *pangaalis* are built side by side so that they would be able to utilize all the facilities of the houses of the *pangaalis*.

Naagarajan, writing about the richest man of the Nagarattar community in the early 20th century, i.e. Raja Sir Annaamalai, writes as follows:

On his marriage Annaamalai Chettiyar set up house on his own. It would be more correct to say, his parents set him up in a household of his own. That did not mean "moving house". A couple of rooms of the family house and a kitchen were set apart for him and he was supposed to run them. In point of fact, it was his parents who ran the establishment until he and his wife accustomed themselves to the routine and learned to follow it. Extremely frugal and socially well knit, the Chettiars believed in early beginnings. Annaamalai Chettiyar's elder brothers were already married and they had households of their own. The parents kept a watchful eye on them, guided their steps at every turn and groomed them to blossom into competent householders. The need to have a good look at both sides of the family rupee was ever present to their minds for, though their means were ample, the need for thrift was ever present....The sons were also trained in the family business. They were unpaid apprentices, apprentices who were coached in account-keeping and letter-writing. They had no other ambitions. Accounts came in from the family businesses abroad every month, from Ceylon, Burma and Malaya and from the firms in India. (Nagarajan 1983:17)

After marriage, Raja Sir Annaamalai had four sons, and they shared the property alike (father and sons) and each one was entitled to a fifth share of the family properties which included every item of property from the business at home and abroad, houses, lands, gardens, etc.....Not a stick but was divided. The partition is usually effected in a family council at which near relations and friends assist. Preferences are respected where there is no special objection and the partition is reduced to writing. (Nagarajan 1983: 23)

In addition to the property share given to the sons as small

entrepreneurs, there is also a share for the daughters although this is much smaller in comparison. However, the final partition takes place when the father dies. Sometimes the final partition does not come at all, since the *pangaalis* decide to continue a jointly held company. If sons get married and receive their share from their fathers, they are expected not to ask for any further share until the death of their father. It is the wife's family who should help him thereafter.

Nagarattar women bring a large sum of capital from their 'mother's house' (*ammaa viidu*), and it is because of this, it is said, that *aacchis* dominate their home and their husbands. Though not always the case, the Nagarattars think of marriage as starting a new business: "You cannot start a new life without any funds. Only when you have a stable fund, can you make a good family." Therefore, establishing a new family needs capital from both sides, i.e. husband's and wife's; while the husband's side looks after the family until they start to manage by themselves, the wife's natal family extends financial help after they have established an independent house. *Pulli* (the nuclear household), then becomes the symbol of the economic independence secured in the joint family.

1-5 Plan of the Nagarattar House

Fig.1-1: House plan

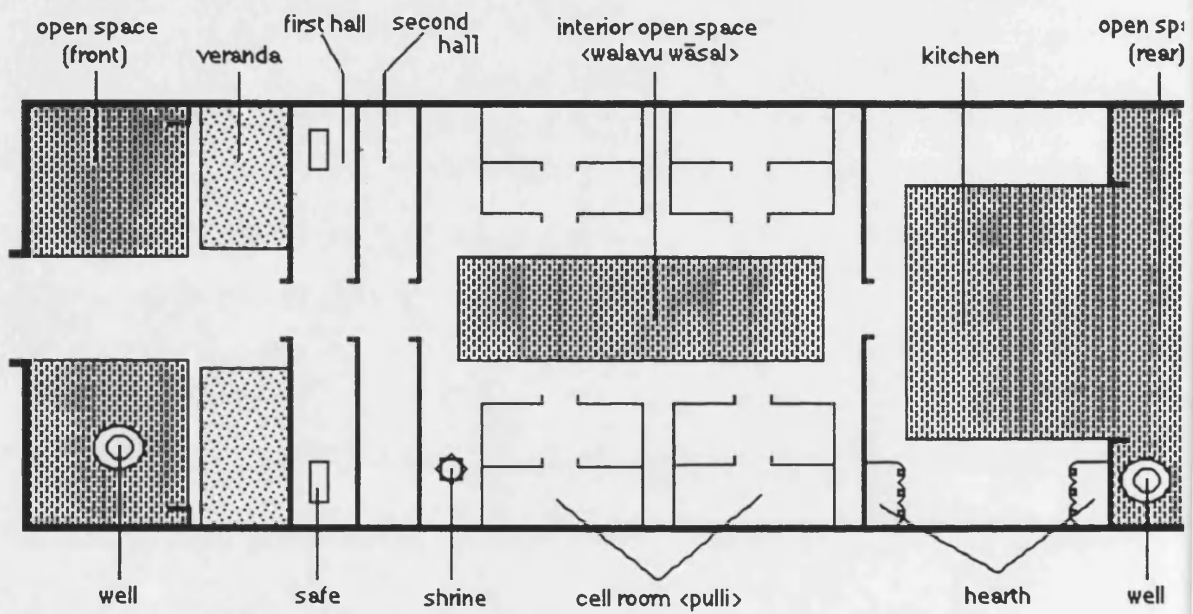
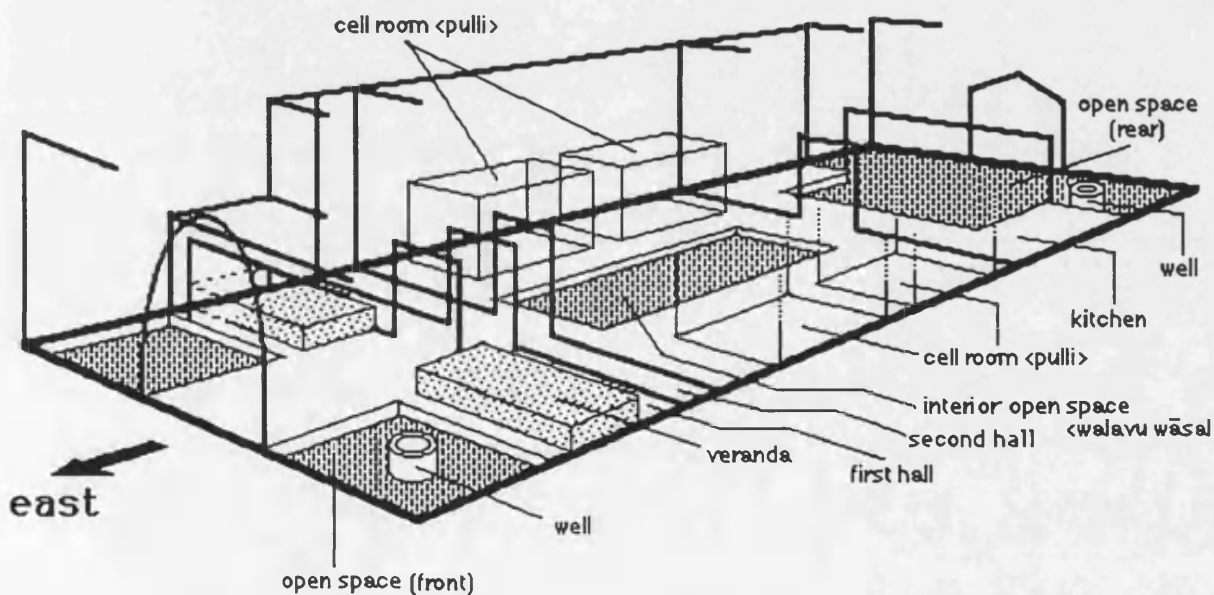


Fig. 1-2 Three-dimensional view of the ancestral house



The house faces east, as seen above, and the front entrance leads to an open space where a well is normally built. Then comes the veranda, usually occupied by men on ceremonial occasions and where strangers and business partners are entertained. If the joint family is wealthy enough, they can further extend this space and add a roofed hall to entertain guests and business partners. In such a case, this space may become the area used by accountants and clerks in transactions. If the house is fairly prosperous, the most senior male's quarter is secured in one corner of this area. In rich houses, this area is normally decorated in a western fashion, with stained

glass, chandeliers, desks and chairs, and western type wardrobes. There is a heavy door which separates this quarter from the interior and leads to the inner area called *walavu*. As seen in the second plan, the interior courtyard is called *walavu waasal*, and is the place where most of the ceremonial functions take place. It is in this area that they conduct auspicious rituals such as weddings and *saandi* (celebration of a male Nagarattar's sixtieth birthday). This is also the place where the corpse of a dead relative would be laid on a new mat to receive rituals from relatives. This *waasal* is surrounded by a corridor which faces several cell-like rooms (*ul viidu*, or 'inside house'). *Ul viidu* is called *saami viidu* 'deity's room' where they place an altar and conduct *puja* (ritualistic worship of Hindu deities). When they have weddings, this room is referred to as the *kaliyaana viidu* (wedding room). When a man gets married, he has this room as the starting point: he would either have it built with the funds which he saved while he worked abroad; or nowadays, if he had several brothers, he would inherit this room temporarily from his father. The room built with his own funds or inherited from his father is shared by him and any brothers he may have. After four or five generations, if the *pangaalis* still want to maintain the same joint household, the newer generation may build another quarter for rooms for their own nuclear family and their kitchens. If the father wants to build a new ancestral home to house his sons and his grandsons, he may ask for a contribution from those sons and grandsons. In any case, a Nagarattar man needs a ceremonial *ul viidu* for all ritual purposes. He does not live in this room, yet the room is ritually essential when he gets married and conducts important ceremonies for his family (see chapter three). It is usual for wives to keep their valuables in a safe and store provisions in this

room. In the past, this was also the space where the newly-wed couple would consummate the marriage. When a wife gets older and becomes a widow she may sell her own house and live in this joint ancestral house, as was the case with a couple of widows that I saw in Chettinadu. There may be two or three widows living in the ancestral house in different *pullis*. However, even then, they would not share the same kitchen. They always cook separately and their financial concerns are strictly separate.

Another door leads to the kitchen. Usually, this quarter is where the servants sleep. There is also an open space for cooking. When big ceremonies are held, extra space is provided for drying things (such as chiliies and large cooking utensils). Facing the open space, there are hearths (*aduppu*) which are allotted to each *pulli*. Once the newly married couple's training period is over, they are supposed to be independent, and have their own hearth and economic budget. Therefore, separate hearths as well as the *ul viidu* are a symbol of the autonomy of the nuclear household within the joint ancestral home. This kitchen quarter leads to the backyard of the house where the toilets are situated.

Usually, there are several toilets: if the family is rich the number of toilets is the same as the number of *pulli*. Usually, there are at least two toilets, because ceremonial functions require this. In a large house where very few people live, women use the back gate far more frequently than the front entrance. There are old widows who never open the front entrance for fear of burglars. The back gate is also used for informal visits and allows women more privacy.

The building of such large, joint houses has been used as a tool to protect the economic welfare of family members: in times of poverty, they still have somewhere to live. It is relatively cheap and

economical to share the cost and build a house in this way.

According to some I spoke to, those who had worked as 'agents' abroad saved money and built ancestral houses at a relatively cheaper cost in the 1920s. Some of them, in reality, were living in utterly miserable conditions, but maintained their status as a Nagarattar because of their ancestral house.

1-6 Chettinadu villages

Until the 1920s, Chettinadu was divided into several regions in the mind of the Nagarattars: West, East, South regions, the Kaaraikkudi area, and the Deevakottai area. Since there was little means of transport, these areas made territorial, endogamous blocks. Nowadays, they intermarry, but cultural differences persist, which can cause difficulties among certain blocks of people when they intermarry people of other regions.

At the moment, the population of the total Nagarattars can be estimated to be around 130,000 to 140,000⁴, but most Nagarattars live in cities or in towns, that a few villages out of the 78 were deserted because of a fall in population. Yet the Nagarattars still identify themselves with the village (*uur*) where their ancestral houses are. "Where are you from ?" ("*onga uur* ?") "I am from Pallattur." Such conversations are the norm between Nagarattars who meet for the first time. In this situation, Pallattur may not necessarily be the village he or she has been brought up in. He or

⁴According to Chandrasekhar (1980: 45), the total number of temple registration in their clan temple is 30,352 in 1950. The couple registers their marriage to the groom's clan temple, so assuming that there are around 4 to 5 members in each family, the total population can be around 121,408 to 151,760.

she may have lived in cities, and have only occasionally visited this village for functions as a child, taken by his or her parents. He or she might have never lived in the village before or after marriage. The village (*uur*) mentioned is where his or her ancestral house is situated and patrilineally transferred. Concerning the Tamil notion of *uur*, Daniel writes as follows:

An *ür* is an entity composed of substance that can be exchanged and mixed with compatibility which are purely political and legal definitions of territory and which, therefore, do not summon forth in the Tamil the associations and concerns relative to substance exchange. It is the ideal of every Tamil to reside in his *conta ür* - that *ür* the soil substance of which is most compatible with his own bodily substance. Such compatibility can only be achieved when the *kunam* of the soil is the same as the *kunam* of one's own *jāti*. (Daniel 1984 : 101)

Whether a Nagarattar lives in Singapore or in Los Angeles, he should come back to his *uur* in Chettinadu to attend ceremonies as this is the place where he and his family see people who share the same 'substance', i.e. *jaati* (caste membership). Their ancestral house is inseparable from the *uur*, since it is the identity of the caste status and proof of the membership to the caste. The *viidu*, the house, is described by Daniel as follows:

To the Tamil villager, a house is a living being that is conceived in a sexual act, grows, is born, has a horoscope, goes through a formative period comparable to childhood, matures, and attains a stable nature, interacts in predictable ways with its human occupants and with neighbouring houses, and ultimately dies when it is abandoned. A house is a member of the village community....Houses also assume the rank of the *jāti* of their occupants. Hence, houses, too, must observe the rules of status and propriety which govern intercaste relationships. (Daniel 1984: 149)

As I discuss in later chapters, the importance of the ancestral house

is associated with the life cycle rituals, e.g. pre-puberty, puberty, wedding, *saandi* (the celebration of a married man's completion of his 60th year) and funeral rituals. As Daniel mentions, procreative activities and death are shared by the *viidu*, especially by the ancestral house, for the Nagarattars. Chettinadu villages are full of grand mansions which are built side by side on the streets representing the close interwoven relationships between the members of the same caste.

The non-Nagarattars claim that the Nagarattar houses are conspicuously big whether they are *walavu viidus* or modern individual houses. One Nagarattar widow in her middle fifties who built a new house in Kaaraikkudi told me that it had to be large even though she lived alone, since her fellow castemen would not respect her unless the house was grand. Therefore, the Nagarattars equate their status with the grandeur of the house. Selling one's house is an obvious sign of economic decline, thus although they do not mind selling houses and land plots in urban cities, they do not sell the houses in Chettinadu unless they are extremely needy.

As I have already described, a number of such villages are deserted, and only the houses remain. However, the village does become animated, when functions are held. The streets become full of people, music is heard everywhere, and rows of cars park on the streets. Wherever they live - Bombay, Singapore, America, or London - the Nagarattars come back to participate in the celebrations of weddings or *saandi*. Not attending leads to the loss of membership and status in this community. Chettinadu exists for them in an abstract sense even though it hardly functions as a village when no celebration is being held. The Nagarattars imagine their society to be the people of the Nagarattar community who own their

ancestral house in Chettinadu even if in actual fact their people are dispersed all over the world.

At the centre of these social activities, are the *aacchis*, or the married Nagarattar women. Those who live in Madras and Madurai often come back to Chettinadu by train or by car. To them, coming to Chettinadu is an intrinsic part of their life. Some elderly *aacchis* constantly shuttle between Chettinadu and Madras, dealing with the social life and attending functions of other Nagarattars. If the *aacchis* did not return to Chettinadu they would have no real social life, and, without his *aacchi*, there is no social life for a Nagarattar.

1-8 Intercaste relationship and the Nagarattars

According to Leach, within a caste in India there are two kinds of relationship. Those who belong to the same sub-caste are bound by kinship while the external relations between different subcastes are economic and political.

These relations stem from the fact that every caste has its special 'privileges'. Furthermore, these external relations have a very special quality since, ideally, they exclude kinship links of all kinds. (Leach 1960 :7)

The intercaste relationships amongst the Nagarattars in Chettinadu are mostly transmitted hereditarily. They have service castes who come to serve their life-cycle rituals, and have 'agents' (domiciliary stewards) who look after their property.

The lower castes see the Nagarattars as aloof - they live in fortified mansions, and employ other castes such as the Kallars and the Brahmans as their 'agents'. Superficially, this suggests that the Nagarattars appear to be one of the 'dominant castes', as the term is

used by Srinivas (1987). Srinivas maintains the following:

Numerical strength, economic and political power, ritual status, and Western education and occupations, are the most important elements of dominance. Usually the different elements of dominance are distributed among different castes in a village. When a caste enjoys all or most of the elements of dominance, it may be said to have decisive dominance. (Srinivas, 1987: 114)

However, the Nagarattars in Chettinadu do not fit exactly into this model of the dominant caste. As landlords, some of them may still have an eminent right over agricultural land, but this does not mean that they are willing to be involved in the local village politics of the non-Nagarattars. They want to be aloof and disconnected from village politics, although they have a number of village servants hereditarily attached to them.

In that the Nagarattars are aloof, and of a high caste, they appear to be very similar to the Brahman communities. On closer examination however, it emerges that they are different from the Brahmans and highly Brahmanized castes such as the Shaiva Vellalars on several counts. Having village servants and agents, the Nagarattars can exercise physical power through economic power, if only indirectly while the Brahmans in Chettinadu cannot do so.

While I was in Mahaamaipuram doing my first stint of fieldwork, I was told by one of the Pandaarams (the village priestly caste), that one Pandaaram who was serving in the Maariyamman temple had been attacked and injured one night by a local gangster, a Kallar, who was hired by a Nagarattar. According to him, the Pandaaram who was attacked, had been having an affair with a Scheduled Caste woman. Since he was a temple priest, he was told to stop the affair, as it was not 'good' for the status of a temple priest. The Pandaaram ignored this and continued the relationship. The

Nagarattar decided to teach him a lesson by hiring one of the local gangsters to attack the priest at night, and the priest quit the affair instantly.

What was striking to me was that the Nagarattars could effectively dominate the non-Nagarattars without using their own physical power, and that the Nagarattar had sent the local gang to the temple priest as a matter of temple honour. Generally speaking, the Nagarattars do not want to get involved with inter-caste politics in the village, but if the matter turns out to be a temple affair, they will voluntarily get involved: if there is a charge of corruption in the temple management, the Nagarattars may even stop their donations. If they are asked to manage the temple treasury, they perform that task far more seriously than other castes.

The Nagarattars are different from either the 'right-hand castes' or the 'left-hand castes' which are described by Beck (1972). According to Beck, the dominant caste is defined as the sub-caste community that controls a majority of the local labour force in a given area (Beck 1972: 15), such as the Gaundars in the Kongu area. The Pillais are one of the high castes in the Kongu area, and are one of the 'left-hand castes', stressing ritual purity such as the elaborate dietary and interaction restrictions. They also prefer to stay away from agricultural labour, refusing, for example, to plough. Beck claims that the Pillais are not the dominant caste but they are viewed as being almost equal in rank to the Brahmans and hence are part of the "head" (the highest caste) or neutral (i.e. apolitical) area of the social body, which stands above the rival prestige ladders of the right hand dominant caste (Beck 1972: 9).

The Nagarattars are similar to neither the Pillai nor the agricultural Gaundar caste type. They are non-agricultural, but do

not imitate Brahmanic customs. As I shall describe in the following chapters, the Nagarattars' concept of purity and pollution does not tally with the Brahmans' in many respects and thus the Nagarattars are not dependent on Brahmanic value systems. The Nagarattars employ the Brahmans to their own advantage in the same way as they use other service castes as part of their interactions with the village.

For the Nagarattars, their view of Chettinadu as the 'native village' (*sonda uur*) is not due to their holdings of agricultural land but because it is the site of their ancestral house (*walavu viidu*). In any case, some Nagarattars nowadays have hardly any agricultural lands, even if they are rich, because they receive their income from other businesses. They regard society as a network of the Nagarattar community which has extended well outside the village boundaries: even kinship, their closest network, does not necessarily fit into the territorial boundaries of the 'village' in the sense meant by Srinivas or Dumont.

The majority of Nagarattars do not work in the fields - they either engage in small businesses, or work as clerks, but are rarely agriculturalists. The most common occupation is that of moneylender. They are the prevalent moneylenders for the agriculturalists and various artisans in the village. And it is through this relationship that the Nagarattars in Chettinadu have been closely connected with the villagers.

As Fuller points out, until recently money power in the agrarian economy has been entirely neglected by major anthropological approaches. Money circulation in the revenue system of India both in the pre-colonial and colonial village economy has been crucial, and purchase of land and the title of *miras* and *zamindar* was commonplace as Fuller cites recent works done by

historians (Fuller 1989: 49).

According to the historical analysis presented by Bayly for example, villagers were closely tied to the market economy and the supply of loans was essential for farmers to plan ahead for their business and family life in Northern India. Merchants and money lenders have also played important roles in the supply of money, the provision of loans and the circulation of the products of both urban and rural economies. As for the Chettinadu area, dependence on the Nagarattar money by the local *zamindars* and peasants in the Ramnad region was quite acute, according to Price (1979).

This outlines more realistically the relationship between the Nagarattars and the non-Nagarattars in the village. As the landlord-cum-money-lenders, the Nagarattars lent money to farmers who needed capital to purchase seeds and manage their houses until the harvest was completed. However, since a good harvest depends on the climate and other unpredictable factors (e.g. natural calamities), the money lenders have to take into account the risks involved when lending money to the farmers.

Although the Nagarattars as money-lenders are highly calculative and rational they are at risk from the failure of the autumn crop and thus they had to estimate the potential damage that might be caused by rain or other more unpredictable calamities. One of the reasons why the Nagarattars are eager to patronize the local temples and village deities might well derive from the desire to prevent such unpredictable calamities upsetting their scheduled recouping of money.

The local Parayas (the Scheduled Castes) who are normally employed by the Nagarattars as labourers, informed me that the Nagarattars used to give them chickens and other items when the

Parayas worshipped their own lineage deity, Karuppa, whose shrine was situated in their quarter. According to them, whenever there was a drought, the Nagarattars asked them (through their agents) to worship their deities on their behalf since the *kula deivams* of the Parayas were believed to be powerful.

1-9 Village deities and the Nagarattars

The Nagarattars are renowned as temple goers. In my opinion they are rather 'addicted' to it. The women love to go to the local temples wherever they are, especially on Fridays, which is the most auspicious day, offer *aacchanai* (offering through the medium of a temple priest), and maintain close relationships with the priests and the temple management. Even the Brahman temple priests (Gurukkals) admit that the Nagarattars, especially the *aacchis* are 'religious' in the sense that they love to go to temples and pray for the welfare of their family. The frequency of visiting temples among the Nagarattars in general is much higher than among other non-Brahman castes. When I was conducting fieldwork on Maariyamman worship, I noticed that no villager visited the temple as frequently as the Nagarattars. Moreover, the Nagarattars patronize temples and give donations whenever necessary, or join the management itself by becoming trustees. However, the Nagarattars' love of temples is not restricted to the grand temples where Sanskritized deities such as Shiva and Vishnu are enshrined, in fact they worship local village deities more ardently than they worship the higher gods.

They are fervent worshippers of goddesses, especially those who are the guardians of the village. Kaaliyamman, Maariyamman,

Selliyaṁman, etc. are deities who are believed to have especially ambivalent characters. If they are in good humour, they bring good rain and harvest, while in anger, they cause calamities and disease.

Whenever there is a village festival of Maariyaṁman in a nearby village or in the village itself, the Nagarattars do their utmost to attend. If it is impossible for them to attend then they give donations from the commonly pooled fund of the Nagarattars in the region.

In village life, both Brahmans and non-Brahmans worship *kula deivam* (the lineage god) which is located in the place where the family ancestry began. According to the Nagarattars, village gods, especially *kula deivams* are quite powerful and protective if they are pleased. On the other hand, if they are not properly worshipped, they cause calamities and annoy people.

Kula deivams worshipped today, as well as those mentioned in the Puraanic literature are mostly female (Das 1982: 82-3). The shrines devoted to them are usually small structures with thatched roofs, but sometimes they consist simply of stone markers. Although annual festivals are not held in a grand manner as the shrines for these deities are mostly small, they are believed to protect the locality for generations.

Deities like Muni, Karuppan, Muttaalamman, and Maariyaṁman are affiliated to particular villages, being worshipped as *kula deivams* by a single lineage or several lineages of different castes. The nature of this worship is different from that of the village festival. While the participants in village festivals are usually varied, the *kula deivam* worship limits the members to specific lineages, and the priest is selected from one of the married male members of those lineages. Worship of lineage gods is common among all Hindu

castes. Whichever caste worships these deities the *kula deivam* is supposed to be responsible for all the people who live locally.

A *kula deivam* is handed down on the paternal side, and as a general rule, marriage is prohibited among those who worship the same *kula deivam* enshrined in a particular locality. An exception to this rule applies to the Brahmans who have the *gootra* system to regulate their marriages.⁵

The Nagarattars, although Shaivites (worshippers of Shiva) who are divided into nine clan Shiva temple divisions, are ardent worshippers of local gods and goddesses. In Kaanaadukaattaan, one of the Chettinadu villages, one elderly Nagarattar widow said that she could never start any auspicious function without first worshipping local deities such as Muni and Karuppan who were worshipped by local villagers (including the Nagarattars) as *kula deivam*. Therefore, even when she has a big function in Madras, she returns to Chettinadu to worship these deities offering *aacchanai* and sometimes a piece of cloth. Praying to such local deities is considered by the Nagarattars to be essential for a good start and auspiciousness for any venture.

The religiosity of the Nagarattars is closely interwoven with their hereditary profession as merchants. Although merchants are highly rational and live in a world of calculation and probability, the predictability of logic is contrasted with the unpredictability of natural disasters. Therefore, donations to the temples and expenditures to the charities are part of the 'cover' or the insurance for the Nagarattars in this world (I shall return to this topic in the

⁵ *Gootra* is a system whereby Brahmans claim their ancestry from sacred *rishis* who composed vedic hymns. Those who have the same *gootras* are prohibited from marrying even if there is no traceable kinship relationship.

final chapter). While calamities may not be avoided even by being religious and charitable, the Nagarattars still enter into the world of the unequal relationship with the divine even if their daily life is based upon rational calculation and centres around the kinship relationship which is based on the ideology of exchange and 'reciprocity'.

In the following chapters, I shall discuss the ideology of reciprocity amongst the Nagarattars which is closely tied to their kinship, family and business organization, before I examine their ideology of non-reciprocity in the final chapter.

- 1-1 The *aduppu* (hearth) attached to the kitchen quarters of *walavu* *waasal* represents the autonomy of the *pulli*.



- 1-2 Front entrance of a prominent Nagarattar house.



1-3 A Nagarattar family in 1920s.



1-4 Front veranda of *walavu viidu*.



1-5 Deserted streets of Chettinadu.



1-6 An *aacchi* with her Brahman 'agent'.



2

The morality of endogamy

2-1 Caste membership

In contemporary India, asking someone to reveal their caste is considered 'rude', since it can potentially cause embarrassment to those from the lower castes. Therefore, trying to establish someone's caste becomes a matter of deduction by other means and people often confessed that they did not have a clear idea of their friends' castes. When I discovered the caste of various people, their friends were often surprised as their assumptions proved to be entirely wrong. For example, a well-educated boy was believed to be of the non-Brahman caste by his friends who had deduced, from his behaviour and educational level, that he belonged to the Vellalar caste. In fact, he turned out to be a Vannan, or a washerman, which is considered to be a lower service caste ranked just above the Untouchables. Another boy who was a Vellalar Pillai, was believed to be either a Brahman or a Sawarashtran (one of the weaver castes of north Indian origin) because of his rather light complexion. An Aiyangar Brahman who had assumed this to be true was surprised to discover his mistake.

Although assumptions of caste are often wrong, there are certain guidelines such as behaviour and speech usage, that can be fairly accurate indicators. In Tamil Nadu, Hindus are roughly categorised into three groups: Brahman castes, non-Brahman castes, and the Scheduled castes (ex-Untouchables). Brahmans, according to the local people, are conspicuous, because of their light complexion and their tendency to use more Sanskritic terms in conversation than

the non-Brahmans who tend to use Tamil terms.

Normally among the higher caste Hindus, it is said that behaviour patterns are different from those of the lower castes. Their life-style is seen as well-organised: they rise early, keep their houses very clean, firmly encourage their children to study, and save money well. Their attitude, a religious mark on the forehead (worn when the person is a strict Shaiva or Vaishnava), the way clothes are worn, and caste dialect, etc. are all indicators that can be used to guess the caste of another party.

A further indication of caste is a person's name, which can imply broader categories - Brahman names and non-Brahman names are often quite distinctive. A Brahman would never have a name such as Karuppan, Muniyandi, Muttammal, or Nagamma, as these are the names of local village gods and goddesses. Instead they are more likely to have names frequently found in Sanskrit literature, e.g. Subramaniam, Venkatesh, Chittra, Rajeshwari, etc. Again, this is not an absolute distinction, since the first set of names mentioned is used by both the non-Brahmans and the Scheduled castes, and the latter names are used by both the non-Brahmans and the Brahmans.

However, when these names are used with a caste title, such as 'Subramaniya Aiyar', the caste is unmistakably detectable. In this case the person cannot be a non-Brahman, but must be a Smartha Brahman, since the caste title 'Aiyar' denotes this. Similarly, 'Aiyangar' is the caste title of the Vaishnavite Brahmans. In the case of the Nagarattars, a man whose name is Annamalai may call himself 'Annamalai Chettiyar', thus adding the title to denote that he belongs to a mercantile caste. It would be difficult to know which Chettiyar caste he is from: a Nagarattar, a Velan Chettiyar, a Vellalar Chettiyar, or a Komutti Chettiyar.

Adding a caste title at the end of a name is normally practised only by males. The example I gave was that of a man whose name is Annamalai, known as Annamalai Chettiyar¹. For further clarification, he adds his father's and paternal grandfather's initials: L. PL. Annamalai denotes that his grandfather is Lakshmanan and his father is Palaniyappan (P and L are taken in this case). If his grandfather had built a house it may be called L. PL. House in which the first shareholders would be his father and his paternal uncles. It would not matter that the house had been built by the grandfathers' ancestors; if the house is shared by Annamalai, his brother, and their father, i.e. by those who share Lakshmanan and Palaniyappan as their ancestors, the house would still be called L. PL. House. This would be the case for as long as Annamalai and his brothers' children remained alive, as it would make it much easier to refer to. However, the grandchildren of Palaniyappan would no longer keep the initial of L. PL. in their names, but would change it to PL. A. or just A, if they so desired, while someone who wished to keep initials from three generations may call himself L. PL. A. Lakshmanan, for example. This method of identifying a male by the house name helps to differentiate between all those with the same name as there is very little originality in the naming of Nagarattars

The initials attached to the individual name imply the house to which a Nagarattar belongs and the social identity of a Nagarattar partially consists of the house symbolized by this. The sharing of the ancestral home is made concrete in the form of a share holding of

¹ 'Chettiyar' is used when addressing a senior man from a mercantile caste in a respectful manner. The wife, servants, and house stewards would refer to a senior old Nagarattar as 'Chettiyar' when, for example, someone enquired as to his whereabouts. Thus, a married Nagarattar woman is called *aacchi* (elder sister), and an adult male Nagarattar is called Chettiyar.

that house. A male Nagarattar is entitled to become a shareholder of an ancestral house which was built by his paternal ancestors. The inheritance is represented as a 'room' (*ul viidu*) and a hearth, although this is often divided when handed down to subsequent generations. Although the construction of new buildings has become rare, there are still some wealthier families even today, who can build a new house or add a new wing to an old house for male children to share.

2-2 Clan and temple divisions

The largest patrilineal unit among the Nagarattars is the clan, symbolized by the nine Shiva temple divisions². These temples were given by the king when the Nagarattars settled in the Chettinadu area. They believe that the original members of the temple are also patrilineal relatives and that they thus share a common ancestry. Those who belong to the same clan division are called *pangaali*. The

² The 9 temple divisions are as follows:

- 1). Ilayaattakudi temple which has the following subdivisions: i. Okkur, ii. Pattanasamy, iii. Perumarudur, iv. Kinkanikkur, v. Kalanivasal, vi. Perasandur, vii. Sirusettur.
(Nowadays, marriages between these subdivisions are allowed).
- 2). Maattur temple -- subdivisions: i. Uraiur, ii. Arumbakkur, iii. Manalur, iv. Mannur, v. Kannur, vi. Karuppur, vii. Kulattur.
- 3). Vairavan temple -- subdivisions: i. Sirukulattur, ii. Kalanivasal, iii. Maruttendrapuram.
- 4). Iraniyur
- 5). Pillaiyaapatti
- 6). Neemam
- 7). Iluppaikkudi
- 8). Sooraikkudi
- 9). Veelankudi

male co-sharers of the ancestral house, therefore, belong to the same temple division, and are also called *pangaali*.

The clan is exogamous. Sexual relations within the same temple division are considered to be incestuous, since the man and woman are believed to be brother and sister even if their connections are undetectable (see chapter 3 for further discussion).

The Nagarattars classify themselves through the clan and subclan system as *pangaali*, and the share of the ancestral house is passed down this line. Women do not inherit any share of the patrilineal ancestral house. They remain in their father's lineage before marriage and use their father's name initial after their own. After marriage, they take their husband's name. They may also assume their husband's and his father's initials. L. PL. Lakshmi Aacchi means that her father-in-law is Lakshmanan and her husband is Palaniyappan. Like most Indian castes, she can also add her husband's name at the end: Siita Chidambaram, Meena Ramasamy, etc.. Therefore, their initials and titles express their social identity, which is rooted in the joint house.

Among the Nagarattars, there were 6 territorial divisions *wattahais* (regions) which were formerly endogamous units, probably until the 1910s. Since there were very few roads in Chettinadu until 1930s, *pangaalis* used to come on foot to attend the ceremonies. Therefore, according to Somalay, it was the custom to contract matrimonial alliances with families of which they had first-hand knowledge who lived within such short distance (quoted in Rudner 1985: 334). The regional endogamous blocks have since disappeared, although certain preferences in marriage alliances

remain.³ These units were once associated with territorial divisions, as were the agricultural castes whose occupation was closely associated with the land and the residential locality of the village.

The nine Shiva temple divisions mentioned above, function as marriage regulators and those who belong to the same temple division should not intermarry as they are considered to be *pangaalis*. Each temple maintains a management board made up of elderly male members from the powerful families, and the trustees are replaced every 3 years or so. They make decisions about the budget, ceremonial functions, renovations of the temple and so on, but usually they have no moral authority over the clan members.

The temple trustee is a ceremonial position. Although the Brahman temple priests (Gurukkals) are the officiants at all the rituals, they cannot impose their opinion on the management to any great extent, since they are merely temple servants. However, the temple managers themselves do not have much moral authority except in their power to regulate marriage.

To be a pure Nagarattar, both parents must belong to any of the nine temples. Marrying someone whose parents are not fully-

³For example, people say that the richest families came from the east *wattahai*. It is said that their women always wear silk *sarees* and are culturally refined. On the other hand, those from the West region used to work for the eastern people as stewards. People from the South region in general are poor, sometimes the women work in the fields and thus they are darker than the eastern people. A middle-aged woman who belonged to one of the top families of the Eastern region told me that her mother was quite upset when she heard that one of her granddaughters was going to be engaged to a man from Kaaraikkudi. Since two separate regions, i.e. the Kaaraikkudi town and Deevakottai town areas were also endogamous regions, the older generation of the East region sometimes find it difficult to accept this kind of an alliance.

fledged members means that the couple will fail to win the community's recognition of the marriage as authentic, and so the garland from the lineage temple will not be received by the bride and groom. The temple management, which consists of wealthy and powerful Nagarattars, objects to sending a garland and registering the marriage if the marriage is not between authentic Nagarattars.

As the wedding day approaches, the parents of both parties go to their respective temples, pay the temple tax, and ask the temple management to send a garland to their children's wedding. The temple of the male side registers the marriage in their registration book on this occasion. The temple trustees normally check the name of the parents in their registration book, and confirm whether their marriage was registered. If it has been, they acknowledge the marriage of their child and register their child's name as part of the authentic *pulli* (nuclear family).

Since the procedure of verifying the authenticity of the children is simple, few serious problems occur. However, I was told that there were some cases where the agreement of the trustees was needed. For example, a Nagarattar, who divorced his first Nagarattar wife and married another Nagarattar had to appeal to the temple trustees of both his and his new wife's temples after more than two decades: because he had married his second wife without a proper marriage ceremony, and had not registered his marriage with the temple, when his son was getting married, he faced a serious problem. His son was refused a garland because his father's marriage was not registered!

The trustees were called in to discuss this matter three days before the marriage ceremony. They unanimously decided that the man's son's marriage should be registered and the garland be sent,

since his mother was an authentic Nagarattar. However, they demanded the temple tax which the man had neglected to pay at the time of his second marriage, with interest.

Another case, which I heard, was more than a century old. A man had insulted the temple trustees by coming to a temple-meeting riding a horse. He did not get off the horse at the temple premises and his horse scattered dust over the trustee members. The man was excommunicated because he had insulted the trustee members, who were also the elders, in a public place, and he and his descendants were refused garlands on marriage. Therefore, even though the descendants were all authentic Nagarattars the garland simply did not come to the weddings of this man's descendants. I was told by one of the trustees that one of his descendants now wanted to apologize for his ancestor's mistake and regain the privilege of receiving the garland from the temple. The trustee I spoke to told me that this would be possible, since they were all authentic Nagarattars. So, the trustees were now thinking about the proper way to ask the man to express his remorse.

The clan temple system shows that as a first principle, the trustees, as the representatives of the clan group, should be respected in the temple. The temple institution endows honour on the clan and the patrilineal structure which supports it. The garland which the clan temple sends symbolizes the couple's authentic membership of the community, honouring not only the man's patrilineal group but the woman's as well.

2-3 Intercaste relationships and the purity rule

The traditional value system based on the religious notion of the pure

and the impure, is said to be deeply related to the social status among the Hindus in general. For example, Dumont (1970) maintains that impurity is connected with biological processes: phlegm, blood, excrement, and especially the dead body, are all considered to be agents of pollution, and those who deal with such processes as hereditary occupations, are considered to be low in the social hierarchy -- street-cleaners, undertakers, toilet cleaners, etc. are considered to be the Untouchables; washermen and barbers who deal with cleaning are considered to be engaged in lowly occupations, though not as low as the Untouchables. On the other hand, the highest status is given to the Brahmans who are the least engaged with the physiological processes of other people as far as hereditary occupations are concerned, and as hereditary priestly castes, they are allowed to touch the sacred idols and chant mantras (the sacred hymns). Therefore, even though most caste groups have discarded their traditional occupations, this value system attached to the stigma of pollution still classifies the castes in general, in terms of social status, according to Dumont.

The essence of Dumont's argument lies in his claim that Hindu culture in general is regulated by the single value system of hierarchical dichotomy of the pure and the impure, irrespective of caste, and this rule binds not only the external relationships between the castes but also the internal relationships, i.e. kinship itself. In terms of kinship, this purity rule differentiates the offspring from the primary (legitimate, in Dumont's sense) marriage and the ones from the secondary (illegitimate, or second marriage with a woman whose status is lower than that of the first wife) marriage, for example. In general, most castes give the first born son higher status than the other sons.

Although it appears harsh to say that the first born son is 'purer' than the second son, the rule of hierarchy differentiates them and the 'purer' sons i.e. the legitimate sons are placed higher than those who are illegitimate i.e. less pure, in terms of kinship.

Hierarchical relationship rules are obvious in other crucial relationships of kinship, according to Dumont. Sons are far more appreciated and are given greater importance than daughters, and the man's side, or the paternal relatives, (i.e. the wife-takers), are given a higher position than the maternal side (the wife-givers). This relationship is expressed by the continuous flow of gifts given from the wife's side to the husband's family even after marriage. Dumont therefore claims that the hierarchical system, based on the pure and the impure, regulates not only the intercaste relationship, but also the intracaste relationship, i.e. the kinship system, and the marriage alliance.

Dumont, discussing the regulation of marriage, claims that not only hypergamy but also endogamy is a corollary of hierarchy, rather than a primary principle (1970: 113). If a man breaches the rule of endogamy and marries a woman from another caste, if it is a legitimate marriage, both the man and his wife and children obtain the status of his caste although such irregularity is penalized by a loss of status within the caste of the man. Therefore,

Hierarchical principle which ranks castes and their segments does not stop at the bounds of the unit of endogamy, it permeates it, in a more or less effective way, and endogamous marriage does not necessarily unite spouses of equal status.(Dumont 1970: 113)

However, Dumont's claim that the hierarchical principle which ranks castes and their segments, controls both outside and inside the caste group is difficult to substantiate, especially in the case of the Nagarattars. If a Nagaratar X marries a woman of caste Y, even if

their marriage is legitimate, their children do not obtain their father's caste status. Only X remains as a full fledged caste member until his death, and there is no chance of his offspring making alliance with his caste members. The concept of the Nagarattars' rigid endogamy however, does not appear to resemble Dumont's hierarchical principle of the pure and the impure, as I discuss in the later part of this chapter.

However, as far as intercaste relationships are concerned, the Dumontian argument is still partially valid even for the Nagarattars. In daily life, people refer to three divisions: high caste, low caste, and the Untouchables or the Scheduled Castes, and people classify such social categories based on the traditional value system of the pure and the impure. Moreover, the Brahmans maintain the Dumontian purity rule more strictly than other castes. The Brahmans are regarded as a high caste, because they were supposed to have led a religious life for centuries. When I asked what they meant by a religious life and austerity, most people would mention vegetarianism. "Nowadays, a lot of Brahmans are non-vegetarians. But formerly, all the Brahmans were pure vegetarians and teetotallers. They abstained from eggs, and some strict Brahmans would even refrain from strongly flavoured food such as garlic, onion, and pumpkin, which would stimulate desire and pollute the body. They would never eat in a non-Brahman house, and would never accept food cooked by non-Brahmans."

In extreme cases, a Brahman would not even eat in another Brahman's house if the latter belonged to a different sect. A middle aged housewife who was a Smartha Brahman once told me, "In my grandmother's time, a good friend of my grandmother, who was a Vaishnava Brahman would never eat anything, nor even drink a cup

of coffee in my house, even though we were good friends. We were Smarthas, and her religious orthodoxy forbade her to eat what was prepared by different religious sects. If she was extremely hungry, she would ask me to give her a cup of water in a silver tumbler, since silver is supposed to transmit the least pollution. She would drink it without the tumbler touching her lips. I was not insulted by such a conduct, though. I respected her religiousness. She used to share our sorrows and we used to talk for hours in my house. Indeed, she was one of my grandmother's best friends. However, we wouldn't eat together."

In order to lead a religious life, it is considered necessary to refrain from taking food from an unknown source, as that could potentially pollute the body. Even if they are rich, strict Brahmans cannot hire a cook from outside their sect. The strictest Brahmans, i.e. the *vedic shastrigals* (vedic priests and scholars) would only allow their wives who had been trained by their mothers to do the domestic work.

Thus, hiring a non-Brahman as domestic labour is unthinkable for Brahmans, since the home is considered to be the most sacred area. The kitchen is considered to be the purest area. A strict Brahman housewife would not like non-Brahmans to enter her kitchen even if she allowed her non-Brahman friends to enter her puja room.

Most non-Brahmans say that such a strict dietary custom is difficult to observe, as it would prohibit them from eating out and travelling widely. In addition, non-Brahmans admit that fish and meat are tempting. "Brahmans have missed a lot by being vegetarians. I am not interested in a religious life. I want to enjoy life."

This remark of a young Maravar, an agricultural caste, shows that non-Brahmans see meat eating as enjoyable. Although the Nagarattars do not show any obvious cravings for meat or fish eating, the village festival and the *padaippu* are enjoyable times as they eat the fresh meat made available after sacrificing their goat or chicken to a village goddess, or to their ancestors.

On the other hand, Brahmins feel that their high status is due to their religious lifestyle, i.e. the observation of rituals, abiding to the *shastric* laws, and their strict dietary habit. "We Brahmins were meant to be poor, as we were expected to live a life of austerity; performing rituals and mantra chanting for other people, dressing simply, and eating simple and pure foods."

Thus, in exchange for religious austerity, the Brahmins are given the highest status, at least so the Brahmins claim. Vegetarianism is regarded as a symbol of non-violent religious life all over India, not only by the Hindus as Dumont claims in his discussion, but also by other religious communities such as the Jains, Buddhists, and some sects of Syrian Christians. In the South, among the non-Brahman Hindus, a few sects especially among the Shaivites (worshippers of Shiva), like the Shaiva Mudaliyars, Shaiva Vellalars, and Shaiva Chettiyars, are believed to be vegetarians, and regarded as high castes. The Nagarattars, being Shaivites, are called Shaiva Chettiyars when they attend the *madams* of Shaiva Vellalars, and are treated as a vegetarian Shaiva caste⁴.

Although the Nagarattars are proud of being Shaivites, in real life, they appear to be far less concerned about the above mentioned purity rules. They are in fact non-vegetarians by custom, although

⁴I was told this when I was visiting Shaiva *madams* in Tiruvaaduturai, Kanchipuram, Dharmapuram, etc. in 1988 summer.

some families or individuals do choose to be vegetarians by preference, but vegetarianism is not observed as a caste habit in general. As for marriage alliances, there is no status differentiation between a vegetarian family and a non-vegetarian family among the Nagarattars. Some Nagarattars, such as those from Deevakottai are said to be traditionally vegetarians but this does not give them any ritual privilege over other Nagarattars, nor do they insist on marrying their daughters to non-vegetarian Nagarattars who are from different regions.

Moreover, the Nagarattars do not seem to respect the Brahmans for the latter's peculiar dietary habit. From the point of view of the non-Brahmans including the Nagarattars, Brahmans' refusal to take food in the non-Brahman houses is taken simply as a peculiar, but orthodox, Brahman custom.

There are a lot of Brahmans who work for the Nagarattars as agents, clerks, and teachers at the schools run by the Nagarattars, and seem to be favoured for their loyalty and calm nature and the fact that they are not able to eat together does not affect this close relationship. However rich the house may be and however good and clean the food is, strict Brahmans cannot accept it if the cook is a non-Brahman, and this custom can be taken as an expression of Brahmanic pride and so does not insult or humiliate the Nagarattars. The Nagarattars are happy to leave the cooking to non-Nagarattars, and both the Brahmans and the Nagarattars take each others' way of life for granted and so do not interfere.

All the cooks I met in the households of the Nagarattars were non-Nagarattars. They were either from Vellalar castes or from much lower agricultural castes such as the Vallambars, who would have been trained by the *aacchi* and whose forebears would have

served the same family for a few generations. There were some families who even hired domestic servants and cooks from the Scheduled Castes claiming that these people were employed for their loyalty and obedient character. The few *aacchis* who chose to be vegetarians because of their devoutness did not mind leaving the cooking to the non-vegetarian lower caste cooks, either. Moreover, there are Nagarattar families containing both vegetarians and non-vegetarians, and the cook does the cooking for all. For the strict Brahmans, this would be unacceptable since using the same cooking utensil to prepare both vegetarian and non-vegetarian meals would pollute their food.

Although poor Brahmans would be happy to work as cooks since they consider the preparation of food to be a serious and ritually important job, no Nagarattar is willing to hire a Brahman cook, because they are not able to cook the traditional Chettinadu menu of the Nagarattars, as it includes non-vegetarian food. It is shameful for a Nagarattar not to serve the traditional food to his guests and while their own castemen would be too proud to work in a fellow Nagarattar's house as a cook, the alternative is to hire a cook from a lower caste and train them to cook the proper food of the Nagarattars. The Nagarattars would consider working as a servant in a kitchen humiliating even though they would be content to work as an agent or a clerk.

Brahmans on the other hand, take cooking extremely seriously, and the kitchen is regarded as a sacred place forbidden to outsiders which is in direct contrast to the Nagarattars who are not concerned about ritual pollution as far as cooking is concerned. Working as a cook in a fellow Brahman house, or for a high caste family like the Nagarattars, is not degrading for a Brahman. Cooks

are regarded by the Nagarattars as domestic servants who have to do various jobs, including the preparation of the ingredients, cleaning the rooms and serving food. For a Brahman, cooking is a far more prestigious job than any domestic labour which includes the preparatory stages and the cleaning of the kitchen.

The Nagarattars' flexibility about food preparation is demonstrated not only in their recruitment of servants but also in the preparation of food itself. People joke about how *aacchis* are good at saving and storing unused things. A special delicacy called '*wattal kolambu*' is a good demonstration of the maxim 'waste not, want not'. For example, Brahmans use only a few fresh vegetables, and will not usually eat the same *kolambu* in the next meal, as they feel it would 'pollute' the body. The Nagarattars on the other hand, insist that a three day old *kolambu* is the most superior. They also claim that this is true of fish *kolambu*: storing cooked food before eating improves the flavour, in their opinion.

"When we have some left over *kolambu* after lunch, we give it to the servant. But I know an *aacchi* who orders her servant to sell it to poor people for 10 or 20 paisa per cup!", a middle-aged Brahman woman told me disgustedly.

However, the Nagarattars will not be shamed by these critical comments made by the Brahmans. One Nagarattar said, "Brahmans depend on us. Who gives them *daanam* (religious gifts for Brahman) and the jobs? Who supports the poor Brahmans? If we hadn't saved money and donated to the temples and the welfare institutions, who would have done so?"

The Nagarattars' economic rationality as well as 'taste' takes precedence over the Brahmanic purity rule. In addition, the Nagarattars consider feeding people to be an essential ritual which

they have to practise, and they have to eat with their guest irrespective of their relative status. Although they may not eat anything in the house of a Scheduled Caste for example, their concern in this case is directed towards 'hygiene'. I was convinced in Chettinadu that the Nagarattars would accept an invitation from a lower caste if the man's social status was high and the house was clean and neat.

This indifference to ritual pollution contrasts with that of the Shaiva Vellalars who are one of the high caste non-Brahmans. As an example, I shall cite the case of the Kontakatti Vellalars (a Shaiva Vellalar caste, hereafter referred to as KV) described by Barnett (1976). The purity concept of the KV has a clear alliance with local Brahmans, and they support a religious *madam* in Kanchipuram and claim that the Tesikars (vegetarian non-Brahman priests influential in certain Brahman temples) were once KVs (Barnett 1976: 136).

To the KV who are pure vegetarians, the Brahmanic purity rule is an essential guideline to regulate their daily conduct and the status hierarchy. Just like the Brahmans, they are meticulous in defining the group from whom they may accept water or cooked food. They also maintain their caste *madam* and patronize the temples of the Shaiva religion.

The contrast between the KV and the Nagarattars is also apparent when the degree of dependence on the local service castes is analyzed. While the Brahmanic purity rule means that they cannot hire service castes for purificatory purposes (the Brahmans' rule is that they must purify themselves) in any Chettinadu village, there would have been service castes such as Barbers and Washermen who served the Nagarattars. Only after serving them, would they serve other castes. The Washerman and Washerwoman launders the

clothes, even though some of the Nagarattars may have servants or perhaps their wives themselves would do the washing. The service of the Washerman is necessary for clothes that are to be worn on special occasions such as weddings, festivals, Pongal (celebration of the new year), and Deepavali (autumnal celebration of good harvest). At these times the Washerman becomes very busy, as ceremonial cleansing done by him is considered essential. The Washerman's wife works for the women and she plays a crucial role when the girls reach puberty. She washes the *sarees* of the girl, and according to one Nagarattar woman, even lends her own *saree* to her during her first menstruation. She receives vegetables, paddy, some money, *adai* (pancakes) etc. which are used in the ritual. The Barber also has additional work as the funeral priest in the cremation ground, tonsuring the chief mourner's head and helping him to conduct rituals over the corpse. His wife also works as a midwife.

I came across a Barber's wife in Deevakottai who used to work as a midwife before it became more common for people to go to the hospital to have their babies delivered. Nowadays, she still bathes new born babies and gives massages to women. Whenever a baby is born, the Barber's wife is sent for. The Nagarattar wives believe that the same woman should bathe the baby for at least 6 months, otherwise, the baby will catch a cold. Although she no longer prescribes her own herbal medicine for the baby, the family I met still wanted liquid medicine to be given from the hand of the Barber's wife, although it was purchased at the pharmacy by the family. However, the cash payment is minimal: she receives around rs. 10 per week if she comes every day to bathe the baby. She has about 30 houses to look after. While the Brahmans cannot hire service castes for massages and oil baths, the service of the Barber's

wife is essential to the well-to-do Nagarattar wives. Many *aacchis* go to the temple on Friday, but they need an oil bath before they go and it is for this purpose that they require the service of the Barber's wife. She is not paid a large sum but the Barber's wife comes mainly for the food she receives at the house. She eats the same food as the Nagarattar family, which she is given in the kitchen. While the traditional Brahmans do not allow lower castes and non-Brahmans to enter their kitchen as it is regarded as a sacred space, the non-Brahmans in general do not have these prohibitions and allow their servants to eat there.

The relationship with the Barber's wife and the Nagarattar women is casual and friendly. Moreover, the family treats the Barber's wife as a professional in her dealings with the babies and as far as I have observed, there is no sense of a ritual taboo relationship between the baby and the Barber's wife caused by the fact that she also deals with babies of different castes. The custom of child delivery being entrusted to the Barber's wife has nearly vanished and most babies are now born in hospitals, but the Barber's wife has a hereditary right to claim a present from the house of the baby and this custom is still preserved.

A Nagarattar said to me: "When my baby was born, the Barber's wife did not come to my mother's house to ask for the gift. She came to my mother recently when my daughter was nearly 6 years old and wanted the gift. My mother gave her a stainless-steel plate and a tumbler but she said that she would prefer a brass one. Nowadays, brass is costlier. My mother had to give it to her since she wanted to make the woman happy." Another woman simply sighed, and said, "The Barber's wife certainly comes and demands a gift on a baby's birth even though she does not do anything for our

baby. She simply comes and demands the gift on each child's birth, and we cannot refuse."

In this respect, the traditional client-patron relationship between the Nagarattars and the village service castes still exists on a non-cash payment basis. As Leach (1960) has pointed out, concerning the *jajman* relationship, the dominant castes hire the village servants and pay 'in kind' rather than in money, and the servants' privileged relationship with the dominant caste is a hereditary one. The service castes do not insist on cash payment because a non-cash payment is far more advantageous as they can gain more from working as hereditary servants than working as daily labourers who earn around 10 rupees per day. As ceremonial specialists, they can demand more privileges because they are not replaceable. In contrast, dependence on service castes would not be acceptable to the Brahmans because of their rule of purity.

2-4 Endogamy as caste morality

Although the Nagarattars may sometimes pay lip service to the ritualistic purity rule observed by the Brahmans, the Nagarattars largely dismiss it in real life, nor do they follow it in terms of food intake. However, their kinship orientation and caste membership is strictly endogamous, yet it is quite different from the concept of ritual purity (*suttam*). However rich they may be and however many generations are born, the Nagarattar line is not authentic if there has been a marriage with a non-Nagarattar member.

For example, if A's father is a Nagarattar and mother a non-Nagarattar, he may claim that he has inherited his father's temple membership, as would be the case with regard to the Brahmanic

gootra. A male Brahman's marriage to a non-Brahman, if she is from a high caste, is mostly accepted and his children are assimilated into his caste eventually, and children take up their father's *gootra* as their identity of caste membership.

In the case of the Nagarattars, if the offspring of such an alliance marries a Nagarattar, he or she will nevertheless remain a non-Nagarattar. Even if the partner's father were a Nagarattar and the mother a non-Nagarattar, the children thus *appearing* to be fully-fledged members as they would have inherited temple A and B from their fathers, none of them would be considered authentic, since a pure Nagarattar should inherit membership of the caste from *both* parents. In other words, the clan temple membership is inherited from their father but the caste membership is based on a bilineal inheritance.

The temple garlands for the bride and groom come from their fathers' temples on the wedding day, and the implicit rules are that the couple's parents' weddings must have been registered in the books kept in the respective temples.

The consequence of marrying someone who is not a Nagarattar is as follows: 1) if a male marries out, his membership of the Nagarattars will be maintained until his death. He can attend ceremonies and functions as a Nagarattar if he wishes to do so, but he would not be accompanied by his wife and children since they would not be regarded as pure Nagarattars. The relationship between his family and his kin would gradually diminish in successive generations. His offspring would never be able to merge back into the Nagarattar community. Instead, they belong to the diverted line which is formed out of the endogamous tendency. 2) If a female marries out, she immediately loses membership of her

community and instead acquires temporary membership of her partner's caste and her children belong to her husband's community.

Whether a Nagarattar marries a higher caste or lower caste, the offspring is separated from the main stream. Such offspring used to be denied any right to claim their father's property until recently; and although nowadays, the legally married non-Nagarattar wives and their children may claim their share of the property under modern law, they are still not entitled to make alliances with the pure Nagarattars.

Marrying a non-Nagarattar is considered to be detrimental, not because it creates 'impurity' in the Brahmanic sense, but because it allows property to flow out of the caste and breaks the reciprocal relationship of marriage alliance between the wife-givers and wife-takers. Complete isogamy is based on the compatibility between these two. The garlands sent by the paternal clan temple of both sides thus represent a strict membership based on the ideology of equality of status among the members, since the garland cannot be bought however rich a man may be.

Divorce is permissible among Vellalars and non-Brahman castes, if it is unavoidable, but it very rarely takes place among the Nagarattars, since it is taken as a violation of customary law and the man's status is diminished. Marrying a Nagarattar woman after divorcing the first wife is permissible whereas intercaste marriage is not. However, divorce cannot be effected without paying compensation to the first wife and returning the dowry and other property which were brought by her. Bigamy, in the sense of a man having two authentic Nagarattar wives is unacceptable, although having a concubine from another caste is another matter entirely.

2-5 Intercaste marriage

1) 'Love marriage'

According to the Nagarattars, a 'love marriage' (they use the English term) is regarded as eloping, and considered shameful. Most women college students I interviewed would not consider such behaviour since it would mean disconnection from their natal families, and the loss of support from their kin and relatives. Love marriages are legal, and from the point of view of property inheritance, children have the full right to inherit from their parents nowadays. However, as the following cases show, there are still problems in securing caste membership for their children, since most 'love marriages' are intercaste marriages.

Case 1. Meena: female Nagarattar, late 20s, married a pawnbroker, has two daughters. Meena married a pawnbroker of the Servai caste after she became a widow at 19.

Meena's mother died when she was 14, and her father remarried. Her step-mother was unkind and wanted to marry her off as quickly as possible. Meena was forced to marry her stepmother's nephew at 17, although she didn't like him at all. He was a middle-aged bank clerk, working for the Bank of Madura. "He was very fat and very dark. I really didn't like him and said 'no' to my parents. But my step-mother forced me to marry him because she wanted to get rid of me as soon as she could."

He died suddenly two years after she had had a daughter. When she became a widow, her mother-in-law took away her jewellery saying that she no longer needed it since she had become a

'widow' and later Meena had to fight her step-mother in court to retrieve it.

She was forced to live with her mother-in-law and her sister-in-law for a while, who would speak ill of her whenever her husband's former colleagues came to mourn her husband's death. "My in-laws said that I had had affairs with my husband's colleagues. It was unbearable." She left the house with her daughter as soon as she got a job in the same bank where her husband had worked. According to law, the widow of a former employee is automatically given a position in all public and semi-public organizations in India.

In her aunt's house, she met a pawnbroker, Ramasamy, who was a Servai. He fell in love with her and, rejecting all other good alliances, he married her. "He was offered many good alliances. One of the girls' fathers even begged him to marry his daughter offering him a car and a house. But my husband said that he wouldn't marry his daughter because he had already promised to marry me, and didn't give in to such sweeteners."

Ramasamy's father and his brothers objected strongly in the beginning, but finally gave in, respecting his choice. After all, Ramasamy was quite successful as a pawnbroker and he did not depend on anyone financially. Meena was accepted by Ramasamy's family as his wife.

"It was easier because I was a Nagarattar, a higher and more refined caste than the Servais." It was a gain for them, but, according to Meena, if it had happened to one of Ramasamy's sisters, none of his brothers would have accepted it: "They would have rushed to their sister's husband's house, and would have dragged her back. They would have beaten her husband to death, whatever caste he may have been. To them, it is unbearable to lose a woman of

their caste. It is a humiliation for them."

Meena's parents have severed all communication with her, but, unlike the Servais or Kallars, the Nagarattars would not use physical force. "They just frown, and show signs of rejection when I see them."

She was cast out by almost her entire family; only her maternal uncle is still friendly and welcoming. As her maternal uncle, he still feels that it is his responsibility to think about her happiness, even though he would not be able to assist her much after her marriage. "All the Nagarattars stopped talking to me. Although I attend some weddings of friends, nobody talks to me." She said she did not mind, since she was happy with Ramasamy, adding that, if she were still with the Nagarattars, she would not have been able to remarry, and would still be living as a poor widow. Nowadays, she feels like a Servai. She has had another daughter by Ramasamy who believes that she is a Servai, since she was brought up in a 'mixed' culture, and even her first daughter has come to regard herself as a Servai.

"I don't think that the men of the Nagarattars are 'real men'. They will do whatever their '*aacchis*' say. My husband may beat me if I say something wrong. But I married him, and I have to bear it because he is my husband. I don't like the way of the Nagarattars. Their marriage is only for convenience. The *aacchi* goes this way and her husband goes that way -- leading separate lives -- that is not a real couple."

In expressing this sentiment she may well have been thinking about her father, who was dominated by her stepmother. Meena said that her first daughter could marry a Nagarattar if some one suitable came along in the future. "I do not reject that possibility, since she is

a pure Nagarattar. I know Nagarattars like wealthy families. Since we have money, they may want to come to us for an alliance. I don't mind which caste she marries into." As for the second girl, Meena said, "She will most probably marry a Servai, because her father is a Servai."

Even if Meena hoped to return to the Nagarattar community by marrying off her first daughter to a pure Nagarattar, it would in fact be impossible. Although her first daughter has authentic Nagarattar parents, the next generation would not be able to have any contact with Meena's present husband. On the other hand, as a custom, the Nagarattar who married her daughter would expect affinal relationships to continue with her former husband's relatives, which would, of course, be unacceptable to Meena.

Case 2: Meenakshi: female Nagarattar, 35 years old, married a non-Nagarattar Komutti Chettiyar, lives in Madras, no children.

Meenakshi married a man who was a Komutti Chettiyar, and owner of the factory where she had been working. The Komutti Chettiyar divorced his wife and married Meenakshi because his wife did not look after him well. (I met both Meenakshi and her husband at the wedding of a relative of Meenakshi's.)

After they married, they were disowned for a few years, but since the Komutti Chettiyar was a rich man, Meenakshi's relatives started to invite her and her husband to their ceremonies.

They are childless. When I asked about the possibility of adoption, Meenakshi's relative sighed, "Who would come to them? After all, we do not belong to any caste, it is a mixed union !"

The Komutti Chettiyars are a caste of Telugu origin who often

call themselves 'Aarya Vaisyas'. According to a Telugu Brahman priest, they are even richer than the Nagarattars and stricter in ritual matters. "Unlike the Nagarattars, they are strict vegetarians, and wear the punal (sacred thread) all the time -- the symbol of the twice born. They diligently observe the annual rituals such as Varalakshmi noombu. They are even better than some Brahmans!"

When I was attending the wedding of a boy who was a relative of Meenakshi, another relative told me that Meenakshi's marriage to a Komutti Chettiyar had affected their status. "The groom could not get a good alliance. Moreover, he was forced to marry quickly because of a misfortune. His sister had eloped, and was subsequently taken back home. In addition, Meenakshi made an odd marriage. People say that the family background is very bad if you have such stray cases. They are not well disciplined. I would never offer my daughter to such a family."

Meenakshi's story illustrates the kind of factors that affect family status, and the consequent alliance possibilities. 'Bad' relatives strongly affect an individual's status in the community, which explains why strict endogamy is maintained as a matter of morality.

Case 3: Palaniyappan, male Nagarattar, late 40s. Married a non-Nagarattar lawyer, has one son.

Pananiyappan is a politician and an ex-minister in central government. When he was practising as a lawyer 20 years ago, he married Kamala, who was his colleague. She was from another caste, but had a good family background. Her father was a Supreme Court judge, and her mother was a poet and philanthropist.

Moreover, Kamala was one of the best lawyers in Madras. But in spite of such a background, Pananiyappan faced strong opposition to his marriage. Nobody in his family attended their wedding and they had a registered marriage in which his close Brahman friend was their legal witness.

His younger sister told me, "When he announced that he would marry Kamala, my father had a heart attack. He was carried to the hospital. For my father, it was an almost unbearable shock. My father was a very modest and virtuous man, respected by all people. He was adopted into a rich family from a moderate background. My mother's father liked him so much that he wanted to marry off his youngest daughter, that is, my mother, to him. So he promised the L. M. House, the family who adopted my father, that he would give his daughter only if they adopted my father. He was a very sincere and hard working man. Even after he was adopted and became the only son of a rich family, he never wasted money. He always felt that it was bad to waste money, so he worked hard and saved well, donated money to the temples and welfare institutions. He was respected by all the Nagarattars and nobody spoke ill of him. Such was his character that he could not bear a blemish to his family. He even refused to see Kamala, but Palaniyappan didn't give in. He said he didn't like the idea of keeping Kamala as his mistress, taking some other Nagarattar girl for his wife. He was very firm on this point - he wanted to marry only Kamala."

Their marriage caused a sensation. It was reported in a newspaper as a scandal since the family was well known. They were not only rich but also related to an aristocratic line: Palaniyappan's family was related to the Nagarattar's topmost lineage through his mother. According to Palaniyappan's sister, her mother was so

ashamed that she did not set foot outside her house for more than a year. "After Kamala had a child, the parents gave in and Palaniyappan and his parents reconciled and started to communicate again, but other people still continued to speak ill of them for several years. Only after Palaniyappan became a Member of Parliament did people stop."

Palaniyappan's sister said that in spite of the scandal, they could not stop him marrying Kamala, since he was a 'man'. "Because he is a man, he wanted to show his will and strength. So he married Kamala. What could we do? We had to give in because we did not want to lose him. We are now very close and Kamala often comes here. Their son comes here and stays with us while his parents are away. But it will be very, very difficult for him to marry a Nagarattar. He now studies in America. He may even marry an American. I don't think any Nagarattar would offer their daughter to the boy even though my brother is a politician and rich. Moreover, my brother and Kamala do not think their son should have to marry a Nagarattar. They had a love marriage, so how can they insist on a caste marriage for their son? Their son may marry anyone. But I can't allow it for my daughter. When she became 14, I told her not to fall in love. A love marriage is not possible for us. Because she is a girl, she should stay with us, in this community. If she falls in love and marries someone outside the community, everyone suffers. She understood and said that she would marry whomever we chose for her."

2-6 Second House Chettiyars (Renddavadu Viidu Chettiyars)⁵

Since no Nagarattar would marry offspring from an inter-caste marriage, a line has been formed called the 'Second House Chettiyars', which makes internal alliances. Offspring from these inter-caste marriages have already turned up among the richest and most prestigious families.

The Second House Chettiyars can be divided roughly into two; those of South East Asian origin and those of South Indian origin. The Nagarattars who had 'local wives' in South East Asia, mostly abandoned them with their children in those countries, leaving them behind with only meagre compensation. Their descendants still engage in mercantile activities in South East Asia, and call themselves 'Chettiyars', but not Nagarattars.

Some Burmese women who were taken to Tamil Nadu by the Nagarattars have created another group. I came across some of their descendants (their sons, daughters and grandchildren) in Madurai, and they were working as maids or three-wheeler auto-drivers⁶. In general, they remain manual workers and marry among those from similar status chosen from the mother's side. They sometimes call themselves Burmese, since they can gain status if they claim a 'foreign origin' and they live with their mothers in the fatherless

⁵ This naming itself is a humiliation, given probably by the Nagarattars. When I talked with them, the Second House Chettiyars never referred to themselves this way. Instead, they would call themselves 'Chettiyar'. Since it is rather confusing to use this title in this section, I had to use this discriminatory usage in spite of its negative connotations.

⁶ Three-wheeler scooters are called *rikshaw* or auto, and used as a cheaper version of four-wheeled taxis.

families.

Another group of Second House Chettiyars are of local origin. Many of the Nagarattar concubines come from the Isai Vellalars (*deevadaasi*, the temple dancers' community). There are also concubines who are Mudaliyar, Vellalar, or Asari.⁷ Amongst these there are some who are well-educated and rich, and because of the close connection with the Isai Vellalar caste who are talented in dancing and music as their caste tradition, they may have close access to the movie industry.

However, they have realistic expectations for their children's marriage prospects. Although they envy the pure Nagarattars and hate their own illegitimate origin, they feel it is better to marry among themselves. If a man of Second House origin is rich, he would want to find an alliance for his daughter from an equally rich family of similar origin. He may fear that even if he is rich enough to marry off their daughter to a poor Nagarattar, she may be bullied by her husband's relatives because she is not a 'pure' Nagarattar. In marrying among themselves, they avoid such problems altogether.

It is extremely rare for a Second House Chettiyar to marry a pure Nagarattar since it requires enormous wealth and power to coax the other party to give up part of their sense of caste authenticity. As far as I know, there is only one such case at the moment; Sarasvati, who is a successful entrepreneur and a widow of a rich Nagarattar businessman, married off her two children (a male and a

⁷According to Somalay, a Nagarattar writer, *vellaatti*, is a term used by the Nagarattars which has three meanings: 1) a female domestic servant, especially from the Vellalar caste, 2) second wife, 3) mother-in-law. The term nowadays means "second wife". Somalay assumes that in those days (before the 1940s), a lot of the maid servants used to come from the Vellalar caste, and probably became the concubines of their masters as well.

female) to pure Nagarattars who lived abroad. Her daughter married someone who is in Malaysia, and the son married a girl who was brought up in England. Her success in making these alliances was due to her wide contacts with authentic Nagarattars at the top of the line. However, she is said to have serious problems with her daughter-in-law and her son-in-law.

The Nagarattar who told me about her said that these two families abroad were a good 'catch' for her. No Nagarattar who lived in Tamil Nadu would accept such an alliance, and so she had to search for families who were abroad and who were less concerned about caste authenticity. Everyone who knows her accepts that the wealth of the two families is not equivalent. The Nagarattars who made the alliance with the family of Sarasvati were lower in status and it was said that she had "bought" a bride and a groom for her children. (Purchasing occurs in most of the alliances among the Nagarattars, a fact that was conveniently forgotten in this case). This was the only time I heard of a case in which an authentic 'arranged marriage' took place between the Second House Chettiyars and the pure Nagarattars, demonstrating just how difficult it is for the Nagarattars to give up their caste purity even if they are offered money.

Case 1. Mother: Savittri , a Brahman, and her daughter: Raada

Savittri became a concubine of a Nagarattar at 16. Her father, a Smartha Brahman, was a scholar and a renowned poet. When her father died, one of her sisters took her to a rich Chettiyar in Deevakottai, since there was no one who could look after her financially. The Nagarattar was 44 then, and his *aacchi* was several

years older than he. According to Savittri, in those days, wives were much older than husbands in the Chettiyaar (Nagarattar) community because of a shortage of women during the 1920s.⁸ "Naturally, men prefer younger women and so have a 'side wife' (concubine)."

The Nagarattar died after 9 years, leaving 5 children behind with Savittri. Since his *aacchi* did not have any children, she adopted a son from her husband's temple division who conducted the funeral as an authentic son. Consequently, the adopted son inherited all the property.

Except for the house in which she lived, Savittri had very little property. The *aacchi* took pity on her, and gave her 2 acres of land so that Savittri and her 5 children could survive and, perhaps more importantly, so that people would not criticize the *aacchi*. Savittri's eldest son became a three-wheeled scooter driver since he was not interested in studies. At present, her second son is studying at a local engineering school to become an electrician. Her eldest daughter married a Chettiyaar of mixed origin who lived in Malaysia. Savittri gave her daughter rs. 100,000 dowry, 25 sovereigns of gold, and a few kilograms of silver vessels⁹.

⁸ It seems that this phenomenon took place for a certain period sometime before the 1920s. I was told about this by several older Nagarattars. In those days, since women were in short supply, it was the groom who paid the bride price. Moreover, he had to marry someone who was older than he. This story again demonstrates the endogamous tendency of the community. Whether it is paid by the groom or the bride, the dowry or bride price constitutes the major part of the capital of the new household which will be passed on to the next generation. If there is a shortage of women, they have to adjust to the situation, but they rarely opt for intercaste marriage.

⁹ As shown in the 5th chapter, the amount of dowry and gold she gave to her daughter is of the lower-middle class standard amongst the Nagarattars.

Her youngest daughter eloped with someone from a low caste. Savittri did not talk about her to me. When I asked her if she had only two daughters, she said yes. Her worry was about her second daughter Raada who was 32 years old. She had an M.Phil. in commerce, and was teaching at a woman's college.

Raada was very sensitive about her birth, and suffered from a sense of inferiority because of it. She wanted to marry only an authentic Nagarattar, who was well-educated. If this was impossible, she did not want to marry at all. She hated Brahmans since she felt that her relatives were responsible for her misery. From her point of view, they put her mother into trouble by sending her to the Chettiyar as a concubine. Sarvittri, her mother, was only 16 then and was very naive, and so Raada did not blame her mother but shared the misery with her. Raada refused all alliances offered by her mother's friends since they were either from the Brahman community or from mixed castes.

Savittri said that the boys of the Second House Chettiyars were mostly ill-educated. Her daughter did not want to marry a rich boy, but a well-educated boy. However, Savittri said that Brahman women who became the concubines of the Nagarattars were few and far between and that it was extremely difficult to find a boy with a similar background, i.e. with a Nagarattar father and a Brahman mother, or vice versa.

Savittri lamented her lot to me. She wondered why she was being made to suffer like this. "I was born into a Brahman family. Brahman is a religious caste, renowned for their accumulation of merit, having lived in austerity for many years. What mistakes did I commit in my previous life such that I should suffer like this?"

While her 'husband' was alive, she was not happy. He treated

her cruelly, beating her every day. She would go to her Brahman friend's house to weep. She said to me that she had never felt happy for even a single day although she was living in a nice bungalow with all amenities and servants. Since her husband's death 24 years ago, she has been living as a widow, and she feels that her suffering continues because of the marriage problems of her children. She feels that intercaste marriage has negative effects: "It creates a lot of sins, and tortures the offspring for generations."

She is critical of the Nagarattars in general. She says that they are simply money-orientated and cold-hearted. "If a Nagarattar finds a flower, he will pluck it, saying it may be useful for some purpose. He will use it for a *puja* or for something else, and immediately throw it away after that. He never feels for the flower. The *aacchis* are very calculating and stingy. They protect their property and they never give shares to the concubines."

For the past 10 years or more, both Savitri and her daughter have repeatedly made visits to Satya Saibaba's *ashram*¹⁰ for spiritual relief. They go to see Baba whenever Raada gets long holidays from the college where she is teaching. Recently, she got a post in Satya Saibaba woman's college.

Savitri has found a relief in this. Although the salary is less than the present college, she feels it could be better for her daughter to spend her life there. Savitri even feels Raada does not need to get married if she does not want to. If they live close to Baba, they may be relieved from their agonies. She has decided to live with her daughter in Anandapuram where they can see Baba regularly, renting out her house in Deevakottai.

¹⁰ Ashrams are Hindu religious institutions which are open to both world-renouncers and lay people as religious retreats.

"I made my elder daughter marry happily. She is happy in Malaysia, and she has a child now. My second daughter does not need to get married if she does not want to. She can live to serve God if she wants. Baba will look after her. It may be less painful than having a lot of problems in marriage. After all, intercaste marriage is a bad thing, and we have had to suffer for it. I feel sorry for her and for myself. My daughter does not need to create another unhappy child by marrying someone."

Savittri is a good friend of Sarasvati, and, on visiting her, Savittri talked about her daughter's marriage. Savittri was surprised when shown the large collections of bridal '*saamaans*' (goods) in her house¹¹. Sarasvati said that she would only marry her two children to pure Nagarattars.

"How can she do that? She is a non-Nagarattar, and no Nagarattar would come to her children for alliance!" But Sarasvati succeeded, and Savittri was quite upset. "She is a non-Nagarattar, isn't she? She was also a 'sidewife'!"¹² Nobody talks about it because she is a rich entrepreneur. I thought that there was no way she would be able to marry off her children to Nagarattars, but she succeeded. Unfortunately, I do not have that much money for my daughter and that's why Raada has to suffer."

Case 2. Mani, male, mid-40s; his daughter Lakshmi, 23 years old, married.

¹¹The Nagarattars in general, provide^{an} extraordinary collection of bridal '*saamaans*' for their daughter. Concerning this, see chapter 5.

¹² The conversation was all in Tamil, but she used this English term in order to signify 'concubine'.

Mani is a well paid engineer. His father is a Nagarattar, and his mother is an Isai Vellalar. In the beginning, Mani's mother was a concubine, and lived in a separate house with her children where his father used to stay. Mani was engaged to a woman of the same background (father was a Nagarattar and a rich pawnbroker-cum-landlord, and her mother an Isai Vellalar). Before the wedding ceremony, Mani's father took his concubine (i.e. Mani's mother), Mani and his sister to his ancestral house.

The Nagarattar knew his *aacchi* was dying and he wanted to conduct his son's marriage in his ancestral house since Mani was his only son. *Aacchi* and the concubine lived under the same roof for 6 months until the *aacchi* died. After her death, Mani's father married his mother.

However, when his father died, Mani had to fight with his paternal relatives for the traditional right to the ancestral house.¹³ He won the case, and he lives in half of the house, while his paternal uncle and his families live in the other half. There is no communication between them, and they belong to entirely different alliance groups.

Mani has two daughters. He recently married one of them off to a man whose background is similar to his; the groom's father is Nagarattar and his mother is Isai Vellalar. The groom is a successful engineer who runs a factory with his father, who is well-educated.

Mani is modestly rich. Aside from his salary, he has a

¹³As I described earlier, according to the tradition of the Nagarattars, the right to inherit the ancestral house is shared by the offspring of the brothers who jointly built the ancestral house. The 'share' of the house is handed down to the brothers' children but only to the male children of authentic lineage. This unwritten law is still maintained by the Nagarattars as custom.

business and property which he inherited from his father. The business was originally started with the money his wife brought as a dowry. Most of the income from his business is not reported to the tax office, but is placed in a fund for his daughters' marriages. Out of this income, he spent around rs. 800,000 on his first daughter's marriage. This amount situates him in the upper-middle level income group even among the Nagarattars.¹⁴ Because of the problem with his paternal uncle, he had to hire a wedding hall for his daughter's marriage. He also spent a lot of money on gold jewellery and silver vessels for his daughter.

Despite expensive jewellery and silver vessels, his list of bridal goods was simple and his taste more urban than that of traditional Nagarattar families, and this lifestyle was maintained by his daughter and her husband. The names of his two daughters are Brahmanic and he tends to move within the circle of urban professionals, especially Brahmans.

His ease with the Brahmanic customs is rooted in his maternal ancestry: since his mother was an Isai Vellalar, she maintained the *deevaadaasi* tradition which was half Brahmanic. (As I shall explain in the following case study, the *deevaadaasis*, took up some of the Brahmanic customs through their interactions with temple Brahman priests.) Both he and his wife are pure vegetarians. He goes to the Vinayaga temple every morning, visits *madams* and sees the *swamis*

¹⁴ According to one person I talked to, the relationship between class and the amount spent on marriage is as follows:

- 1.5 lakhs (rs.150,000) : very poor. Below this, marriage is not possible.
- 3 lakhs (rs. 300,000) : not poor. Middle class.
- 5 lakh to 10 lakhs : moderately rich.
- more than 30 lakhs: : rich.

(the religious head of the *madam*) regularly.

However, he also tries to present himself as a pure Nagarattar and stresses their positive aspects. "The best aspect of the Nagarattars is their hospitality. Since many of them have spent much time abroad, they know how to make foreign guests welcome. They extend their hospitality thinking that they may be able to gain a return either in business or by making contacts abroad." He also laments that some of the good traditions of the Nagarattars have now disappeared. "During the British colonial period, they were willing to take risks, engaging in long distance trade and finance. Nowadays, the boys want to be well-educated, become white-collar workers, and avoid taking risks. The good traditions are gone."

Describing himself to me as a Nagarattar, Mani however occasionally talked about the Nagarattars with resentment. "They earned money in Burma and in Malaysia, took everything from there. They never thought about the prosperity of the host country, but only about themselves. They should have become citizens and contributed to that country but they didn't do so. They only cared about bringing everything to Chettinadu. It is quite understandable that the local government became angry and drove them out. Although the Nagarattars were not able to get any compensation when the government confiscated their assets in Burma, they had already brought an enormous amount of their property from there in kind and in money. There can be no complaints about the confiscation of the local property. They exploited the local people, deserted the local wives, leaving them meagre sums of money. They took away the wealth from such countries and never thought about looking after the local people."

Mani's criticism of the Nagarattars' actions in Burma is

consistent with the account given by Mahadevan (1978), who claims that they exploited the Burmese rather than helped them. However, Mani's criticism was largely supported by his own experience that as an unauthentic Nagarattar he was discriminated against.

Although he was critical of the Nagarattars, he never mentioned his non-authentic origin. When socializing with authentic Nagarattars and attempting to behave like a genuine one, he does not mention his relatives who are Isai Vellalars. According to Raj, a dance teacher, an Isai Vellalar, Mani's mother is related to her family, though he never mentions this to others.

Case 3. Raj, female, dance teacher, from the Isai Vellalar caste, 65 years old.

Raj was legally a concubine of a Nagarattar and she lived with him for 33 years until his death, and even supported him financially. She was 17 when she started to live with him.

When Raj came to Deevakottai for a performance at 17, TR, a young Nagarattar, approached her mother to ask for her daughter as his concubine. He was already married but said his wife had had a hysterectomy and was not fit for married life (he already had two daughters from his wife). Eventually Raj's mother agreed. He left his family, built a house in Kaaraikkudi, and started to live with Raj. He lived with her for 33 years, had one son, and died at 75.

Unlike ordinary concubines, Raj had her own means of support as a dancer. She started to dance at age five and became fairly successful. Later, in her fifties, she won the all-India national award as one of the best dancers of Baratanatiam. Throughout her life, she continued dancing and supported herself even when there

was no money coming from TR, her husband. ¹⁵

During World War II, he became a freedom fighter for Congress, and was put in jail. Raj often went to visit him and supported herself with her own income. After independence, when TR wanted to start a business, she offered to add her savings towards his business fund. Because of actions such as these, TR's wife did not show any animosity towards Raj, indeed, she even treated Raj politely in functions where Raj appeared with TR. The wife's children, too, would visit Raj's house, calling her 'aunty'.

However, their relationship suddenly turned sour when TR was about to celebrate his *saandi* (the anniversary of the completion of his 60th year). In the beginning, TR wanted to celebrate with both wives, in Raj's house where he had lived for nearly 20 years. However, his wife insisted that he come and celebrate in the ancestral house and only with her as his legal wife. TR refused, and did as he intended, inviting friends and relatives.

His wife then stopped sending her children to their house so that when he died at 75, their relationship was cold. While praying, he collapsed and died in the temple of which he was a trustee. His body was carried to the ancestral house by fellow Nagarattars without informing Raj. The *aacchi* and her relatives immediately cremated the corpse, denying his illegitimate son's right of kindling the funeral pyre. They did not invite Raj or her son to the funeral.

While Raj was mourning for her husband in her house, the wife's brother came to her on the third day after the cremation to

¹⁵In fact, she continued to talk about him as her 'husband', since according to the tradition of Isai Vellalars, women can never start cohabitation without a proper marriage ritual. Therefore, even though the man may have another family elsewhere, from the point of the Isai Vellalar woman, cohabitation is a 'marriage' because a ritual will always have taken place.

talk about the property partition. She refused to talk about it as she was in mourning. However, he told her that a quarter of the share of TR's property should come to her. She said she did not care how much she got, and in the end, she received nothing.

At that time, her son was a lecturer in an engineering college. After his father's death, he claimed his share of the property from his mother. He took most of Raj's property given by TR, and from the money built his house in Madras. He rarely comes to see his mother these days.

He married twice. The first time was a 'love marriage' to a Christian girl in Bombay. Without informing his mother, he married her and brought her to Raj's house. The wife was left there when she was about to have a baby. After the child was born, the wife left him, leaving the baby girl in the custody of Raj. Later, he married a girl from the Isai Vellalar community. He neglected the daughter from his first marriage, leaving her with Raj.

Raj's granddaughter became a dancer and married her paternal aunt's son who is a *nadaswaram* (traditional musical instrument) player. There was no dowry, but her married life is a happy one. Raj now brings up her great-granddaughter in her house, still earning money as a dance teacher. She says her great-granddaughter will also become a dancer. She does not mind whom her great granddaughter marries.

Unlike Mani, the Brahman woman mentioned above, Raj does not regret her life with her lover, TR. In effect, she was his wife and helped him in times of need. Although her first daughter-in-law disappeared after giving birth to a daughter, Raj did not consider the child a burden. In her community, girls are able to support themselves as dancers.

Raj's father was a Smartha Vadama Brahman working as an accountant in a temple. He came forward to cohabit with her mother although he was already married. According to Raj, "It is not so easy to find a husband for *deevaadaasis*, as their husbands have to be able to maintain two houses without trouble. It is a difficult thing for most men although sometimes a girl and a priest who met every day might fall in love and start living together." ¹⁶

¹⁶According to RJ, girls of the Isai Vellalar community were divided into two categories. Those who married an Isai Vellalar were not supposed to take part in any kind of performance. They were called *kudumba peeru*, and their status was higher than the mixed breed, although they never performed. Those who became *deevaadaasi* came from the mixed breed. Only those who married into castes such as the Brahman or Chettiyar were allowed to enter the fine arts. The custom of giving the *pottu* (the symbol of the *deevaadaasi*) was abolished 85 years ago and the *deevaadaasi* disappeared.

In terms of manners and customs, Isai Vellalars are largely influenced by Brahman temple priests with whom they have had much contact. While the Isai Vellalars are mostly non-vegetarians, those *deevaadaasis* who were concubines of the Brahmans also became vegetarians. However, according to Raj, as far as the status in their caste is concerned, the former's is higher than the latter's. Such distinction does not seem to have created any substantial discrimination, since children from the intercaste marriages may marry freely into those of *kudumba peeru*..

Sixty years ago, if a girl who was born to a *kudumba peeru* wanted to perform, it was possible only in the temple where her father was performing music. No other temple would allow her to dance. If a girl from a mixed marriage, i.e. whose father was either a Brahman or a Chettiyar, wanted to become a *deevaadaasi*, she had to go to the temple where her mother was dancing. Even if her Chettiyar father had a temple of his own or had a temple under his custody, the temple management would not allow her to perform since there would always be a dancer hereditarily attached to the temple. The hereditary tradition was strictly followed because they were serving the gods.

Compared to the Chettiyaars, Brahmans were the more affectionate to the women of the Isai Vellalar caste, according to Raj. The first wife, i.e. the wife of the Brahman priest, treated the

According to Raj, children of Nagarattar fathers are richer, but in terms of culture, children of the Brahman fathers are more refined. Brahmans also treated Isai Vellalars more respectfully because of the long standing relationship between the two communities. The family of the Nagarattars denigrated the second wife from the Isai Vellalar community saying "the concubine has come"(*waicci wandaval*).

"In the Brahman's house, my mother was treated with respect, and the Brahman's wife used to say, 'aunty has come.' The first wife would call the concubine's daughter 'my daughter', and my sister's husband was called 'sister's husband' by them. Nowadays, even the pure Brahmans marry women whose parents are Isai Vellalar and Brahman. Or, even if both are Isai Vellalars, Brahmans will still marry them. Those whose parents are Isai Vellalar and Mudaliyar, or Isai Vellalar and Chettiyar are accepted as well. But none of the Nagarattars accept such combinations."

2-7 Discussion

The Servais, Kallars, and Maravars, who together form the Mukkulatoors, are renowned for their 'masculinity', and membership of their caste is inherited patrilineally. They are very pleased if a man of their caste manages to marry a Brahman girl, for example, since their own women are normally very dark, and women of fair skin are considered attractive. "Brahman women do

concubine of her husband as a relative. She is called 'aunty' by the first wife's children. But if the husband is a Chettiyar, there would be no relationship between the wife and the concubine. Nothing would be given to her.

not work in the field, and eat only good vegetarian food full of *ghee* (purified butter) and milk, which cools down their body, so their skin is quite fair. However, we are angered if a Brahman boy has married a girl of our caste. We'll ask where the fellow is, and go with a group to beat him and get back our girl!"

However, among the high castes such as the Shaiva Vellalars and Shaiva Mudaliyars, the tendency is to accept Brahmans or those of an equivalent high caste as marriage partners if there are not many options open to them. If a 'love marriage' takes place, as long as the partners are of the same caste status, then it will not be frowned upon. Offers of marriage alliances are often advertised in newspapers these days and several mention that they do not discriminate against sub-caste distinctions.

Those who know both Savittri and Raj say to me, "People who originate from inter-caste marriages tend to be unstable. They suffer from psychological problems, and their children often make arbitrary marriages too. Therefore, it is better to avoid intercaste marriages altogether. It creates the potential for a lot of problems in the future."

This point of view, however, ignores the fact that nowadays even in South India, 'love marriages' as well as arranged intercaste marriages have become more widespread and acceptable among the Vellalars and the Brahmans. The 'dowryless marriage' is quite advantageous for the girls. For example, a middle-aged doctor who lives in Tiruchi, an oculist and a Vellalar (he admits that he is not sure what kind of Vellalar he is), says that he has married a woman from the Soliya Vellalar caste, for love. His two brothers also had love marriages. One of them married a Mudaliyar girl, and another married a Brahman. Both brothers were non-vegetarians and their

wives have begun to cook some non-vegetarian dishes for them, though they themselves still eat only vegetarian food. The oculist's parents had a 'love marriage' as well. Their father was a Vellalar and their mother was a Mudaliyar. No dowry transaction took place in his family. "My wife did not bring anything except a few cooking vessels she needed. She did not have her own property, either. Now she spends from the joint account in which I deposit the regular income."

He says such love marriages are quite common especially among the Vellalar community. Although his statement cannot be seen as general opinion among the Vellalars, it is nonetheless true that a Vellalar (both a man and a woman) whose parents are from another caste can marry a pure Vellalar if both sides agree. 'Vellalar' is a wide category which combines dozens of regional castes, and they have come to accept varieties of sub-divisions to be inter-marriageable. Intercaste marriages often take place between the Vellalars and the Brahmans without destroying the parent-child relationship. Marriage to a Vellalar is especially advantageous for Brahmans from the point of view of educating their children; a Brahman is a 'forward' caste, and as such does not get a 'reserved seat' in colleges and public institutions. Since the political situation is at present quite negative for Brahmans in Southern India, they use alliances with 'backward' castes as a means of survival. Even after marriage, the parents are maintaining their relationships with their daughters, according to the oculist. They continue to visit their daughter's family just like other Brahman parents who married their daughters to Brahmans. It is often a relief for Brahman girls whose parents cannot afford to pay a dowry. In most cases, the children take on their father's caste. Yet if the girl's side is more powerful

and dominates the groom, both the groom and the children may adopt the bride's culture.

The oculist added that failure in marriage will happen whether it is an arranged marriage or a love marriage. He says, "Therefore, you cannot say that love marriage alone creates problems. It happens just as frequently in arranged marriage."

The Nagarattars have a quite different attitude: "You can only get respect if you marry a Nagarattar. We will never make alliances with people whose family have married non-Nagarattars in the past." This comment came from a 19-year-old housewife who recently gave birth to her first child; even among the young Nagarattars, the idea of authenticity continues to exist. Her view was shared by other college girls I interviewed.

However, it is also true that 'stray' cases are on the increase. One middle-aged Nagarattar said, "If you've established your base abroad, it's unavoidable. Say, for example, the XX. family. They have three sons and three daughters. One son married a German, another a North Indian, and one girl is married to a mixture (an unauthentic Nagarattar). Even TS's first wife's grandson married an American. What can you do? Nothing. Boys and girls fall in love and marry. I would guess that this happens to about ten per cent, and their marriage is not registered in our clan temple. We may lose our authentic population, but the majority do not want to marry in that way."

The present law orders them to give property shares to children of unauthentic origin as well, provided their parents were legally married, thus even the Nagarattars cannot entirely stop the outward flow of their caste capital. However their ethic of endogamy acts as a breakwater i.e. marriages between cross-cousins

and through affinal ties do stop this flow to a great extent.

Thus, it is evident that subtle discrimination is still practised. The temple garland, the symbol of the morality of the authentic Nagarattars, was not sent to the weddings of Sarasvati's children mentioned by the Brahman woman, Savitri.¹⁷ Sarasvati at least succeeded in marrying off her two children to authentic Nagarattars, yet even she cannot influence the course of her son's children.

Among the Nagarattars, a child whose father or mother is not a Nagarattar immediately loses the chance of inheriting the property which is of Nagarattar origin. Although this prohibition of intercaste union is the norm in most parts of Southern India, the rule is particularly strict among the Nagarattars.

As Tambiah describes (1973 b), *the laws of Manu* take a liberal attitude to the absorption of the diverted line (i.e. the offspring from the caste mixture caused by accepting brides from the lower castes). As a means of enforcing hypergamy, after 3 to 7

¹⁷Nowadays however, there is a way to insist on the legitimacy of the union even if the man has a wife and a concubine. In a recent case, the concubine, who was from the Isai Vellalar community, was admitted as an authentic wife in the court and inherited most of the property of her deceased 'husband'. According to the story, when her husband died, she tactfully refused to give the corpse to his relatives. And with the help of her relatives, she conducted the funeral ritual in accordance with the Isai-vellalar style. Since the *deevadaasis* start cohabitation with their 'husbands' after conducting proper rituals of 'marriage', the court admitted her claim as she was the woman with whom he had lived for most of the time. The *aacchi* who was the authentic wife from the point of view of the Nagarattars was not admitted as the legal wife in the court and she only managed to get the ancestral house in which she lived, while the Isai Vellalar 'wife' managed to get most of the property of her 'husband'. This offended the *aacchis* since among the Nagarattars, only the *aacchi* is the authentic wife whether she has had a child or not.

generations depending on the caste of the wife, even the Brahmans acknowledge the offspring derived from such intercaste marriage. Thus the Brahmanic ideology is basically hypergamous, as a device to accumulate wealth at the top of the varna hierarchy.

Dumont (1986: 177, 294-5), highlighting the case of the Piramalai Kallars in South India, refers to the offspring which derived from the union with a woman of lower status, which was later reintegrated into the caste with equal rights. My fieldwork data too, confirms that among the Chettiyar castes, Veelan Chettiyars and Vellaalar Chettiyars intermarry nowadays, and Kallars, Maravars, and Ahamudiyas recognize one another as equals and intermarry. Moreover, in the area near Tiruchirapalli city in Tamil Nadu, I found that the Brahmans, Mudaliyars, and Vellalars intermarry quite often as a result of 'love marriages', and indeed the direct interaction between the male and the female is allowed because love marriages do not involve the risk of severance from the natal families of both sides.

In comparison, the Nagarattars are extremely strict in maintaining their endogamous principles. By marrying into another caste, a Nagarattar, whether man or woman, loses the caste membership of the Nagarattars for his or her offspring for good. The stigma of marrying a non-Nagarattar is so strong that even if parents cannot find a partner for their daughter, they may prefer the daughter to remain unmarried or marry her off to a man whose qualification and salary are lower than hers.

A wrongly married line has to opt for alliances with families of a similar background, i.e. those who are called 'Second House Chettiyars' by the Nagarattars. They may even marry other castes and merge into them. By marrying a non-Nagarattar, the

relationship between brother/sister and cross-cousins in the subsequent generation eventually disappears, as communication becomes less and less until the diverted line is severed from the trunk of the Nagarattars.

For the Nagarattars, endogamy and cross-cousin marriages are used as the strategy to maximize their business interests which strengthen the reciprocal (egalitarian) relationship between the member families. In addition, as a consequence, they are the essential support for a woman after marriage. In the following chapters, I shall explain how cross-cousin marriage creates a web to support women.

3

Kinship and the internal structure of the Nagarattar caste

3-1 Kinship classification

As discussed in the previous chapter, the caste boundary is strictly protected by endogamy among the Nagarattars, so that there is no recruitment of new members from the offspring of intercaste marriages. Their 9 Shiva temple clan divisions regulate marriage as the exogamous group. Descent is patrilineally transferred as is the membership of a clan temple division. The bride and the groom should belong to different Shiva temple divisions, and their children inherit their father's temple division. Men remain as the members of their father's clan temple division but women change their clan membership after marriage.

In using the term 'descent', I shall follow Dumont's definition. Dumont uses this term exclusively to refer to the transmission of membership in the exogamous group. The terms 'patrilineal' and 'matrilineal' are applied to descent only in that sense, and not to succession and inheritance (Dumont 1983: 38). Therefore, when talking about property transfer, I shall not use terms such as patrilineal or matrilineal, and shall discuss property transfer separately from descent, eg. property is transferred from father to son, or from mother to daughter etc. Similarly in using the terms 'patrilateral', 'matrilateral', and 'bilateral', I shall also follow Dumont and use these terms only when discussing cross-cousin marriage.

In South India, among the non-Brahmans, one cannot marry

someone who belongs to the same *kula deivam* group, since *kula deivam* is transferred unilineally and this functions as the descent marker to regulate marriage. Among the Brahmans, although they have *kula deivams*, it is not the marriage regulator. If one party in the marriage belongs to a different *gootra*, it does not matter whether he or she worships the same *kula deivam*, and those who share the same *kula deivam* may marry if they belong to different *gootras*.

Similarly, as I have already mentioned, the Nagarattars have 9 clan Shiva temple divisions which are patrilinearly transmitted, like the Brahmanic *gootra*.. Therefore, as long as the husband and wife belong to different Shiva temple divisions, they follow descent exogamy. Marrying (or having sexual union) with someone who belongs to the same temple division is considered to be incestuous, and is scandalous. However, although this is a rule generally accepted, an occasional 'incestuous' sexual union may still occur. If it does happen, attempts are made to hide it to avoid a scandal. For example, I was told that a male Nagarattar who belongs to a wealthy family fell in love with one of his cousins who belonged to the same temple division (i.e. she was his parallel-cousin). They eloped, went to Kerala, and married there. Since descent is traced differently from caste to caste and Muslims in Kerala practice parallel-cousin marriage, they encountered no problem in getting married there. However, the eloped couple's families could not come out in public because of their shame and other Nagarattars made the parallel-cousin marriage into a scandal.

Although the Nagarattars feel that liaisons like the above are not as unacceptable as other incestuous relationships (e.g. father-daughter or mother-son), their normative rule nevertheless forbids

such relationships at least formally. Of course, it is in the nature of any rule to be broken, yet, as the above case shows, when it happens, people try to conceal it from the public.

Such prohibitive rules of sexual union between certain relatives exists in kinship systems to regulate marriage. For example, in South India, the majority of castes treat the cross-cousin marriage as some sort of preferential marriage pattern (either matrilateral, patrilateral, or bilateral), although it does not mean that all marriages follow this pattern.

In order to discuss the marriage alliance and kinship of the Nagarattars, following Good, I shall distinguish three analytical levels.

- 1) ^{the} statistical-behaviourial level consists of the aggregate consequences of the behaviour of members of the society or group in question. In the case of kinship, this level is exemplified by demographic data on residential, marital, and other observed patterns.
- 2) the jural level comprises the normative, legal, moral, religious, and analytical statements of the group's members.jural data consist of ideals and justifications made explicit by group members themselves, though not always verbally.
- 3) ^{the} categorical level comprises ^{modes of} classification and systems of nomenclature. The relationship terminology is the archetype of data at this level. Categorical data generally differ from jural phenomena by being implicit. (Good 1991:54-55)

Although cross-cousin marriage may exist as a preferential pattern of alliance in South India, not all alliances follow this pattern. In other words, the statistical level may not always reflect the preferential cross-cousin marriage of the caste. According to one senior Nagarattar, cross-cousin marriage was quite common until the 1950s, since it was the most convenient way to find a suitable partner in a nearby area. There was very little transport connecting the different regions of Chettinadu, thus cross-cousin marriage was more practical as this kind of alliance needed only a small amount of cash dowry

and enquiry about the other party. On the other hand, according to the same Nagarattar, a drastic change has taken place recently. As people became more urbanized the men with good qualifications started to seek alliances with girls from richer families, thus not following the traditional cross-cousin marriage pattern.

His explanation cannot be proven statistically, as time and locality, demographic situation, etc. affect the real pattern of marriage alliance, and the choices of cross-cousin marriage or non-relative marriages are a matter of individual choice for each family. In other words, marrying a cross-cousin is not an obligation or a 'rule'.

The jural level, which gives the normative, legal, or moral aspects in the kinship, on the other hand, expresses the rules and statements which are often referred to by the members verbally: one should not have sexual union with the Ego's parallel relatives, eg. his parallel-cousin or his sister. This is a breach of the moral code among the Nagarattars (and also among most South Indians). Although such normative rules are sometimes broken, transgressions are to be concealed, since they are performative statements intended to direct, justify or rationalize the structure observed by the group.

The Kinship terminology, followed by the group belongs to the categorical level above mentioned in (3). The terminology, unlike the jural level, works merely as prescription, which has no coercive power: a man can marry any woman who is marriageable, i.e. who is or is not his cross-cousin. His wife may start to call him '*aittaaan*' (elder cross-cousin brother) following the prescription of the kinship terminology which classifies the age difference. The terminology merely prescribes and classifies, while the jural rule has coercive power which gives moral sanction if there is any breach.

The kinship terminology of the Nagarattars expresses preferential bilateral cross-cousin marriage. As Good's diagram (1991: 61) clearly shows, the consequence of repeated bilateral cross-cousin marriage can create the terminological identifications as follows¹

Z=FBD=MZD, B=FBS=MZS, MBD=FZD=WZ=BW,
MBS=FZS=ZH, D=BD=WZD, S=BS=WZS, ZD=SW, ZS=DH,
F=FB=MZH, FZ=MBW=WM, M=MZ=FBW, MB=FZH=WF,
FF=MMB, MM=FFZ, FM=MFZ, MF=FMB.

The kinship terminology among the Nagarattars follows as below. These people listed below as a whole are called relatives (*sondakaaran*).

-----<table 3-1 >-----

Kinship Terminology of the Nagarattars

relationship notation:

F father M mother B brother Z sister S son

D daughter H husband W wife P parent

e elder y younger

ms man speaking ws woman speaking

relationship term / genealogical referents /		level
1. <i>aiyaa</i>	FF, MF, FFB, MFB, FMB, MMB	+2
2. <i>appaattaal</i>	FM, FFZ, MFZ, FMZ	+2
3. <i>aayaa</i>	MM, MMZ	+2

4. <i>appaccii</i>	F	+1
5. <i>periyappaccii</i>	FeB, MZH(older than F)	+1

¹I shall use the following abbreviations in this chapter for kinship notations.

B=brother, F=father, Z=sister, S=son, M=mother, W=wife, H=husband, D=daughter.

6. <i>cittappaa</i>	FyB, MZH(younger than F)	+1
<hr/>		
7. <i>attaal (attai)</i>	M	+1
8. <i>periyattaal</i>	MeZ, FeBW	+1
9. <i>cinnattaal</i>	MyZ, FyBW	+1
<hr/>		
10. <i>ammaan</i>	MB FZH WF HF	+1
11. <i>attai</i>	FZ MBW WM HM	+1
12. <i>maamiyaar</i>	HM	+1
13. <i>maamanaar</i>	HF	+1
<hr/>		
14. <i>annan</i>	Be, FBSe, MZSe	+0
15. <i>aacchi</i>	Ze FBDe, MZDe	+0
16. <i>tambi</i>	By, FBSy, MZSy	+0
17. <i>tangacchi</i>	Zy, FBDy MZDy	+0
<hr/>		
18. <i>attaan</i>	MBSe, FZSe, WeB, H, eZH	+0
19. <i>aittiyaandi</i>	MBDe, FZDe, WeZ	+0
<hr/>		
20. <i>maappillai</i>	DH, FZDH, MBDH	+0
21. <i>kolundaan</i>	HeB, MBSyws, FZSyws, HyB, yZHyws	+0
22. <i>koludunaar</i>	HyB	+0
23. <i>naattinaal</i>	HeZws, HyZws	+0
24. <i>kolundiyar</i>	WZe, WZy	+0
25. <i>sammandi</i>	MBDyws, FZDyws, HyZ, yBWws	+0
26. <i>sammadaan</i>	DHF, DHM, SWF, SWM	+(-)0
<hr/>		
27. <i>mahan</i>	S, BSms, ZSws, HBS, WZS	-1
28. <i>mahal</i>	D, BDms, ZDws, HBD, WZD	-1
29. <i>marumahan</i>	BSws, ZSms, WBS, HZS, DH	-1
30. <i>marumahal</i>	BDws, ZDms, WBD, HZD, SW	-1
31. <i>peeran</i>	SS, DS, BSS, ZSS, BDS, ZDS	-2
32. <i>peetti</i>	SD, DD, BSD, ZSD, BDD, ZDD	-2

The terminology follows the principle of reciprocal sets:

For example; father, mother, paternal uncle, paternal uncle \longleftrightarrow son and daughter; Maternal uncle and maternal aunt \longleftrightarrow son-in-law and daughter-in-law; Elder brother, elder sister \longleftrightarrow younger brother and younger sister.

Although terminologies in general follow the preferential bilateral cross-cousin marriage pattern, in the generation +2 level, instead of only two terms, the Nagarattars have three: while they identify father's father, father's father's brother, mother's father and mother's father's brother (*aiyaa*), mother's mother (*aayaa*) and father's mother (*appattaal*) are distinguished. Therefore, the terminology does not create a completely symmetric structure.

The above list of terminology can be divided into two categories, i.e. cross and parallel relatives, distinguishing two kinds of relatives².

² Although following Good (1991:59-60), I agree that "parallel and cross relatives" is a much better terminology than Dumont's original "consanguine and affine", I shall sometimes use the term kin and affines to explain gift-exchange and ritual procedures, which are much closer to the Nagarattar terminology of *pangaalis* and *taayaadigals*, since terminologies as parallel and cross relatives may include more distant relationships such as Ego's father's father's brother (parallel) or Ego's mother's father's brother (cross), I shall restrict the terminologies of *pangaalis* and *taayaadigals* to a much narrower sense in the following discussion: by *pangaalis* and *taayaadigals*, I generally refer to those who participate in gift-exchange relationships and ceremonial rituals, unless I specifically refer to much wider category (eg. clan members are also *pangaalis*).

-----<table 3-2>-----

The structure of the Nagarattar Relationship Terminology

	parallel	cross		
level	Δ (M)	0 (F)	0 (F)	Δ (M)
+2	<i>aiyaa</i>	<i>appattaal</i>	<i>aayaa</i>	<i>aiyaa</i>
+1 (e)	<i>periyappacchii</i>	<i>periyattai</i>	<i>periyattqal</i>	<i>periyammaan</i>
(y)	<i>appaccii</i>	<i>aittai</i>	<i>aattaal</i>	<i>ammaan</i>
+0	<i>annan</i>	<i>aacchi</i>	<i>aittiyaandi</i>	<i>aittaa</i>
-0	<i>tambi</i>	<i>tangacchi</i>	<i>kolundiyaal</i> (<i>sammaandi</i>)	<i>kolundunaar</i> (<i>kolundaan</i>)
-1	<i>mahan</i>	<i>mahal</i>	<i>marumahal</i>	<i>marumahan</i>
-2	<i>peeran</i>	<i>peetti</i>	<i>peetti</i>	<i>peeran</i>

The two kinds of relatives, parallel and cross, are distinctively different in several ways. As seen above, ego's relatives are divided according to relative age, into senior and junior (elder brother=*annan*, younger brother=*tambi*, etc.), but the cross and parallel relatives in each level maintain different naming. There is classification by terminological levels: the terminology distinguishes six levels, i.e. three senior to Ego, and three junior : ((+2 and +1,+0) levels: grandparents, father, and elder brother), and (-0, -1, -2) levels: younger brother, son, grandson). The distinction prescribed in the terminology classifies marriageability when it is applied to the gender of the opposite sex: a man could marry his cross-cousin who belongs to the(-1) generation. A female ego may marry one who belongs to her own generation but who is older than her, i.e. *attaa*.

Although this is a generally accepted rule among the South Indians, the Nagarattars break this rule in unavoidable circumstances. For example, sometime before the 1940s, some men seem to have married slightly older women (even paying bride-price), since the number of marriageable women was far less than that of marriageable men among the Nagarattars (cf. case study of Savitri in chapter 2). Both the Nagarattars and non-Nagarattars who are over forty remember coming across several Nagarattar husbands slightly younger than their wives. Nowadays, the number of marriageable women appears to be equivalent to or even slightly greater than the number of men, and thus the Nagarattars now avoid marrying older women.

The most essential part of the Dumontian argument is the relationship between the Ego's father and his mother's brother based on the alliance. This alliance relationship defines the mother's brother by reference to the father, but the father himself is defined by reference to the Ego (1983: 10). Father and mother's brother are similar in generation and different in kin, as these two classes of people created by marriage creates two kinds of relatives, i.e. kin and affine. However, according to Dumont, there are no special terms for affines, since 'my mother's brother is essentially my father's affine' (p. 12), and 'we have in fact taken the two oppositions as a way leading from Ego to the father and from father to the mother's brother' (p. 12). In other words, Dumont maintains that the relationship with Ego's mother's brother is not through his mother but through his father, since his mother's brother is essentially his father's affine.

This point, however, is questionable, as, in the case of the Nagarattars, there are two distinct categories which distinguish cross

and parallel relatives surrounding Ego. *Pangaalis* are equivalent to the parallel relatives discussed above and the *taayaadigals* are translatable as the cross relatives. What the Nagarattars call 'mother's people' (*taayaadigals*) includes not only mother's brother (*ammaan*): for a married woman, it is her natal family members, i.e. her parents, her brother, who become the gift-givers for her. For her children, 'mother's people' means both their grandparents and maternal uncle and his children, who are their cross-cousins. Although the affinal relationship between a married man and his wife's brother is essential, this depends on the stronger relationship between his wife and her natal family, since it is his wife who is the official gift-receiver. His children also become gift-receivers from his affine, yet this is again through his wife, as his children call his affine 'mother's people'.

However, Dumont is still correct in distinguishing the two classes, i.e. kin and the affine (or cross and parallel relatives) as the core of the South Indian kinship system. In the case of the Nagarattars, these two classes of relatives have conspicuous differences not only in terms of marriageability/ non-marriageability, wife-givers/wife-takers, gift-exchange relationships, but also in the life-cycle ritual rituals in which they participate, and the very distinction of these two relatives marks the essential part of the ritual life of the Nagarattars.

3-2 *Pangaalis*

The term *pangaalis* literally derives from *pangu*, the share, and means that they are the sharers of ancestral property transferred from father to sons. Among the Nagarattars, those who belong to

the same Shiva temple divisions are believed to be descended from the same male ancestor, so they are brothers and sisters, i.e. *pangaalis*. In daily usage, "*pangaali*" denotes more immediate kin, i.e. Ego's siblings, F, F's F, F's Bs, F's F's Bs and their families, i.e. those who used to live under the same roof in the ancestral house are normally termed as such. *Sondakaaran* on the other hand means relatives in general, thus both the kin (parents and parallel relatives) and the affine (cross relatives) are all covered by this term.

If a Nagarattar does not have a child, he is only allowed to adopt a son from his own clan temple divisions. In other words, whether the adoptive son is a close kin or not, '*pangaali*' both in a distant and a closer sense, appears to have some sense of shared common blood which David claims to be intrinsic to the Sri Lankan Tamils' ideas about the *sakootarar* (David 1973: 524).

The *pangaalis*, when it came to business, would act cooperatively. The close *pangaalis*, who shared the expense of building their joint household, used to live under the same roof for a certain period. And the *pangaalis* were the ones who would take care of the death ritual. If a man did not have a son, and failed to adopt one, then the role of chief mourner would be taken up by one of the *pangaalis*, --in most cases, either a nephew or a brother. Death involves the heaviest ritual pollution, and the role of the *pangaalis* in the funeral is essential, since there is no other group to take up this role (see chapter 6 for this discussion).

The core of the *pangaali* category is the ego's male parallel relatives, with their wives and children subsumed under this category. *Pangaalis* are sometimes the cooperative workforce. Among the landholding families, brothers share the land, as is the case with most agricultural castes and landholding higher castes.

Among the Nagarattars, *pangaalis* used to own business property jointly, including the ancestral house which was used as the business headquarters. (This is still practised among some families of the Nagarattars. See the case study of VS line in the appendix of this chapter.)

In terms of business, business credit was shared by *pangaalis*. The Nagarattars created a credit instrument called *hundis*, which is discounted with the Imperial Bank by a Nagarattar businessman when he needs cash immediately. For this purpose, his brother will also sign, as, for *hundis*, two signatures are required (Gandhi 1983: 407). The Nagarattars were renowned for having their own funds, which were also pooled jointly among the close *pangaalis*.

The relationship among *pangaalis* can become strained, however, due to the mutual involvement in property share and joint business. One middle aged Nagarattar said to me that his relationship with his deceased father's uncle turned sour as his uncle wanted to divide their joint property in his own favour. "Because of this, we did not invite him to *padaippu* (ancestral worship) in which we worship our common ancestors as well as my deceased father."

Another Nagarattar also lamented, "In the past, people used to send good managers if their brother's companies were in difficulties. Nowadays, no brother and no *pangaali* helps each other."

Although such strains are found especially among paternal uncles and brothers, since they are supposed to compete with each other to gain profit, *pangaalis* are still an essential group for life-cycle rituals.

Padaippu-ancestral worship

Padaippu is held to commemorate the patrilineally related ancestors.

There are two different types of worship. One is the worship of *kula deivam* (lineage god) who is normally enshrined in the place (a village) where the ancestry began, usually 5 or 6 generations back. Families congregate once a year or once every several years, and hold a grand *padaippu* in which the eldest male member of the oldest family officiates over the ritual. Sometimes, if the participating families are large, they may take it in turns to hold the officiant's position, each family providing an officiant once every ten years.

The other type of *padaippu* is much smaller in scale. At these times, it is not the *kula deivam* who is worshipped, but those ancestors who are specially remembered by the family and whose photographs are hung on the walls of the ancestral house -- a deceased father, mother, aunt, uncle or child may be remembered, for example. Only the close kin among the *pangaalis*, such as family members and joint family members, i.e. Ego's father and his spouse, father's brothers and their spouses, their children and their spouses and children, may attend. Or it may be even smaller in size with only the father, mother, sons and their spouses and children. Even so, holding a *padaippu* is essential before any auspicious ceremony such as a wedding or *saandi*. Special cloths such as *sarees* and *veetti* are presented to their favourite ancestor and are kept in a special box. After the worship, the participating male members wash and dry them before returning them to a box or a chest³. Cooking vegetarian meals and sacrificing chicken are also strictly male tasks.

The area specially reserved for the sacrifice is the *walavu*

³ According to Dumont (1986:375), a chest (*petti*) is often treated as the sacred object in the village temples. The priest officiates over the ritual which is kept in a *petti*, placed in the intramural temple. In the period between festivals, the chest is identified with the whole of the temple.

waasal. Sweets, snacks, and vegetarian food are the commonest items offered. Freshly sacrificed chicken and mutton is offered if the ancestors are non-vegetarians. Clothes that have been torn are taken out from the box and worn by the members who congregate at the *padaippu*, and new clothes replace them as offering to the ancestor, and the new clothes are kept in the box.

Since ancestors are supposed to be already pure and auspicious, everything for the ritual must be fresh and new. New buckets are used to scoop water, and the participants are expected to bathe and wear new clothes, or at least clothes washed by the Washerman. Women, especially the married women who have become members of the family as the in-marrying affine, are also crucial in this ritual. Since the occasion is a pure and auspicious one, they should not be menstruating when attending. It is said that women sometimes take pills to postpone their menstruation for this reason.

In order to worship the pure ancestors, the *puja* room should be extra clean, and this job is assigned to women. It is mostly left to the most senior woman, i.e. either the widow of the deceased or the wife of the eldest in the family takes the initiative and instructs her sons. Clothes kept in a box are to be washed only by men and hanged on the washing line by them.

The order of worship starts with the males who prostrate themselves in front of the *ul viidu* where a pot filled with water and a box containing clothes for the ancestors are also placed, as are the food offerings. First come the eldest males followed by the younger, who may be their sons or brothers. Children follow next, according to seniority. The wives follow their children and the order is again decided according to seniority. If daughters get married, their lineage changes and they cannot participate in this

ritual in their natal family.

As the prohibition of participation by married daughters from the worship as well as the order of worship show clearly, full participation in the worship of the patrilineally inherited ancestors is given to the males and their children-- and, in spite of their seniority and authority over their children, the wives as the in-marrying affine are regarded as more distant from their husband's ancestors than are their children.

Padaippu is particularly essential before a wedding, since the marriage must be reported to the ancestors so that they may send their blessings to the marrying couple; so both the bride's and the groom's sides hold the ritual separately. *Padaippu* is also essential after someone in the family has been deceased for over a year. In order to mark his/her status as an ancestor, the family members should hold the *padaippu*, but, unlike the funeral, the ceremony is auspicious and pure as the deceased is already purified. To the Nagarattars, *padaippu* expresses ritual purity but the generator of this purity is the kin, the closest family members and the *pangaalis*. On the other hand, the Brahman priests are associated with purificatory rituals which involve pollution, such as funerals (I shall return to this point in chapter 6).

When a Nagarattar dies, it is only the *pangaalis* who help the chief mourner to conduct the rituals held both in the cremation ground and in the ancestral house. Even when a wife dies, it is her husband's *pangaalis* who organize the funeral. In this way, for a married woman, full membership of her husband's lineage comes only after death. By becoming one of the ancestors who are worshipped by her sons, she can truly become the guardian of the house.

Among the Tanjore Brahmans described by Gough, a man propitiates his deceased parents, grandparents, paternal great grandparents, and then his maternal grandparents every month, but his deceased father (and his mother, if she is also dead) is separately propitiated on a particular day of the month (Gough 1956: 838-9). However, among the Nagarattars, the 'ancestors' are those who are closely associated with the officiants, and this relationship does not go beyond their grandparents' generation. In addition, the Nagarattars do not worship the maternal line. The mother's parents are simply not propitiated as they are affines to the man.

A contrast can also be found between the Nagarattars' ancestor worship and the Brahmanic one; in the former there is no chanting of the names of the deceased while among the Tanjore Brahmans, they chant the names of all the propitiated male ancestors, but not the females (Gough 1956: 839). They are only associated with their husbands as sets, while among the Nagarattars, wives are still considered to be essential ancestors in their own right. However, while among the Tanjore Brahmans, the ancestral propitiation is done both for paternal grandparents and maternal grandparents, the Nagarattars do not worship the maternal side at all. This also shows that they separate the *pangaalis* and *taayadigals* clearly in terms of rituals. When a wife dies, especially as a *sumangali*, she is to be worshipped as the guardian of the family, and she would be called *periyaacchi* (big *aacchi*).

3-3 *Taayaadigal* (mother's people)

The Nagarattars, like most South Indian castes, think that the maternal grandparents, and the maternal uncle and his family, are

more affectionate and less formal than the *pangaalis*. They call those who are related to their mother 'mother's people' (*taayaadigals*), with more affectionate implications. In terms of kinship terminology, mother's brother (*ammaan*) is identical to father's sister's husband and wife's father, and mother's father is father's mother's brother. What the Nagarattars normally mean by mother's people are those like mother's parents, mother's brothers and their children, who are more likely to live under the same roof or nearby. The possibility that mother's brother and father's sister's husband and wife's father (or husband's father) are all different people is greater than that of these three being the same individual. Among these three categories, i.e. mother's brother, father's sister's husband, and wife's father (or husband's father), the most crucial one is the mother's brother to whom ritual roles in ceremonial occasions are assigned. Similarly, mother's father and mother's mother are the important figures for Ego rather than father's mother's brother or father's father's sister, even though, terminologically, they can be identical.

The role of mother's people is closely associated with the gift-giving which takes place with the marriage alliance. The distinction between the wife-givers and wife-takers exists when actual marriage takes place, although preferential cross-cousin marriage maintains isogamy in principle. One of the most essential obligations of the wife-giver is continuous ceremonial gift-giving to their daughter's family. When a woman gets married, she is given part of her share of property from her parents in the form of *siir danam* (the gift from the 'mother's house').

Among the Nagarattars, woman's property comes from two sources: firstly, she is entitled to inherit all the property of her mother. If she has sisters, she should share it with them. Secondly,

her father would give her part of his property as a premortal inheritance on marriage, although the amount she receives may not be as large as that of her brother. If she is the only daughter or if she has no brothers, she is entitled to receive the whole of her father's property, unless her father adopts a son. It seems to be the custom among the well-to-do Nagarattars to adopt a son only after getting their daughters married so that their adopted son would be useful for ceremonial purposes and remain as a protector to their married daughter. If possible, there could even be a cross-cousin marriage between their children. However, even after marriage, a married Nagarattar woman can expect to get part of her share in instalments taking the form of gifts.

The most conspicuous feature of alliance as an enduring marriage institution which defines and links the two kinds of relatives, consists in the giving of ceremonial gifts and functions (Dumont 1983: 79). As Dumont claims, in societies with 'male predominance' (I shall rather say patrilineally organized descent groups'), property is transmitted from one generation to the next in two ways: by inheritance in the male line, and also by gifts to in-laws, namely from father-in-law to son-in-law (p. 79). A married woman will receive a regular flow of gifts from her parents on Deepavali, Pongal, and at the birth of her children. This role is later taken up by her brother, i.e. her child's maternal uncle, until the woman is dead.

The ceremonial role of maternal uncle thus represents a continuation of the gift giving of Ego's mother's generation, i.e. the function of gift receiving has come down one generation after the birth of the child. The child's grandparents give gifts such as gold and silver ornaments at the birth, and on several other occasions such

as a birthday, or the puberty ceremony for a girl, and then again at the marriage. As the above case of gift giving clearly shows, gift-giving follows the cycle of the growth of the family, i.e. reproduction. On the other hand, among the Nagarattars, 'mother's people' do not give any gifts when death takes place in their married daughter's family, unlike the Kallars and Maravars in Tamil Nadu (Dumont 1983: 93-104).

When a child has no mother's brother, his role may be taken by the father's sister's husband, or a relative of equivalent position, at least during ceremonial occasions like a wedding. With regard to this point, Dumont explains that a man inherits his father's property with the charge of supporting his sister, not only with the marriage gifts but also with other gifts which are to be given in the future, including the presents to be given to the sister's children.

These are provided or compensated for by the fact that the sister had no formal share in the heritage, her share consisting precisely in such presents. If she has no brother and if no special arrangement is made, she will exceptionally inherit her father's property, but, as a negative counterpart, nobody will be there to make the customary gifts to her children. If she wishes her cousin to assume the role of a brother, she has to give away to him precisely the same property or at least a part of it as would have gone to her brother if she had one. (Dumont 1983: 90-91)

If there is no maternal uncle to take the groom or the bride to the marriage platform at marriage, their paternal uncles might take the role, not as *pangaalis* but as a surrogate (although I never came across this situation during my fieldwork). As a matter of courtesy, if this takes place, the bride's parents have to give special gifts to the surrogate maternal uncle who take up such a role. The transmission of property takes place under the form of gifts, and this explains the affection towards the 'mother's people' from the married woman's children.

From the point of the gift-receiver, i.e. the married woman's family, this constant flow of gifts also suggests dependence on the 'mother's people'. Among the Nagarattars (and also among most South Indian Hindus), what they call 'mother's house' (*ammaa viidu*) is in fact the married woman's father's house. Yet when a woman talks about "mother's house" affectionately, she means the gift giving house from which she can expect constant economic support. It is especially so among the Nagarattars, as I explain in the later part of this chapter.

If cross-cousin marriage takes place, this dependence on the 'mother's house' becomes much stronger. For example, if a girl marries her mother's brother's son, she may regain the privileges of her mother's natal house after marriage. A young Nagarattar girl once told me, rather regretfully, showing me her maternal grandparents' grand house, that she would not be able to use the facilities available there as frequently as her cross-cousins who were born there. However, she said that she would be able to do so if she marries one of her cross-cousins, who live in her maternal grandparents's house. She appeared to be quite optimistic about this possibility, although the decision to claim the traditional right (*urimai*) to marry one of the cross-cousins is reserved for boys, not girls.

The maternal uncle, as I explained above, is supposed to be economically responsible both for the male and female children of his sister, and the ceremonial role of the maternal uncle is more explicit if the child is a girl. As Good (1991:5) maintains, the role of controlling the reproductive capacity of a woman is partially shared by the affine in the group where preferential cross-cousin marriage is practised. Among the Nagarattars, as the potential

supplier of spouse of the girl, in the classificatory sense at least, the affines represented by the maternal uncle endow the girl with a *kaluttiru*, the necklace which is given at the wedding.

Tiruvaadurai

Tiruvaadurai used to be held among the Nagarattars as the celebration of a small girl when she is around 5 to 10 years old. She is decorated with jewellery, is dressed in a grand *saree*, and is given a small *kaluttiru* around her neck as a ritual protection.

In this ritual, the maternal uncle is the person who is responsible for tying the *kaluttiru* around the neck of the girl. This ritual died out in the 1950s, but the important role of the maternal uncle remains in several crucial life cycle rituals such as the puberty rite and the wedding. A man should give sarees and gifts of provisions when his sister's daughter attains maturity. He ties a string called *kaapu*, a ritual protection, around the wrists of his sister's children. Both the bride and the groom respectively receive this protection from their maternal uncles at their wedding ceremony. Both the groom and the bride are guided by their maternal uncle at the wedding and he becomes one of the key ritual performers at wedding ceremonies (see chapter 6 for details). But the maternal uncle as the ritual officiant is more important for girls than boys.

A senior Nagarattar explains *Tiruvaadurai* as follows: “When the girl is around 5 to 10 years, her parents present her to the neighbourhood. She is decorated with a grand *saree* and jewels, and visits the neighbourhood from house to house, asking for vegetables. Her maternal uncle, mother, brothers and sisters, and her friends of about her age, all accompany her. She sings a song in each house

while begging for vegetables. She carries a silver basket to collect vegetables, singing a verse, and she visits all the Nagarattar houses nearby accompanied by her friends and her maternal uncle. She never visits non-Nagarattar houses, since 'neighbours' and 'public' means only the Nagarattars. However, their non-Nagarattar friends are welcome to the feast, as is always the case for their celebrations."

The food is cooked with the vegetables she collected, in addition to the vegetables her parents bought the previous day. The number of guests vary from between 100 to 300 depending on the status of the family. These guests would have to be served breakfast, lunch, and tea. In the evening, the girl would cook a sweet *dosai* with the help of her maternal uncle, and put 108 holes in it. On the morning of the ceremony, she would be given a small version of a gold *kaluttiru* (a necklace decorated with hand-shaped gold pieces, worn only worn at a wedding ritual) by her maternal uncle in the ancestral room of the joint house. *Kaluttiru*, as I describe in chapter 5, is an essential part of woman's property, given before a *taali* (marriage necklace) is tied around her neck. *Kaluttiru* itself contains a *taali* at the centre, and while the *taali*, on a gold chain, is kept around the neck all the time, the *kaluttiru* is kept in a safe.

In one house, I saw some photographs of *Tiruvaadurai* which was celebrated when the girl was five and a half. Umaa, now a middle aged woman in her early 40s said, "People removed the *kaluttiru* from my neck when I fell asleep that night. I quite liked that ceremony and felt sorry that it would not be around my neck any longer the next morning. "

The small *kaluttiru* was the one kept in her father's house for this purpose, and unlike the real *kaluttiru* which is given to the

daughters on their marriage, it was not supposed to be given away, but shared by girls who are born in the family.

A similar ritual was observed among the Nayers until the 1920s, according to Gough (1955: 49). *Taali* is an indispensable pendant made of gold, worn on a string around the neck, and for most South Indian women, this indicates their married status. The unique aspect of the *taali* rite of the Nayers was that it was to be held not at the wedding but before puberty. Discussing this rite, Fuller (1976: 101) maintains that this rite was not a recognition of physiological puberty, since a separate rite (*tirantukuli*) marked a girl's first menstrual flow.

According to Fuller's description, each Nayar *taravad* (matrilineal joint family), was linked to other local lineages, known as *enangan* lineages. And a girl's *taali* was tied by a male member of one of her lineage's *enangan* lineages, and the tier was known as the *manavalan*. The *taali* rite was held in a group, assembling pre-puberty girls of a *taravad* or several *taravads* nearby, and attended by every member of the *enangan* lineages, and also by representatives of all other Nayar households in the village. The *taali* rite lasted four days, and the girls worshipped the goddess Bhavavati in a lineage shrine, and feasts were given to the attendants. And on the fourth day, the girl and the tier of the *taali* visited the temple. After rituals, the *taali* tier and the girl would take a meal together separately in the inner loggia, and the rite was finally closed with an elaborate feast for the participants (Fuller 1976: 101-103).

Fuller's argument on the *taali* tying rite sheds light on the meaning of *Tiruvaadurai* among the Nagarattars, as they do appear to share symbolic meanings in a few crucial respects. Firstly, both rites are prepubertal rituals given to a girl. Secondly, the *taali* (in

the case of the Nayers) and *kaluttiru* (the Nagarattars) were worn temporarily and not necessarily as the eternal emblem of marriage worn by South Indian women. For Fuller mentions that the *taali* worn by the girl was not necessarily worn continuously but in some areas she removed it shortly after the ceremony (1976: 103). Thirdly, the *taali* tier was the maternal uncle of the girl in the case of the Nagarattar, and *enangan* in the case of the Nayers, both of which are categorically affines to the girl's lineage, thus symbolizing the affine as the 'connector' (David:1973) to the girl's family, the relative related to reproduction and fertility of the girl. For, both the girl and her children do not undergo the official death pollution at the time of the death of the man who tied the *taali*. (If the man is a husband, as a wife and his children, they should undergo a mourning period.). And the Nagarattar girl's *kaluttiru* tier is her maternal uncle. The maternal uncle, being her cross relative, does not play any role in the funeral ritual of her family, nor is she expected to undergo a ritual mourning period on his death. Although the *taali* tier at the 'real' wedding should be the groom, both cases show that the *taali* tiers are not the 'husband' of the girl either in a real sense or in a symbolic sense. As Fuller maintains, the *taali* rite is not the 'marriage' for the Nayar girls but the first stage (first marriage, in Fuller's words)⁴ which endows the girl with social status, a rite of passage for the girl, marking her progress from the social category of girl to that of woman, i.e. a female initiation rite. Among the Nayers, it is to be followed by the *sambandham* ritual, the sexual union, after puberty, during which a girl is linked as a sexual partner to one or more men by whom she is expected to bear children (Fuller

⁴ Fuller calls this stage 'first marriage' (1976: 105), but since this name is quite misleading and rather confusing, as Good maintains (1991: 184), I shall simply call it the first stage.

1976: 105). The second stage (secondary marriage, in Fuller's wording) is the consummation, and what constitutes 'marriage' is the whole process including both the first and the second stages, according to Fuller. In the case of other South Indian castes, instead of a prepuberty ritual, a puberty ritual becomes the significant marker that endows a girl with social identity before the wedding ceremony.

Fuller argues that the *taali* rite is crucial in the pan-Indian context of marriage, i.e. crucial to secure the 'purity and legitimacy' for the girl's offspring (Fuller 1976: 114) and that makes the status of the man who ties the *taali* for that family's girl very important (Fuller 1976: 115). Following Fuller, Good, discussing puberty rituals and weddings in Tamil Nadu non-Brahman castes in Terku Vandanam, maintains that the puberty ceremony and the wedding are in fact two stages of the same process (Good 1991: 198).

Following Fuller's scheme however, Good further stresses the significance of the puberty rite in relation to the control of female sexual activity in the pan-Indian scheme. Before discussing this point, I shall briefly discuss the puberty ritual of the Nagarattars.

Sadangu waruhiradu (puberty ceremony)

During the puberty rite of the Nagarattars it is not the maternal uncle but the grandmother (either paternal or maternal) who gives a ritual bath to the girl⁵. The girl, after purification, is taken to a certain spot and is made to sit on an auspicious *koolam* (floor decoration), and her grandmother places *adai* (pancake) on seven spots of the girls' body: head, shoulders, arms, and thighs. Then,

⁵However, this varies from caste to caste. For example, among the Daasari caste which I studied in 1985, it was the maternal uncle who gave a ritual bath to the girl.

while she touches each spot with margosa leaves, the girl should shake off the *adai* onto the ground. Ceremonial prestations such as rice, banana, coconuts and aubergine, are given to the Washerman's wife with *adai* in exchange for the service she gave to the girl during her first menstruation. The Washerman's wife washes the girl's clothes, and may even lend the girl her own *saree*. (This is still practised today in some places.)

According to Good's detailed accounts of the puberty ceremonies of the non-Brahman castes (eg. Maravars, Paraiyars, Konars, Velars, etc.), the social identities of the participants in the puberty ceremonies clearly indicate cross relatives as the role players. At Terku Vandanam, the girl who has come of age participates in a mock wedding in which the role of a 'groom' is played by her female cross-cousins and the *saree* gift almost always comes from the maternal uncle (Good 1991: 211).

In the case of the Nagarattars, the ritual officiant who gives a ritual bath is either the girl's grandmother or an older woman who lives with her (but not her mother), and although the *saree* should come from her maternal uncle, her grandparents (both maternal and paternal) should also give presents such as a *saree* and ornaments. The ceremony is exclusively for women, -- no men are present. The 'female bridegroom' who is present at Terku Vandanam is absent in the Nagarattar ritual. Therefore, the puberty rite of the Nagarattars involves their affines less conspicuously than Good describes. The Brahman priest who is present at the puberty ceremony as a purificatory ritual officiant in Terku Vandanam is absent in the case of the Nagarattars, although the washerman's wife is considered to take an essential part to express auspiciousness in the ritual: her involvement in the puberty ceremony is associated with her role as

the ritual 'cleanser' who washes the polluted clothes of the girl. Although the girl's garments need not be washed by a washerwoman after the first menstruation, the clothes should be washed by her for the first menstruation period. This role leads to the question of the purity and auspiciousness of the menstruating girl which has been extensively discussed by Good (1991) in relation to woman's sexuality. That is, the series of women's rites, (i.e. *taali* tying ritual, puberty ritual, seclusion, and the weddings) are all concerned to regulate and control sexuality, purity and reproductive capacity, which are crucial to the maintenance of caste identity (Good 1991: 232).

Among the Nagarattars however, the wedding ritual rather than the puberty ceremony is more conspicuous as the marker of a woman's transitional stage. The puberty rite of the Nagarattars is focused more on the 'sealing' of the purity of virginity of the menstruating girl (as is shown in the offering of *adai* to the guardian goddess, and the iron bar set aside the girl symbolizing the protection of her chastity). No cross-cousin is present at this ceremony as the officiant, while the *purram kalikkiradu*, which is a preliminary ritual held before the wedding, marks the removal of such a protection and the maternal uncle plays a key role in this. His blessing in the ritual appears to be the symbolic acknowledgement of his giving away the right to take the girl as the bride of one of his sons since this role is not played by her father-in-law even if he happens to be her 'real' maternal uncle (see chapter 6 for this ritual).

Puuram kalikkiradu takes place before the wedding to remove the protection of the girl's virginity and thus to make her a marriageable and mature woman. Thus, as Good maintains, "this girl -- woman transition is the social counterpart of the folk-

biological change implicit in the immature -- mature transition' (Good 1991: 196).

Good contends that a sexually mature but unmarried female is an anomalous creature and the ritual relieves her natal family of some of the burden imposed by this anomaly, and that the affine of the girl's natal family will eventually resolve it by accepting her in marriage (1991: 197). The puberty ceremony represented as the pseudo-wedding (in the case of the Terku Vandanam) initiates both the social process of removing the girl from her father's jurisdiction, and the physiological process of transforming her blood or body from that of a girl to that of a mature woman, and then at the wedding, to that of a wife. It achieves both these aims by linking her with the family of her ideal future husband (her cross-cousin), so that she ends the ritual identified more with her cross-relatives and less with her father (Good 1991: 200).

Therefore, the purity of the girl is a concern of both her natal family and her future affine, and ^{this} is symbolized by her maternal uncle in the ritual, as it affects the status of both her natal family and her future affine. The maternal uncle plays a key role for the girl. By being her maternal uncle, he is a protector who belongs to her mother's people. By being a cross relative, he also symbolizes her future affine, as the kinship terminology for the maternal uncle (*ammaan*) also signifies the father-in-law. The kinship terminology is not coercive, unlike the jural rules, but it represents one of the idealized patterns of social relationship. Even if the girl marries her non-relative in future, her father-in-law is still expected to behave as if he is her maternal uncle by becoming her protector, as is the case for her maternal uncle.

3-5 'Mother's house' and the nuclear household

As I discussed at the beginning of this chapter, the nuclear family household is economically tied to the wife's natal family, and by being so, it is economically independent from the husband's natal family. However, this is not a phenomenon unique to the Nagarattars but by and large shared by other South Indian castes as a result of cross-cousin marriage, equal status between the wife-givers and wife-takers, and the constant flow of gifts from the wife's natal family to the wife's nuclear household. For example, Dumont describes the general case of South Indian castes as follows.

If, two years after my marriage, I decide to leave my parents' household and establish a separate one, my father-in-law will conclude the series of marriage gifts (a part of which has gone, not to my self, but to my parents) by sending to me, as the head of the new household, the necessary pots and pans. Then, if a child is subsequently born to me, we are told that it will be presented with gifts by its maternal uncle on each ceremonial occasion. (Dumont 1983: 87)

Kolenda (1984: 103) reports that the Nattati Nadars in Tamil Nadu, like the Nagarattars, also follow patrilineal descent organization but the residence is fairly flexible, so that rather than overall adherence to patrilocal residence, some opt for uxrilocal residence but live mostly in nuclear family households, possibly supplemented by a grandparent. A newly married couple may briefly reside with the groom's parents, but otherwise they live in nuclear or supplemented nuclear households (1984: 104).

Therefore, the Nagarattars combination of patrilocal residence with neolocal residence, and occasional cases of virilocal residence, does not seem to conflict with the general pattern of South Indians. The flexible residential system is supported by the close

relationship with the wife's family, especially among the Nagarattars. Generally speaking, a contrast seems to exist between the North Indian type of patrilineal descent groups whose system is combined with a hypergamous tendency, and the South Indian type of patrilineal descent groups, which are based on an isogamous tendency. In North India where hypergamy is considered to be ideal, as Parry (1979) reports in the case of Rajputs in Kangra, the patrilineally organized joint family does not tolerate the couple creating their own economic unit in the joint family economy and the wife as an in-marrying affine who comes from an unrelated family, as a stranger, occupies a lower status than that of her husband's family; thus the wife tends to create the fission and tension between the nuclear family and her husband's natal family, eventually dismantling the structure of the joint family household.

Among the Nagarattars, residential patterns are chosen in accord with the economic circumstances and the size of the family. Formerly, when the Nagarattars sent their men abroad, the newly married couple used to have an *ul viidu* built either by the groom or his father. According to a senior Nagarattar, a newly married couple lived with the groom's parents for some time until the bride was trained in household management. "In those days, the couple married young. So the bride did not know how to manage the house well. Therefore, until the first child was born, the couple would live with the husband's family and the household expenses would be met by the husband's natal family. If they felt they could manage by themselves, they were encouraged to become independent and have their own house."

As *ul viidu* means internal house, it is a nuclear household where the couple sleep and store their own goods. They have a

separate hearth to cook for themselves. When the couple becomes financially separated from the husband's natal family, it becomes a '*pulli* ', a nuclear family of its own.

'*Pulli* ' in Tamil means a dot, and expresses the basic unit of society, i.e. a nuclear family. It normally consists of a husband and wife with or without unmarried children. If a man becomes a widower with children, he is still regarded as a *pulli*, since he is expected to get married. If the wife loses her husband and maintains a household with unmarried children, she is regarded as a half-*pulli*.

This unit is used for the collection of tax for festivals and ceremonies. For example, in a festival of the village goddess Maariyamman, all the castes collectively meet the festival expenses, and the money collected for this purpose as festival tax is based on the unit of the *pulli*, although the amount collected from each *pulli* differs from caste to caste. Normally speaking, in a joint household where a son lives with his wife, his widowed mother, and unmarried sibling, the festival tax collector would count them as one and a half *pulli*-- a widow with children is half *pulli*, but if she has a married son, this is a full *pulli*. Therefore, it is not only the Nagarattars who regard the nuclear unit as based on the *pulli*.

People regard a *pulli* as a relatively autonomous unit which is responsible for contributing to social activities. When a Nagarattar gets married, he forms a potential *pulli* with his wife, as he normally does not become independent immediately. According to a senior Nagarattar, the young couple need a little training before doing so and are coached by the husband's parents. Financially, they are under the umbrella of the joint family. While the husband works outside, his wife gets training at home under her mother-in-law. Such a systematic way of coaching seems sensible, especially when people

married young---a girl would hardly have time to get proper coaching before she marries at around 12 years of age.

When they have a child, it is normally considered to be the right time to separate their economy from that of the joint family. They may still stay in the same joint household where they keep their own room (*ul viidu*), and a separate hearth (*aduppu*) in a big kitchen space where the couple cook separately and eat separately from the other *pullis*. The housewife would have the keys to her own storeroom and the safe in which all her assets, such as daily provisions and jewellery, are kept. If they are rich enough, they may establish their own household and parade their independence. However, the place where they started their married life remains a sacred space. It is in this space, which has been handed down from father to son, that the important auspicious rituals are held. A young girl is given a small *kaluttiru* in this room by her maternal uncle; at the wedding, both parents sign the marriage contract in this space; the bride stays in this room to preserve her auspicious condition until her *taali* is tied; the wedding couple should enter this room before the groom ties the *taali* for his bride, and in some areas, the ritual of tying the *taali* takes place inside this very room. Ancestors are supposed to be worshipped here as auspicious and pure spirits.

When the young couple build a house of their own, the wife's mother's people almost always give financial help of some sort, and the wife may even sell some of her jewellery, if necessary.

Even if her mother dies, the married woman still calls her natal house 'my mother's house' and she gets financial help from it in the form of the occasional gift. For example, an old woman in her early 80s pointed to one mansion and said 'that's my mother's house'. The house she pointed to was the ancestral house of her father

where she was born. Although her parents are both dead and even her brothers are dead, she still calls it 'my mother's house' even though it was legally her father's property to which a woman had no right. In a man's case on the other hand, his natal family is not 'mother's house'. The man, after marriage, would build a house of his own, thus his natal family is where his parents would live. He and his family go back to his natal house after his parents' death. He may not do so if he is not the only son. Therefore, even though he establishes his own house, his visits to his natal house become less frequent than his visits to his wife's family.

This reveals the different relationships that exist between a son and a daughter, in terms of their natal house. The married woman will visit her natal family more frequently, calling it 'my mother's house' and get whatever she wants from her mother. Her husband is also welcome in his in-laws' house. To him, his wife's family is a place where he can relax, and get financial support in times of need. And the father-in-law would always give gifts and be indulgent with his daughter's family while he may not be so with his son's family.

Part of the reason for this differing attitude is that the sons are expected to get everything from the parents after their death, while the daughters can only make a claim before the death of the parents. Therefore, in addition to the dowry, parents are expected to supply substantial financial support both in kind and in money every now and then.

Since a couple establishing a house of their own is a sign of independence from the husband's house, a man consciously separates from his father's household economy and keeps his distance. Promoting the autonomy of the nuclear family is the job of the man's wife's family. If a man wants more help from a source other than

his wife's, it would be from his parents' house. Asking his father-in-law directly for immediate financial help is said to be below a man's dignity, as this shows the incapability of managing his own family. Since, the husband can utilize his wife's dowry and may use it as part of his business fund, he would do so if the matter is urgent. However, his wife may go and ask for help directly from her father, and it is through his wife that the son-in-law can get financial help from his father-in-law. If he wants to borrow from his own father, he may, but because ancestral property should not be partitioned, he has to return this money with interest. A senior Nagarattar in his early 80s says to me that he and his brothers used to borrow from their common fund pooled in their joint business when they wanted to build their own houses. "We borrow money, and working hard for several years, we return it with interest by several installments." Nobody is allowed to take money without returning it to the joint business

The following case explains how the nuclear family is tied to the wife's side and the wife's dowry is managed by the groom's father-in-law, while the nuclear family still enjoys responsibility for managing their own income. The pattern of residence also changes from virilocal to neolocal, as they acquire managerial skills and become economically independent from the husband's family.

Case Study 1)

Naacchiammai is 23 years old, and married to a university professor in his early 30s. She was just 14 when she married, having barely finished the 9th standard, while her husband, already a lecturer, was 26. She gave birth to a girl at 15. In spite of her age, her parents wanted her to marry, since the alliance was 'very good'. Her groom

was related to her distantly. Her husband was the son of her elder sister's husband's paternal uncle.

In fact, since Manickawaasagar was already 26 and was reaching the upper limit of the ideal marriageable age for a male, he wanted to marry as quickly as possible. In South India, people do not like to marry their daughters to a man substantially older for fear of early widowhood. Having been busy with his academic studies, Manickawaasagar lost the chance to seek alliances in his early 20s. If *Naacchiammai's* parents had asked him to wait for one or two years, he would have opted for another girl. Therefore, *Naacchiammai's* parents had no other choice but to marry her instantly. There was no assurance that they would get a better alliance in future.

When Manickawaasagar got married, he borrowed money from his mother to purchase some items for his wedding, and returned it a few days later. She would lend money if one of her sons needed it. Although she charges her five sons no interest, no son gets such a fund from her as a 'give-away'. According to *Naacchiammai*, her mother-in-law is affectionate enough to all her daughters-in-law and *Naacchiammai* received a present of 5 gold sovereigns from her, but her mother-in-law still takes interest from *Naacchiammai's* father when he borrows from her as part of his business fund.

When *Naacchiammai* married at 14, she had to live in Madurai where her husband's natal family lived. Manickawaasagar's father was a pawn broker. He was well-organized at running a business and he educated all of his five sons well. Aside from the money-lending business, the family also kept several cows. The work of looking after the cows had been done by Manickawaasagar, the third son. As soon as *Naacchiammai* was married, this job was

assigned to her. Naacchiammai felt miserable about this, but her husband did not want to continue doing it any longer, preferring to leave the tedious job to his young wife. Getting up early in the morning and milking the cows was quite difficult for a young girl of 14 who had been brought up protectively by her parents.

"I missed my natal family a lot in those days. In my mother's house, we had a servant to do such work, and I never did any work at home. Since I was an only daughter, they spoilt me. My mother did not even teach me how to manage the house. When I married, many of the domestic chores were assigned to me and I felt it to be a big burden." (Manickawaasagar's elder brothers were already married, and lived in separate houses, so she was the only daughter-in-law living with her in-laws at that time).

Her ordeal, however, was over after 6 months, as Manickawaasagar acquired a post in a university in Kaaraikkudi, Chettinadu. That was much closer to her mother's house, and since she was then pregnant, she was allowed to stay with her natal family for another 6 months until the child was born. Her husband often visited her there and stayed there at weekends, enjoying talking with his brother-in-law. Naacchiammai felt much happier with her life, being away from the husband's family. Although her mother-in-law was kind to her, she still preferred to live close to her natal family, since she would have more freedom. She came back to her husband a month after her daughter was born.

She now regrets having stopped her own education at the 9th standard, and feels she cannot even teach her 7 year old daughter. Her husband coaches their daughter every night and saves the private tuition fee. Luckily, her daughter is doing quite well at school, so both Naacchiammai and her husband hope to send her to a medical

school eventually.

"A good education and a good job will help her to make a good alliance," Manickawaasagar says. "To have a respectable job as a career woman may help her gain a good husband." Although they have only one girl, they do not want any more children for financial reasons. "If you have a girl, you want to give her a good education and marry her off to a well-educated man. I cannot afford to have any more children. I may adopt a son after marrying her off, but that is not so essential." However, Naacchiammai would not send her daughter to a far away place to be educated.

Manickawaasagar tries to save as much as possible in anticipation of his daughter's wedding. He is also saving upto build his own house. After all, this would become his daughter's asset on his death.

His salary is around rs. 4,000 per month. Out of this, rs. 1,000 is automatically invested in company stocks. In addition, part of the rs. 10,000 dowry Naacchiammai brought in had been invested in her father's pawnbroking business and now it has accumulated to around rs. 40-50,000.

Naacchiammai's mother-in-law, who is a widow, invested part of her share of Naacchiammai's dowry which was given as the *maamiyaar siir danam*⁶, a money gift. It was rs. 21,000 and she invested it in some stocks. Naacchiammai's mother-in-law spends the interest on herself, keeping the principal untouched. According to Naacchiammai, some of the mother-in-law's money is also lent to Naacchiammai's father who is a pawnbroker. The interest charged by Naacchiammai's mother-in-law to Naacchiammai's father is around

⁶ *Maamiyaar siir danam* is the cash given to the mother-in-law (*maamiyaar*) given on marriage from the bride's natal family. For detailed discussion, see chapter 5.

1.5 wadi (18%). Naacchiammai's mother-in-law says she charges a special rate for her son's father-in-law as her interest rate is slightly lower than the market rate (22%). From Naacchiammai's father's point of view, he gets part of the capital necessary for his business from his son-in-law's mother, at a rate cheaper than the normal rate. Since the interest is paid to his own relative, i.e. an affine who is his daughter's mother-in-law, that eventually benefits the family of his daughter. Therefore, he is happy to pay that rather than paying interest to an unrelated person. From the point of view of Naacchiammai's mother-in-law, it is better to lend money to her affine who gives her far better interest than the banks. Moreover, her affines are reliable debtors. (Naacchiammai's mother privately lends money to some local people and earns pocket money as well.)

As this case shows, the merging of capital exists among the kin and affines as a common fund, while they are still engaged in their own profit making. From the point of view of both families, the profit made by lending money to each other is not immoral, since all the properties will eventually go to their children. This kind of merging while taking a profit, sometimes also takes place between a husband and wife. A wife from a well-to do family told me that she sometimes lends money to her husband and receives interest. "That's for a mutual benefit. My husband gets a lower interest rate from me than he borrows from the bank. And I would get better interest rate than the market rate." Therefore, when they lend money to each other, the interest is fixed at a special rate: it is higher than the rate of normal bank deposit so that the lender gets benefited, but it is lower than the borrowing rate of the bank in order to benefit the borrower. After all, they think it is better to pay interest to his own kin or affine than to the outsiders. In this way, the money circulates

within the kin and affines, benefits both parties, and serves their common aim of saving for the next generation. What they are expected to do is to utilize the money provided by the relatives and earn more by hard work, and pass it on to the next generation.

The notion of common property always exists among the family members although they insist on a strict business attitude in money matters so that the gain should be mutual. (I shall discuss this point again in chapter 5.) By alliance, mutual investment in each other's business becomes easier.

When I asked Manickawasagar whether he could trust his father-in-law in money matters, he said he could. "Of course, I do. Who would doubt his father-in-law? He knows that all our money will go to our only daughter who is also his grand-daughter. In a way, he knows that he is multiplying our money for Umaa." Even in his mother's case, he claims that she thinks only of the welfare of her five sons and their children. "After all, all her money comes to us after her death. Even though she saves money by charging interest from my wife's father, it is going to be our money, and therefore, it should go to my daughter. Until then, she enjoys herself spending the interest and saving the principal."

In this way, the accumulation of property for a daughter is part of the family business which involves not only her parents but also her grandparents, especially those on her maternal side. Even after marriage, the daughter may expect constant financial backup from her 'mother's house'. As for daily provisions like rice, wheat, flour, dhal, dried chilies, sweets etc., Na . cchiammai obtains these from her 'mother's house', so that she does not need to buy anything. She says she can claim anything from her 'mother's house' except a broom and cooking oil which, for Nagarattars, are forbidden gifts

for anybody, even to their daughters⁷.

Naacchiammai regularly pays visits to her 'mother's house' and gets daily provisions, in addition to some items such as kitchenware and plastic buckets. She also gets cash as a gift from her mother's house. Nowadays, the Nagarattars are extremely fond of plastic plates and plastic buckets, as well as stainless steel goods, and so Naacchiammai asks for these items whenever she wants one. She says, "It is better to be a woman. You can keep on getting things from your mother's house." She spends money regularly from her husband's salary on the following:

---table 3-3:-----

Monthly Expenses of Naacchiammai's household

items purchased	rs.
dhal	238
vegetable	75
meat and fish	80
fruits	80
house rent	400
electricity	75
milk	150
newspaper	60
stationary and school tuition fee	60
total expense	1218

⁷ They explained this as follows: the broom sweeps 'everything'; thus people anticipate that the daughter may take everything away if they give away a broom. Oil on the other hand, is not good to give away, since it is ritually a staple material. Cooking oil is treated the same. It should be supplied by oneself, and not given by others. Although the explanations were not entirely satisfactory, I could not obtain any further explanation from my informants concerning this.

In addition, Naacchiammai buys books, school uniforms (two per year), and shoes for her daughter which cost about rs. 500 per year. She now keeps a part-time servant who receives 40 rupees per month in addition to food. As her husband has a scooter, they buy gasoline for approximately rs. 200 per month. They also visit relatives quite often, and transport by bus amounts to approximately rs. 100 per month. They have to contribute money for the weddings of relatives which may cost about rs. 200-300 per year or more. Therefore, I assume she spends approximately rs. 2,000 per month keeping another rs. 1,000 for emergency expenditure and to save, in order to purchase electric gadgets.

Their tight budget is solely directed towards saving for their daughter's marriage, since that will be the most important achievement in their lives. It will even decide their lives later on, because it is essential to have their daughter happily married to a well-to-do husband in order to gain respect in their community.

In such circumstances, the financial assistance of the wife's mother's house is crucial. Her mother started to send provisions to help Naacchiammai when she and her husband set up a house in Kaaraikkudi and it made a big difference.

Although the household economy is said to be pinched if the food budget exceeds 30 percent of the total income, most families in India still spend a large proportion of their income on food. Entertaining guests with good food is the commonest treat in India, and since food is still expensive, it is natural that it should be treated as a part of an exchange of gifts.

In the case of Naacchiammai however, the expense both for food and other consumables is extremely low. The clothes that the family members wear come mostly from her mother's house as well.

These two items save a lot of money for a young couple bringing up children.

A Brahman girl who is a friend of Naacchiammai laments that her father has to prepare for her wedding jewellery, saving money for this purpose. "My father's family is not well off, and we have to help them. Even though my mother is the only daughter, after getting married, my grandparents could not help her much since married daughters are disconnected from their natal family on marriage in our caste. They cannot go back to their parents' house and demand things. My mother's mother's jewellery would go to my mother's brother's wife after her death."

In the case of the Nagarattars, the preparation of jewellery would partially come from the mother's house, especially from the grandmother of the marrying girl. Being an only daughter, Naacchiammai would certainly receive gifts from her maternal grandmother on her marriage, while among the Brahman communities, giving gifts to their married daughter is not as frequent as it is among the Nagarattars.

When I went to see Naacchiammai on the day before Deepavali, her brother was visiting her with a gift of a set of diamond earrings. In exchange, she returned a ceremonial gift of betel leaves and areca nuts on a small plastic plate, an expression of ritual honour. This ritual gift given by the wife to her brother shows her respect to her natal family who would constantly support her and her children, and cannot be equated in value with the gift from her natal family. Formalized ceremonial exchanges between the two parties ^{are} meant to solidify their relationship not only economically but also in ritual terms.

When I asked whether Manickawaasagar did not feel sorry

about having only one daughter, he said, "What can I do about it ? Of course, I wanted a son, but I cannot resist my fate. A girl is born, and I have a responsibility to marry her off. After all, my father had five sons, and when I married I took a dowry from my wife's family. Now it should become the reverse. I should give whatever I can to the groom's side. Things which are given to me may be given away some day. That is life. You cannot keep on getting without giving anything."

3-6 Discussion (1): Women as tribute ?

As the above comment of Manickawasagar shows, the Nagarattars have the idea that things taken should be given away and things given come back to the family in due course. Reciprocal exchange represented in the preferential bilateral cross-cousin marriage is implicitly connected to such an idea, since wife-givers and wife-takers are replaceable in the same generation (sister-exchange) or in the next generation (cross-cousin marriage).

Comparing the weddings of Rajputs in North India and Nadars in South India, Kolenda (1984) argues as follows. Although both give dowry when the daughter gets married and the wife-giver is obliged to keep on sending gifts on important ceremonial occasions, the hypergamous relationship of subordination of the bride's kindred to the groom's among the North Indian Rajputs maintain the role of the bride as 'tribute' offered to the groom's side. In the South however, as represented in the case study of the Nadars, the husband and wife are considered to be a pair, as 'the seed and the earth' (1984: 114), or god and goddess, in which the wife-giver and the wife-taker's statuses are equal, and hence isogamous. Therefore, although both the North

and South Indian cases Kolenda studied are patrilineal groups, the comparison shows that the descent orientation itself does not define the status of women in a particular caste group.

In the case of South Indian castes, such as the Nagarattars, several factors in their kinship organizations secure the position of married women more firmly than in their North Indian counterparts. Bilateral cross-cousin marriage, a patrilineally based nuclear household and neolocality, combined with occasional virilocality, strict endogamy, well-defined marriage contracts, etc.--all these are factors which weaken male authority over in-marrying women. On the other hand, men do not need to give up exercising authority over their married daughters, unlike in North India. Since they practise preferential cross-cousin marriage, the married daughter's child may come back to the original house bringing a dowry with accrued interest. In addition, the married woman's father may still exercise authority over his daughter's nuclear family by controlling and managing the dowry as an 'affine'.

In addition, the property transfer from mother to daughter follows the traditional Hindu type of dowry system (dowry as the woman's property, and not to be given to her husband's family). This reduces the chance of the husband's family exercising authority and control over their daughter-in-law. When the family does not have any daughter, the son's mother's property goes directly to her granddaughter, and not to her sons.

A middle aged *aacchi*, who had had her first granddaughter, told me excitedly: "I had only sons, and didn't have any daughter. It was a pity since I had carried all the *saamaans* (bridal goods) from my mother's house, and there was no one to give them to. My elder son married last year and his wife brought a lot of *saamaans* as well -

-even though I told her family that everything is available here. They still gave a lot to their daughter!" Both she and her daughter-in-law were delighted to have a girl child, and are looking forward to giving their property to her.

The Nagarattars say that when there are only sons, the property of the mother would be kept until the day a daughter is born for their sons. There is no circumstance in which it is possible to keep the *saamaans* and the wife's jewellery in the family for good. As Manickawaasagar correctly maintains, people cannot keep on receiving without giving. People cannot keep on having sons indefinitely. When they marry their sons, some of them have daughters, and the daughters will inherit both their mother's and grandmother's property which come from both the paternal and the maternal side. With the property they are given, the daughters will be married off. Therefore, whether it is immediate or delayed, the exchange takes place, and the wealth of the caste circulates within the caste through alliance.

If that is so, what would be the relationship between brother and sister? In the case of matrilineally organized societies such as the Nayers, until the joint family system started to be dismantled in the early 20th century, the woman sometimes was put into the dilemma of locating her membership in two institutions: her own *taravad*, which is organized by a brother-sister relationship as her brother (or maternal uncle) manages the house as *kaaranavan*, and her relationship with her 'husband' and child which may tend to keep her in the husband-wife relationship and, as a consequence, split her loyalties (Gough 1961: 360-361, Moore 1985: 536-537).

When it comes to the North Indian type of patrilineal organization, the hypergamous tendency makes it difficult to make a

cooperative relationship diachronically between the brother and sister. There is no sister exchange, as there is no repetition of marriage between two families, and the natal family of the bride is regarded as lower than that of the groom and that the continuous flow of gift to the groom's house from the bride's natal family is an expression of 'tribute' rather than the expression of continuous gift-exchange relationship between these two families.

On the other hand, in the south Indian type of patrilineal descent, which is combined with an isogamous tendency, it is much easier to create solidarity between husband and wife based on their neolocality. This does not conflict with their patrilineal descent orientation, as the South Indian type of patrilineal descent orientation tends to tolerate nuclear families, or rather encourage ^{then} ^ in order to activate their economic activities (as was the case of the Nagarattars).

Under such a system, a woman can be practically entirely freed from obligations to her natal patrilineal descent group (as is also the case of the North Indian type of patrilineal groups). Her ties to her husband can be maximized to the point where they take priority leading to the establishment of their own nuclear family. Where a woman's tie to her own unit is greatly weakened, as in North India, her severed or weakened tie to her natal family does not allow her to return to her natal family once divorced. But in patrilineal descent groups where preferential bilateral cross-cousin marriage is practised, she is not so totally severed from her natal family. The gifts which she receives regularly from her natal family are the expression of such a tie which stretches to the next generation, and which may materialize in the form of marriage between one of her children and one of her brother's.

The control over an in-marrying woman by the groom's

family is certainly restrained when she has her own economic assets, especially when that is still under the management of her natal family, in which the preferential cross-cousin marriage pattern organizes the relationship between kin and affine both in the present and the next generation. Transfers of goods and services establish rights for the wife, and yet the continual sending of gifts by her natal family combined with the prescribed cross-cousin marriage does not make a hierarchical relationship between the wife-giver and wife-taker; rather the gifts work to make the cooperation between the two groups advantageous.

On the other hand, economic cooperation between father and son gives the father advantages in terms of authority, as well as creating a strong emotional bond. The bond between the father and son accords with the cooperative patrilineally organized group system, as seen in the business enterprise amongst the Nagarattars. The son looks after his father's ancestral property after the latter's death and keeps sending gifts to his sister. In return, he gets most of the property left after the death of his father. The son becomes the chief mourner for his parents, and worships them after death as ancestors, which is included as part of the obligations he has to observe in exchange for a larger property share.

From the point of view of advantageous alliance, brothers and sisters are dependent on each other: if either fails to make a proper marriage, the other's alliance also fails (see chapter 5 for detailed discussion). Daughters should get married quickly since having an unmarried woman of marriageable age is definitely a minus in getting a good alliance for her brother: the bride's party take into consideration the expenses which are involved in the wedding of the unmarried daughter. If the sister is already married, and if she is

married to a reliable partner, this brings benefits to her brother as well. Preferential cross-cousin marriage being practised, future alliance with their children may be also taken into consideration. Such a long standing cooperative relationship between the brother and sister is represented in the chain of gifts sent by her brother to her family after marriage. Even if her parents are dead, the relationship between them does not disappear because the cooperative relationship between the brother and sister is already extended to their children's generation.

The ritual of *saandi*, described in the next chapter is closely interwoven with the alliance relationship between them, also involving the woman's husband and her children. I shall explain this in the following chapter.

Appendix A

Case study of a business *pangaali* group: VS line

This case study explains how the strategy of maintaining the business group works through the cooperation of the *pangaalis*. The 'house' used to be established by a few brothers and their male children who pool the money they earn. The pooled money is converted for two purposes: 1) to fund the building of a joint house which is shared equally; 2) a fund to run the corporate business, usually money-lending. When they get married and want to start a business or build a house of their own, money can be borrowed from the commonly pooled fund in the joint business. However, the borrower should return what was borrowed to the fund, with interest, having earned this himself. The next generation would not need to contribute to the first fund, since the house would already be built. When they have ceremonial occasions, the father's hearth is shared among the brothers. If they want, they may also build their own extensions to the ancestral house, and finance this themselves. Therefore, the ancestral house remains the symbol of the *pangaali*. In that way, the total share of the joint company capital never decreases but only increases, although an individual may receive the profit according to his share. If the father dies and the sons want to split the finances, they may do so. The share which has expanded as the business scale enlarged, would be split equally, although the house as their ancestral property may either remain as a commonly shared

property or be purchased by one of the brothers¹.

Daughters would be given a dowry, which consists of jewellery, *saamaan* (see chapter 5), and cash. Sometimes they are given land and estates if their fathers are rich. They are never given a share of business, according to the statement of the Nagarattars. However, in reality, they are sometimes given one factory or a business, especially when the groom is a relative (i.e. first cross-cousin or a second cross-cousin). As the father-in-law, the daughter's father would supervise until the groom can handle the business properly. Sometimes the groom is expected to work jointly with his father-in-law and his brother-in-law in the same company. This is the commonest case if the groom is chosen from a non-relative, humble background. If there is no suitable person in the pool of relatives, they choose a well-educated capable groom. Even then the money and the property are supervised by the relatives of the bride and the groom's role is that of increasing the property for the next generation. The couple is given a house near to the bride's family and children marry within the top group again.

Adoption of a son provides a capable heir both from *pangaalis* or from non-relatives, supplementing the cross-cousin marriage.

¹ I am discussing a case purely based on business concern. Nowadays, brothers often engage in different jobs and do not necessarily succeed to the father's business. If that is the case, either the first son or whoever fits into the business may take up their father's business and other members would get their share in various forms. In this sense, the original business scale of their father would shrink due to the property partition.

The VS 2 line was originally set up by two brothers who settled in two villages in Chettinadu in late the 18th century. The villages were adjacent and the brothers started to engage in mercantile activities.

The line is now split into several prestigious families who are the topmost 'aristocratic' families among the Nagarattars. They have become the top group because of the prosperity of the members in the 5th generation, especially Raja Sir Annamalai Chettiyar. He was awarded the titles of Raja and Sir by the British because of his contribution to the colonial economy as merchant cum banker. VS line has so far had 3 MPs (Members of the Parliament)³. There are also two honorary Consul Generals appointed by foreign governments from this line. With their wealth combined, the VS line as a whole is the biggest business group in South India.

At the moment, the VS line has several *pangaali* based business combines: 1) the MCT Chidambaram group (founded by MCT Chidambaram who was a businessman and an MP), which is mainly based on money lending. 2) the AMM group has interests in electrical manufacturing. 3) the MAM group has industrial interests such as construction, building, chemicals, cement manufacturing. 4) the AC Muttiah group has been renowned for chemicals, fertilizers and radiators etc. Other smaller families run businesses like pulp manufacturing, textile and yarn business, as well as money lending.

With the money they acquired in South East Asia during

²I use this naming taking after the initials of the founders, i.e. Veeran and Saatappa who are the earliest ancestors the people of this line can remember.

³Raja Sir Annamalai became the first MP, second was MCT Chidambaram, and the third is P. Chidambaram who is an ex-minister and is currently a member of Congress I.

British colonial period (especially in Burma), the VS line started the first banking business in India, yet they lost a considerable part of the property when the Burmese government closed the door to foreign investors.

Nevertheless, they survived as indigenous business firms, becoming manufacturers themselves in India after the 1950s, and survived to establish their ground as middle scale business entrepreneurs.

According to their legend, the founders of VS line, i.e. Sattapa and Arunacharam (their father's name is Veeran), came to Pallattur, a village in the Chettinadu area. Sattappa later decided to stay in Kaanaadukaattaa, another village in Chettinadu, where his sister was already married. He also married and settled there. Therefore, Sattapa's and Arunachalam's lines are the *pangaalis* although they are established in two different villages and worship different *kula deivam* attached to each village (Thus, I call them VS line and VA line respectively. See fig. 3-1. For convenience, I shall give them in alphabetical order and indicate female lines with double lined initials. 4)

The man in the 5th generation, Muttaiah, had seven children,

⁴I have listed brothers and sisters neglecting the senior/junior order, since this makes the figures much simpler and more compact in explaining the cross-cousin alliances. And the part of senior/junior among the brothers is not crucial in this part of the discussion.

i.e. MCT. Chidambaram.⁵ (A), MRM⁶ Ramasamy(B), Valliammai *aacchi*(C), Arunacharam (D),⁷ Raja Sir Annamalai(E), Sigappi *aacchi*(F), and Lakshmi *aacchi*(G). Cross-cousin marriages took place in this generation: A ,B, C, and G, married their cross-cousins. B's and C's spouses are brother and sister, so are E and F's spouses. (See fig. 3-1 to 3-10). As this example shows, the basic pattern of sister exchange and cross-cousin marriage take place more easily if they have more children.

(A) had 2 sons and 5 daughters. None married cross-cousins. Two cross-cousin marriages took place in the next generation, although in one of the marriages((A-7)'s), the son was adopted. In the 7th generation, 2 cross-cousin marriages took place and one alliance took place with the MSMM family, a family which occasionally makes alliances with this group. These cross-cousins are the children or grandchildren of the sibling of A. In the 8th and 9th generations, 2 intercaste marriages took place. As a consequence, two male members disappeared from the kinship network association.

(B) had no children, so he adopted one of (E)'s children. The adopted son married a woman from MSMM family, and had one

⁵ MCT Chidambaram is called 'MCT ' by his descendants because he is the founder of the MCT house. In other words, his father's name (Muttaiah) and his initial (CT) were adopted by his children.

⁶ As the founder of a new family, he is referred to by others as MRM Ramasamy, signifying the line of Muttaiah-Ramasamy-Muttiah, plus his own name.

⁷ This line is not discussed since he died soon after marriage without children.

son. As was the case in A's line, MSMM family has made alliances 3 times with this line, maintaining the closely intertwined relationship with this group.

(C), who married her maternal cross-cousin, had seven children. Some married their cross-cousins⁸, yet this line did not maintain alliances with the main stream of the VS line. However, one of (C)'s daughters, (C-2), married her second-cousin, and had 9 children. There were 3 sons among the 9 children, and they jointly started a business (the Murugappa group, or the AMM group). This turned out to be successful, and the business was transferred to the next generation without any split. They maintained cross-cousin alliance relationships within the (C) line itself. They also took partners from (E) and MSMM families (see fig. 3-4). (E), who married his cross-cousin (paternal aunt's daughter) from the OA family, had seven children. Two of these married first cross-cousins and one married a second cross-cousin. As I mentioned before, one son was adopted by (D)'s brother, thus the share of the ancestral house was divided between 2 brothers, and formed the Raja group business combine. Among (E)'s 7 children, two married cross-cousins, but others such as (E-2), (E-6), and (E-7), married the members of the family with which they had previous affinal relationships. (E-1) married his cross-cousin, who is connected to (F) and OA family, and his two sons, i.e. (E-1-1) and (E-1-2) respectively, married their cross-cousins. The former married an offshoot of (F-1) and (A-6-1), and the latter married (E-6-1), who is an offshoot of (E-6) and another powerful family, AKCT. (E-3) married a non-relative from PA, but their two children married

⁸I could not find out the actual number of cross-cousin marriages which took place in this generation.

their cross-cousins from (A) and (E) group respectively. (E-3)'s grandson married a girl from (A) group.

Although these two were once combined and called Raja's group, they split their property when their father died, and now they run separate businesses, although their unity and cooperation is often expressed in business partnership when they have common interests. Amongst women, (E-5) and (E-6)'s descendants married into either the AMM, Raja's *pangaali* line, or the OA. Although (E-7) who married an adopted son of a family which did not have any alliance relationship formerly, did not make alliances with this group in the next generation. Yet she made her first son marry a woman who is from the OA line, maintaining the alliance string with the fringe of the VS line. (E-7) also had her grand children marry each other recently, forming another alliance line among themselves.

Among the VS line, at present, the most integrated big joint business organization is the AMM group. However, even this joint business property is relatively recent (dating from the 6th generation), and there is a possibility of its disintegration in the forthcoming generation. However, by the time such disintegration takes place, the shareholders of the joint business will have already established their own businesses with their sons and grandsons. This shows how several new *pangaali* businesses can come out from the older business firms, replacing the older structure. In this sense, even the *pangaali* based joint business flexibly reorganizes its structure within 3 to 5 generational cycles.

Another feature appears in the VS line with respect to the alliance. Occasional alliances take place with specific families like MAMM or OA families who have had the conjugal relationship with the members of the VS line before. These families occasionally

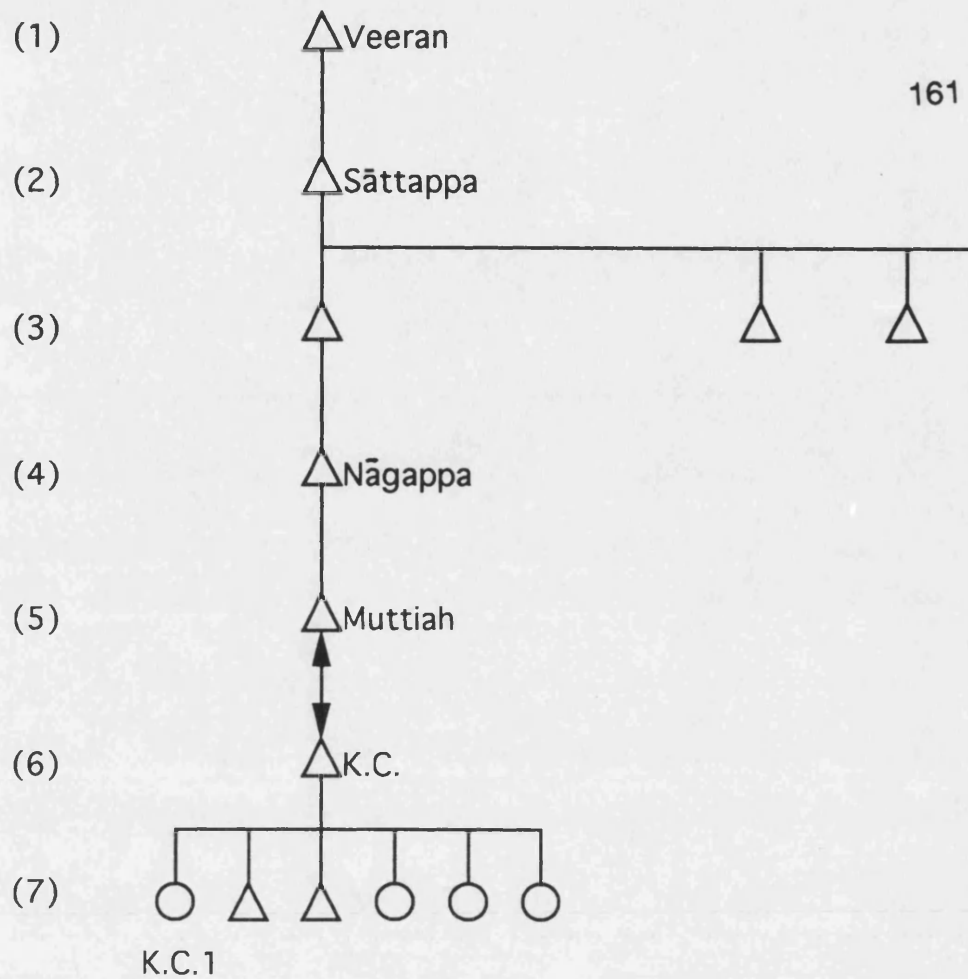
supply partners and strengthen the aristocratic trunk, and through a medium such as this, even the *pangaali* lines (i.e. VS line and VA line) can exchange partners indirectly.

On the other hand, cross-cousin marriages still take place in spite of the fact that the number of children is lessening and it is getting more difficult to find a suitable partner within a limited number of families.

Among the descendants of the V.S. line, four families come up as the major trunk i.e. MCT, AMM., MAM (Raja group 1), and MA (Raja group 2). If there is no child or no male in the family, they adopt a son. In the history of VS line (see Fig. 3-1 to Fig. 3-10), at least 8 adoptions have taken place, and there are a few cases which are pending in the present 7th generation, although they are not shown in the chart. For example, K.C. in Fig. 3 is an adopted son, and his adoptive father Muttaiah is related to the VS line in the 3rd generation, i.e. the founder of VS line, Muttaiah's father Ramanathan (Fig. 3-2), is a brother of Muttaiah (Fig. 3-1)'s grandfather. K.C.'s daughter K.C. 1 eventually married the son of F-1 whose mother (F) is the daughter of Muttaiah (Fig. 3-2). This case significantly shows how the *pangaalis* exchange women via another lineage after a few generations.

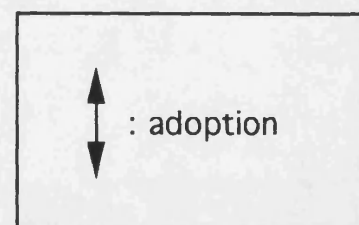
Adoption takes place even if there are two daughters (Fig. 3-9). (F-1-1), who is an adopted son, has been sending gifts to his two sisters. One of them is F-1-3 (Sigappi *aacchi*) whose husband, F-2-1, is MAM Ramasamy, Raja Sir Annamalai's grandson, who celebrated the grandest *saandi* in 1991 (see chapter 4).

Fig.3-1



Appendix B

Genealogy



(A) MCT Group

≠ :divorce

Fig.3-3

(B) MRM Family

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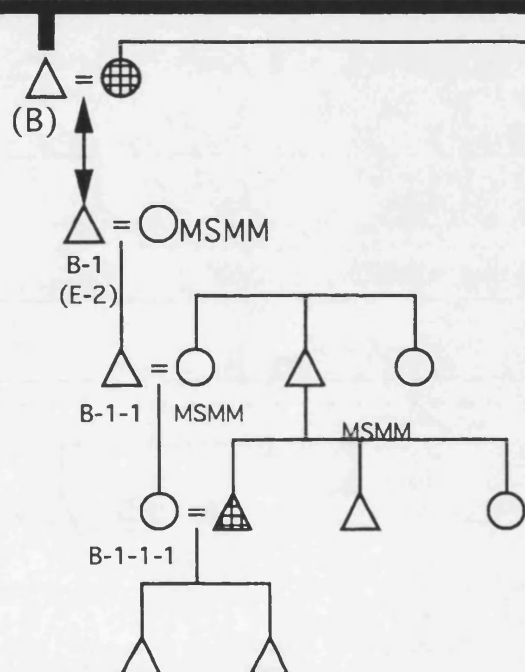


Fig. 3-4

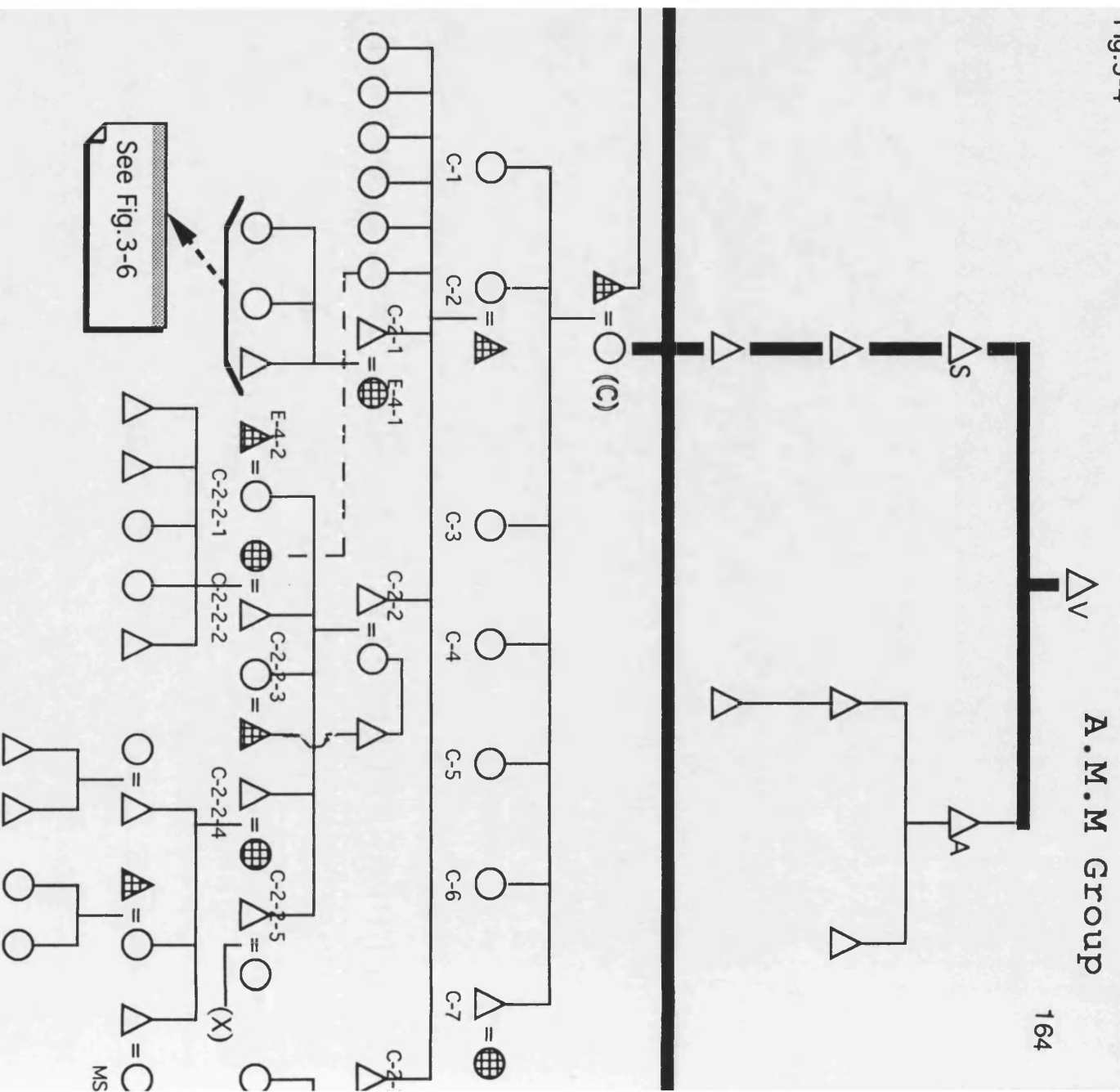


Fig.3-5

Raja Group

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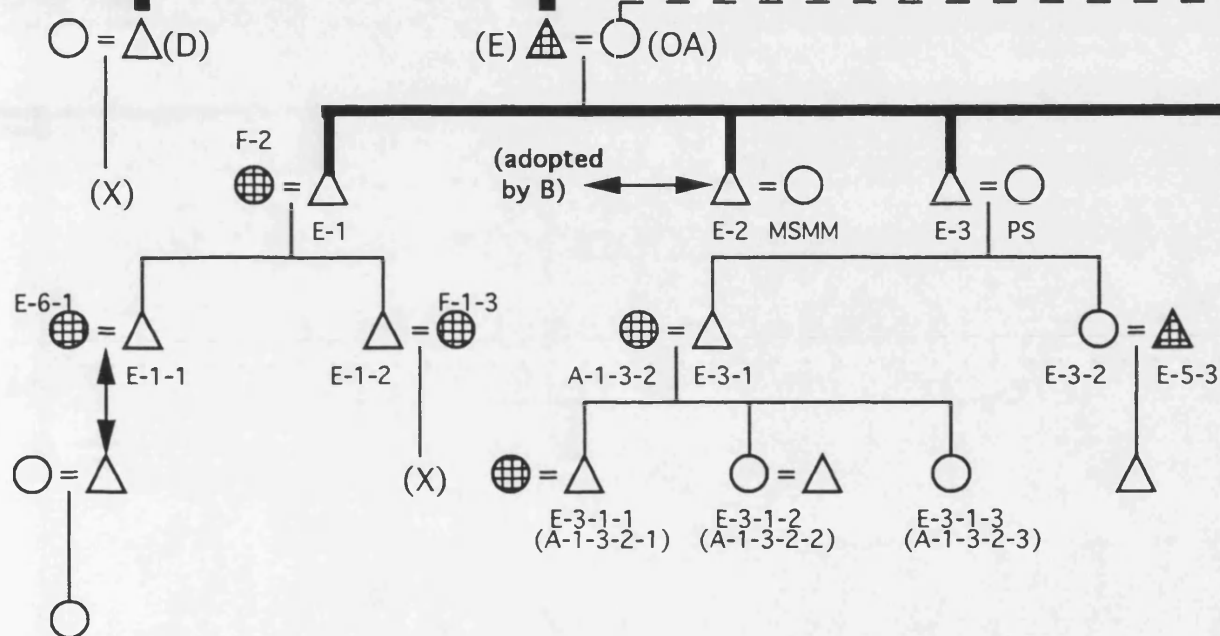


Fig.3-6

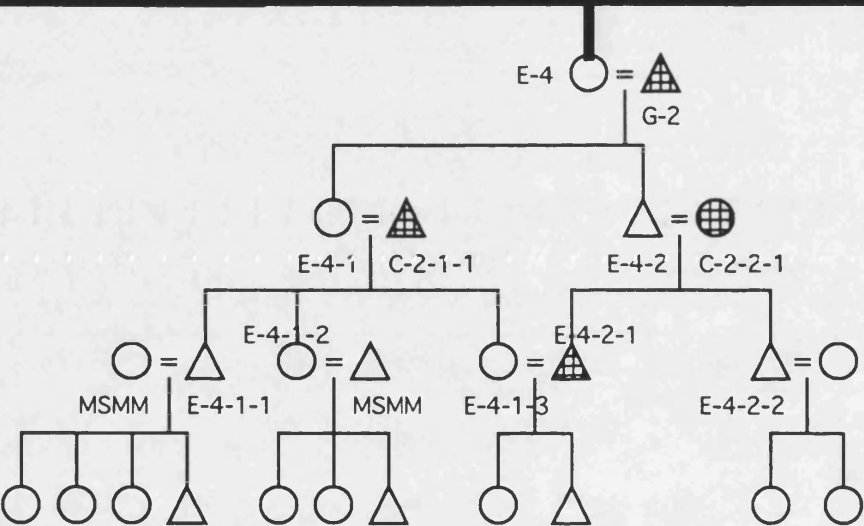
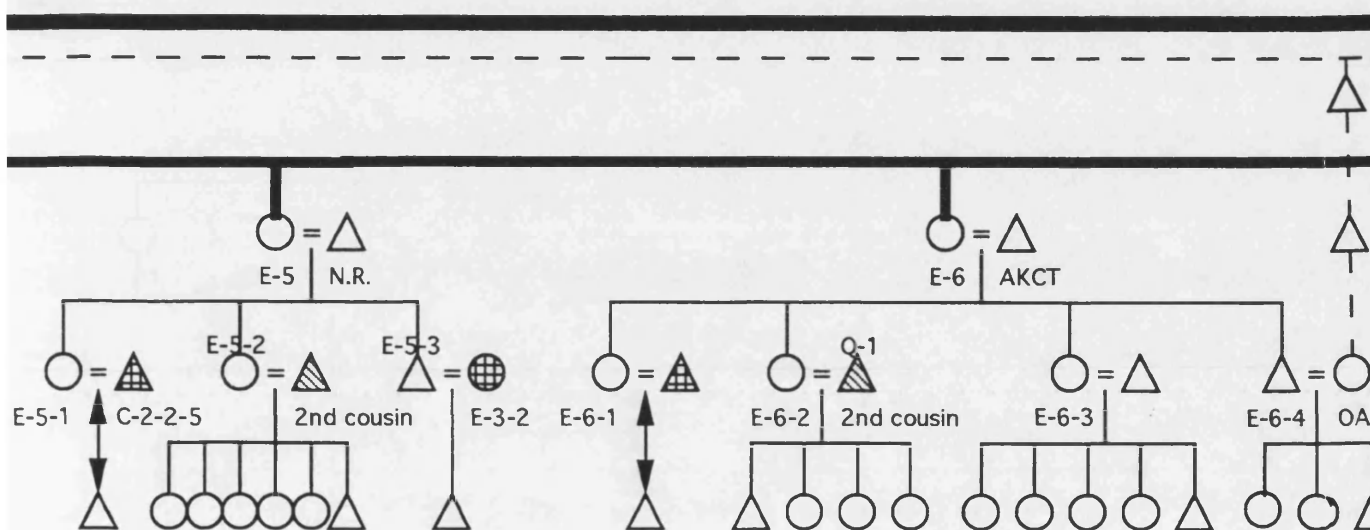
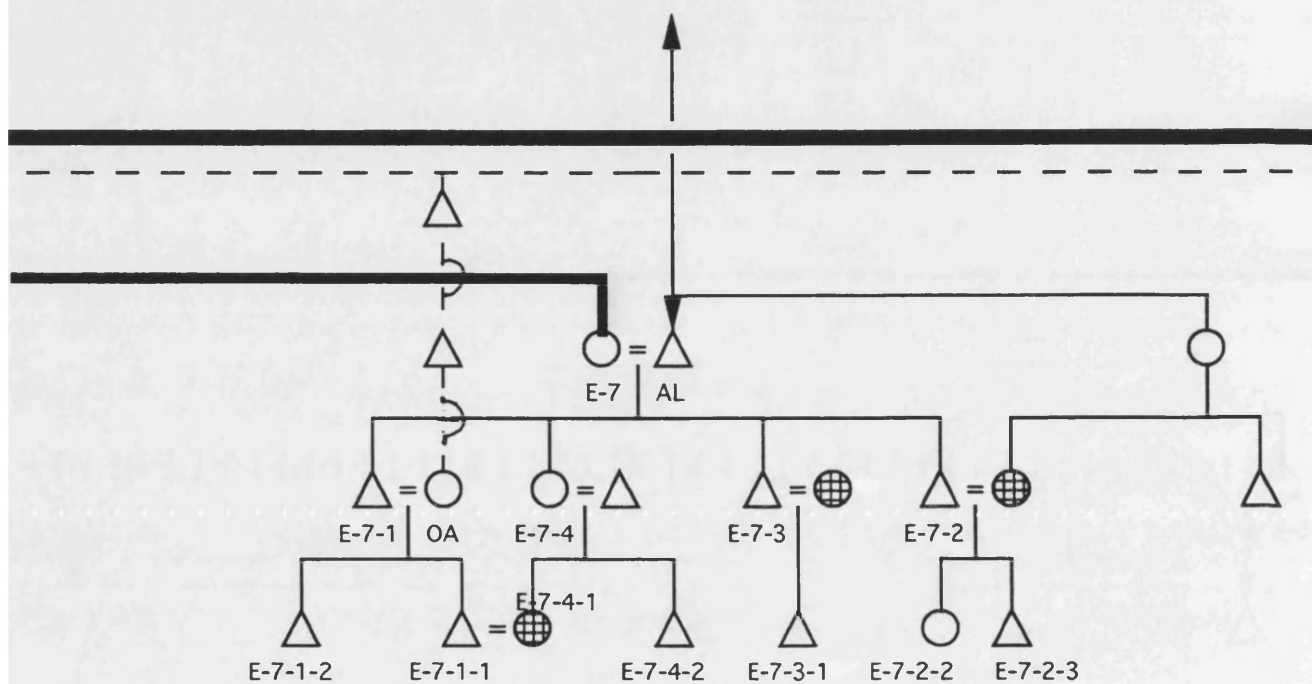


Fig.3-7



△ or ⊗ : second cousin

Fig.3-8



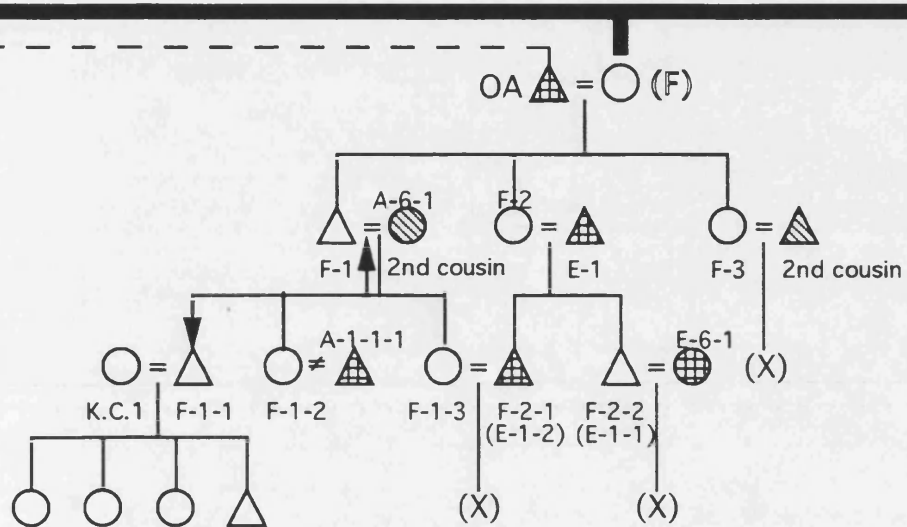
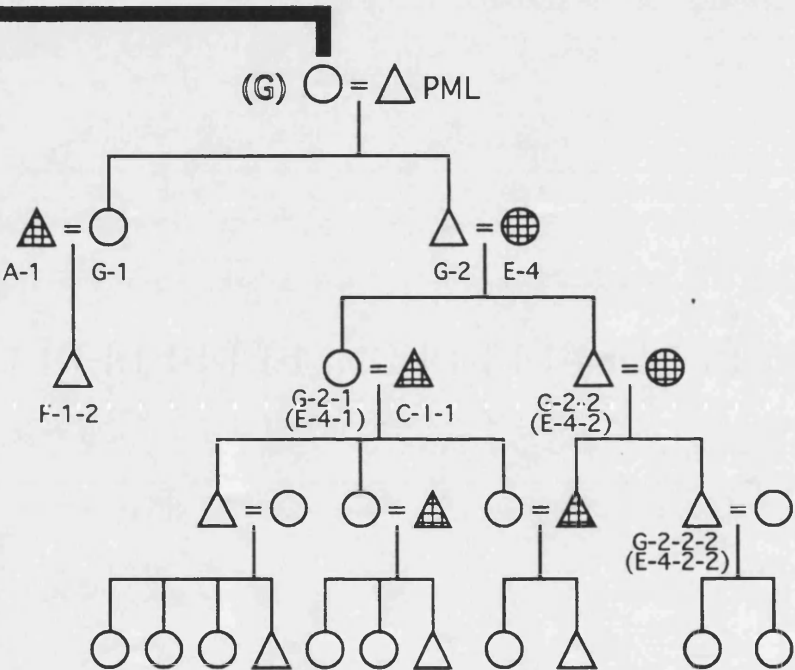


Fig.3-10



Appendix C

Account of a puberty ceremony, 1970

I. Expenditure for meals

budget: rs. 4,500

Expenditure 1.

items spent	amount (rs.)
=====	=====
turmeric powder	1.6
<i>ghee</i>	26
green gram	7.25
mustard	4.5
<i>dhal</i>	3.8
eggplant	1.3
green vegetable	14.
semolina powder	5.5
chilli	100
corn flour	29
Bru coffee	23
betel leaves and areca nuts	16
salt	0.6
Gulabujamun (sweet) powder	19.5
lime box	1.5
match box	2.8
soap	10
-----	-----
sub total	266.35

Expenditure 2.

items spent	amount (rs.)
-----	-----
<i>sarbat</i> (drink)	10
<i>papadam</i>	15
sesami oil	14
milk	3.6
Sabina powder	2.5
Narsus coffee powder	21
palm oil	154.0
sugar	27.5
<i>ghee</i>	40.0
2 plastic plates	108
chilli powder	5
bus fare	2.9

sugar	27.5
betel leaves	51
<i>dhal</i>	250
milk can	41.5
cashew nuts	23.25
<i>biriyani</i> rice	34

sub total	1,097.10
-----------	----------

Expenditure 3.

items spent	amount (rs.)
=====	=====
dates	28
groundnut toffee	51
bread and sweets	634.25
milk packet	564.75
autoriksha	17
basket	3.5
<i>sarbat</i> (drink)	2.75
<i>ravai</i> (flour for <i>dosai</i>)	5
toffee	35
sweets	180
bus fare	2.95
van hire	230.0
advance payment for soda	150
milk	250
vegetables	54.5
camphor	7.5
firewood	49
soap and toothpaste	14.5

sub total	3,376.8-
-----------	----------

Expenditure 4.

bus fare	19.10
income(gift from KN.P.)	2250
coconut oil	8.70
soda	166
a bundle of banana leaves	50
jasmine	20
Campa water	20
milk	16
candle	4
<i>ghee</i>	28
for temple <i>abishekam</i>	30
<i>puja</i>	10

<i>kesari</i> powder (for sweets)	2.5
vegetables and jasmine	26.5
milk biscuit and chocolates	128
sweets	15
eggs	36
Torino (48 bottles)	98

sub total 4,000.6

Expenditure 5. (underlined are the incomes)

tomato	8
groundnut oil	58.5
bread	1.5
gift from V.KN.	<u>2,500</u>
household rent (income)	<u>550</u>
flower	1
1 container	134
10 small containers	238.5
9 jugs	652
2combs	5
1 stainless steel drum	166
100 containers	2,141.75

sub total 7,460.85

Expenditure 6.

bicycle hire	18
for a cook	140
for a watchman	25
groundnut oil	21
mutton	207
biscuit and toffee	73.7
servant maid	2.86
biscuit	10.4
sugar and <i>jagri</i> (raw sugar)	60
soap	10
milk	10
servant	60
servant	30

--sub total 667.96

Expenditure 7.

bus fare	10
bus fare	20
gift to relatives	272
money gift to <i>pangaalis</i>	150
sub total	452.0

II. Gifts to the relatives

items given	amount (rs.)
2 containers	4
2 containers	4
7 containers	14
2 containers	4
1 container	2
2 containers	4
8 containers	16
3 containers	6
3 containers	6
1 container	2
3 containers	6
1 container	2
7 containers	14
4 containers	8
3 containers	6
5 containers	20
total.	118

In addition, the following are given.

items	amount(rs.)
small containers	380
cylindrical shaped containers	655

Total amount spent

rs. 4,433.81

- 3-1 Girls dressed up for Tiruvaadurai and about to go out to collect vegetables. They are carrying silver baskets, and standing in the *walavu waasal*.



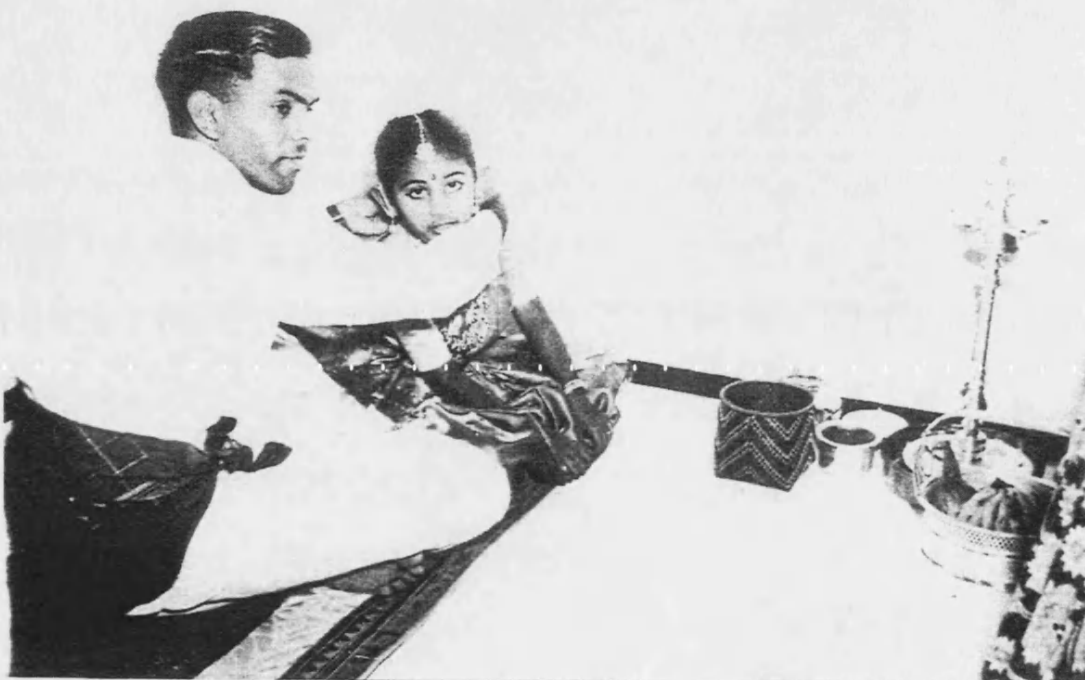
- 3-2 The girl is taken to a nearby temple in the evening escorted by her maternal uncle and her close male kin.



3-3 A girl dressed up for the celebration of Tiruvaadurai.



- 3-4 The maternal uncle ties her a *kaluttiru* in the *ul viidu* sitting on the auspicious carpet. The maternal uncle wears white shirt and *veetti*, and a red silk scarf with gold stripes around his hips, which is the same costume he wears at the wedding of his niece and nephew.



3-5 Girls celebrating Tiruvaadurai gathered at the entrance of *walavu viidu*.



4

*Sumangali worship and the ritual of saandi***4-1 Auspiciousness and *sumangali***

Sumangali is the highest and most desirable status to women in Hindu society. In Sanskrit, *su* means *subam*, or auspiciousness, as does *mangala*. In India, married women whose husbands are alive are auspicious and good, as it implies the well-being of the family. Reynolds claims that *sumangali* means a married woman and mother (1980: 38), but in fact, *sumangalis* are not necessarily mothers, at least for the Nagarattars.

Indeed, in India in general, a woman is said not be considered to have obtained a proper status until she has produced a son. Yet at least among the Nagarattars, a married woman whose husband is alive is of the utmost importance: even if she does not have a child, she can adopt a son, and infertility of a woman is not grounds for divorce. Strict monogamy which is supported by the well defined marriage contract (see chapter 5) also helps maintain the status of a *sumangali*. For a woman, a husband is an essential prerequisite for the assurance of her status. If her husband dies, she immediately loses this auspicious status; she can never remarry and remains a widow for the rest of her life.

Widows are ritually inauspicious and are unwelcome on ceremonial occasions. For example, when the bride's people go to meet the groom who is waiting at the temple, both men and women form the procession, but widows will not participate for fear of bringing any inauspicious elements to the ceremony. If the widows are young, their lives are made particularly miserable, as people say

that it would be due to her previous bad *karma* that her husband died. In the village, numerous stories circulate about how young widows are tortured and suspected by their husband's relatives as the cause of their husband's deaths.¹ A widow is excluded from society, and is expected to live a life of religious austerity like a world renouncer. It is inauspicious to see either a widow or a lone Brahman² first thing in the morning, as neither have any chance of reproducing.

Seeing a *sumangali* first thing in the morning is 'good' (*nalladu*), i.e. auspicious. A red spot on the forehead, coloured *saree*, and the *taali* around her neck are symbols of her status. If her children and husband have some important engagements on a particular day (e.g. examination, business contract, journey, etc.) they would ask her to arrange it such that they saw her first as soon as they left the house.

The auspiciousness of the *sumangali* is well represented in the ritual of *sumangali praatanai* which is quite popular among the Brahmans. In it, five *sumangalis* are invited, and asked to take an oil bath in the house of the ritual officiant. Turmeric, *sikkaai*, coconut oil, and other items are all provided by the householder and his wife, and a new *saree* is given to at least one of the invited *sumangalis*. All *sumangalis* are given a plate of gifts on which areca nuts and betel leaves, money, *kunkum*, fruits, turmeric, sweets etc. are presented.

¹In one village for example, I heard that a 19-year-old Nagarattar widow who lost her husband just a year after marriage, committed suicide, since people gossiped that she had killed her husband through her bad *karma*, and that she was having affairs with other men after the death of her husband.

²A lone Brahman in this context symbolizes a world renouncer, i.e. *sannyasin*, who is not a householder.

Good food is given to them as a treat, and as the embodiment of Lakshmi, the *sumangalis* are sent off with the utmost respect. The *sumangalis* who are invited are relatives and thus this worship is to celebrate the procreative power of the *sumangalis* who belong to the kin and the affine of the officiate and to pray for their prosperity.

Auspiciousness, as Marglin (1985) correctly claims, is strongly connected to fertility, birth, and growth. A man is never welcome without his wife at any auspicious function. If any marriage alliance negotiations are organised, a man is always asked to come with his wife. A man is not considered to be a complete figure until he is married. If he dies before marriage, he is not mourned as a fully-fledged adult, so that there is no proper funeral, and only the closest relatives participate. "Do not go to the temple alone. Prayers will not be heard without a wife" is a saying that indicates that all auspicious activities should be carried out as a couple.

Widows are inauspicious, but they are not considered ritually impure. Living a religious and austere life, they are actually purer than married women from a ritualistic perspective. Nonetheless, widows are unwelcome since they are inauspicious (*asubbha*). All their jewellery is taken away from a woman when she is made a widow and she is expected to live in religious austerity. The only positive move which is left to her is to attain *moksha* (the final liberation) through religious discipline. In this sense, her life and status resemble those of the *sannyasins* (world renouncers). They are considered inauspicious - a temple priest told me that in the past *sannyasins* had not been welcome inside the temple because they were inauspicious and were believed to take away the temple's *shakti* (cosmic power). From a *sannyasin's* point of view, there is no need for them to visit the temple as it is a place of comfort and for

prayer for secular people who cannot renounce the world. Although most *sanniyaasins* nowadays do visit the temple and world renouncers are no longer unwelcome in the temple, the stigma of inauspiciousness attached to widowhood still remains in South Indian culture.

To die as a *sumangali* is a desirable fate for women because of the hardships they potentially have to suffer as widows. If a woman dies as a *sumangali*, her body is wrapped in a colourful *saree* and a red spot (*pottu*) is put on her forehead for auspicious decoration. She is cremated in a grand manner by her husband and his relatives, but nothing positive is attached to the funeral of a widow.

The following is an excerpt from a funeral song (*oppaari*), sung by the widows in the area of Chettinadu. The *oppaaris* of the Nagarattar women are famous for the richness of their poetry and the full and vivid descriptions of their lives. I quote from a book written by Somalay (1984: 441-443) because I could not collect *oppaari* directly from the women, as singing them on a normal occasion is inauspicious³.

The goldsmith who made the *taali* should have known.
 The man who wove the *saree* should have known.
 The man who fixed up the day of the marriage should have known.
 One of them could have given us the warning...
 I bought a *saree*.
 Before I use it, my husband is dead.

I was cleaning the floor.

³When I attended a funeral, I heard an old woman sing an *oppaari* with a particular tune, expressing her despair and heartbreak in the way she sang. The songs are mostly learnt by heart while attending funerals. According to Somalay, *oppaaris* are widespread in Chettinadu, and a famous Nagarattar movie producer and poet, Kannadasan, has taken most of his themes and tunes from lullabies and *oppaaris* sung by his mother and his female relatives.

Suddenly people fixed my marriage.
 Now I am a widow.
 People take away my jewels.
 What are you going to do with them?
 You give me a piece of cloth.
 What is this?
 This is the inauspicious thing.
 Saints use this to wipe their hands.
 Such a cloth is given to me to hide my heart.

No woman feels positive about widowhood. On becoming a widow, she has to remove all her jewellery, including her *taali*, and is not supposed to wear coloured *sarees*, but only white ones. She has to hide herself away and keep social contacts to the minimum. She is simply inauspicious although she is also considered clean and pure.

On the other hand, the death of a woman as a *sumangali* is seen in a positive light because the woman becomes an auspicious being. In one Nagarattar house I was shown a large photograph of a woman who died as a *sumangali* and is now worshipped as a *periyaacchi*, a title normally given to the mother-in-law of a young bride. The second wife of her husband worships her as the guardian of the family's welfare.

Widowhood at present is not as constricted as it has been in the past, and the life of a senior old widow with married children is more protected, especially if she has an independent income, although it is still a considerable blow. Both men and women are regarded as only half persons if they have no partner. However, among high caste South Indian Hindus a man can remarry after being widowed whereas a woman cannot. Thus for women there can be only one proper marriage while, for men, several marriages are possible as long as the brides are of the same status, whether from the same caste or from another one.

A husband is a woman's lifeline, which is why she protects her

husband and is very important in the ritual sphere: she is his closest ally.

4-2 *Saandi*

If a man reaches 60 and his wife is still alive, it is Nagarattar custom for him to celebrate his continued health with his wife. Although *saandi* appears to be a celebration for the man, it is in fact a celebration for the *sumangali*, since, to have a husband who has reached 60 is itself an auspicious thing for the *sumangali*. She has every reason to pray for his longevity, as her status of *sumangali* depends on her husband's well-being.

Saandi was originally called '*Shasti abda puurti*', i.e. the completion of the 60th year (*Shasti* means 60 in Sanskrit). The celebration is held when her husband has completed his 60th year, that is, when he actually becomes 61. He celebrates it in the month he was born, and on the day when his birth star (*nakshatra*) is current. For example, if someone was born on Anusham star day in Margali (one of Tamil months), he would have his celebration when the same star was current in Margali. Since this star is current every 27 days, it may be so twice in one month, in which case the latter occurrence is taken as the day of celebration (Fuller 1992: 263-264).

According to one elderly Nagarattar, '*shasti abda puurti*' has three purposes. First, it celebrates the completion of the 60th year, second, it is the occasion of the *saandi* (*saandi* means 'ritual' in Sanskrit) or *parihaaram*, (i.e. praying for longevity by chanting *mantras* to ward off evil, as the 61st year is thought to be critical for a man); and third, it celebrates *kaliyaanam* (the second round of wedding celebrations with his wife).

Shasti abda puurti is the Brahmanic name for the ritual, but I shall use the term *saandi* as this is how it is most referred to by the Nagarattars. In addition, *saandi* is quite different from *shasti abda puurti*.

Brahmans conceive of life as divided into four stages: *brahmachari* (unmarried student), *grahasta* (householder), *vana prastha* (dweller in the jungle), and *sanniyaasin* (world renouncer) (Dubois 1906: 160). In the third stage, the wife is allowed to accompany her husband and live in seclusion with him but in the last stage the man should renounce even his wife and live in complete solitude. The ritual of *shasti abda puurti* therefore, is to mark the third stage of a man's life and prepare him for the last stage, (world renunciation), and also to pray for his peaceful death. Although such is the Brahmanic ideology, most Brahmans nowadays do not follow this pattern and the ritual of *saandi* is held mostly to pray for longevity.

For the Nagarattars, *saandi* is the second biggest occasion for gift exchange after weddings. For the Brahmans, '*shasti abda puurti*' is a ritual. They insist on the meticulous details of each ritual while the Nagarattars take very little notice of the ritual side, instead devoting themselves to lavish gift exchanges.

A middle aged Brahman woman said that she would not spend more than 3,000 rupees on her husband's '*shasti abda puurti* ' as the number of essential items is limited to the *hoomams* (fire ritual), and meals for a small number of her kin, i.e. her parents, her husband, her children and herself. She was very critical of the 'money mindedness' of the Nagarattars who, she said, pamper themselves and engage in meticulous gift-giving. "The Nagarattars do not think of the real meaning of *saandi* !"

On the other hand, the Nagarattars consider gift-giving as the essential part of the ritual. The minimum budget for a lower middle-class Nagarattar *saandi* is said to be around 20,000 rupees⁴. People in the middle range spend around rs. 30,000 to 50,000, and the upper record was set in 1991 by one of the richest Nagarattars, MAM Ramasamy, who was said by local people and relatives to have spent more than rs. 20,000,000 (\$1 million).

Although Ramasamy's case is not typical, gift-giving during *saandi* is always costly for the Nagarattars. There are three major gift-exchanges: first, *siir* (the gift from the 'mother's house' which is given to the wife by her brother); second, the gifts given to the relatives by the officiant of the *saandi*; 3) and third, the feast for all the attendants of the *saandi* from the officiant. Although gifts are given to the officiate from his children, they are smaller than those offered by the officiant couple.

According to local people, celebration of *saandi* has become more and more popular since the 1960s, and even urbanized non-Brahmans like the Kallars, Maravars, and Vellalars have started to celebrate *saandi* as an auspicious ceremony in function halls in the cities.

However, for non-Nagarattars, the role of the wife's brother as the gift giver is not crucial. For the Nagarattars on the other hand, the most important aspect of *saandi* is the reconfirmation of the relationship between the couple and the wife's natal family, especially the wife's brother.

Saandi renews the tie between the man and his wife's brother. At the wedding, the bride's parents and her mother's brother are the

⁴ At that time, one pound was approximately equivalent to rs. 22-25. Devaluation of Indian rupees took place in June and one pound became rs. 45.

gift-givers. At the *saandi*, this role is taken up by the wife's brother who reconfirms his support of his sister by sending gifts. A man's wife's brother is regarded as a dependable ally, while a wife regards her brother as a protector, so the gift he gives her is an expression of his ever-lasting support.

As Beck (1974: 5) suggests, in Tamil society uni-sex relationships (those between two males or two females), are concerned with the transmission of rights and duties, while cross-sex relationships (male to female) are conceived somewhat differently. While the uni-sex relationships are concerned with authority and practicalities, cross-sex relationships are characterized by the good and beneficial aspect of life. Procreation, prosperity, general well-being and the magical force of blessings or curses are involved in the cross-sexual relationships. Along with mother-son and husband-wife relationships, the brother-sister relationship is thought of as one of the strongest bonds (p. 5).

Thus, the Nagarattar celebration of *saandi* expresses a strong bond between husband and wife, and also strengthens the existing bond between brother and sister. It is considered to be a renewal of marriage, but, unlike the first marriage ceremony which is held in the bride's house, rituals only take place in the husband's ancestral house. The wife is already included in her husband's kin as a member, and another *tqali* which is brought in to the husband's father's ancestral house, is given to honour the sister who has already become the centre of the house into which she married. In most cases, by the time a man celebrates his *saandi*, his wife's parents are dead (or at least well past their prime). While her parents are alive, or at least while the woman's mother is alive, the wife can expect monthly provisions from her natal family to help her own nuclear

family budget.

If her parents are dead her brother takes over the responsibility, sending gifts at least twice a year on Deepavali (the annual celebration of the festival of lights held in the autumn) and Pongal (the celebration of the newly harvested crops held in January). These gifts are considered to be part of the '*murai*' (contract, or promise, which is written at the time of betrothal as part of the payment from the wife's natal family to the conjugal family). If it is difficult for the brother to carry out his gift-giving regularly, he may, if he is conscientious, open a bank account for her so that she would automatically receive a fixed amount on Deepavali wherever her brother may be. To neglect this duty may well breed feelings of resentment in the sister, as her brother would not be fulfilling his moral duty to her.

Murai is part of the traditional responsibility assigned to the 'mother's house' as an obligation to the married daughter. Although *murai* literally means 'promise', the sending of gifts to a married woman from her natal family is considered to be an expression of affection rather than a 'duty'. If her brother dies, her nephew takes over this responsibility but it is regarded as an expression of sincere affection for his aunt. Thus, the celebration of *saandi* is the reconfirmation of unity between brother and sister in their remaining years.

4-3 Gift-giving at a *Saandi*

a) Gifts given to the family members and affines

The officiants of the *saandi*, i.e. a male Nagarattar and his wife, regard the occasion as an opportunity to show their affection for

their kin and affines. The officiating couple's children and grandchildren are most favoured in the gift-giving of the *saandi*. Next comes the man's wife's side, i.e. the man's brother-in-law (the wife's brother), and the man's brother-in-law's wife and children. The wife's parents, if they are alive, her sisters and their husbands, along with their children and grandchildren, are also important. The *pangaalis*, i.e. the husband's brothers and their wives, his married sisters and their husbands, etc. are of secondary importance compared to the wife's side. A middle-aged *aacchi* said, "In the *saandi*, you must be especially good to the *taayaadigals* (the mother's people)".

The *aacchi* was saying that her husband should give gifts to his children and grandchildren, and then to his mother's brother and his family (wife, his children and grandchildren). A boy (or a girl) is connected to his (or her) maternal uncle through his (or her) mother, as the gifts sent from his (or her) maternal uncle are directed to his (or her) mother. A man, after marriage, receives gifts from his father-in-law through his wife. Later, this role is taken over by his brother-in-law, yet the official receiver of the gift is still his wife.

b) Feeding relatives and friends

Everyone at the ceremony who is not amongst the above mentioned close kin, ^{belongs to} the second category of gift-receivers. If the couple is well off, they may give gifts to the *pangaalis* of the man. However, more importance is given to the feast. The couple entertains a number of guests, as they would at a wedding. If the family is rich and they want to give a feast at their ancestral house, the cooperation of their relatives is necessary as feeding hundreds or

thousands of guests requires a great deal of preparation. In addition to the cooks and servants who work in the kitchen, additional people are needed to guide the guests into the dining hall and look after them. "Unless they are escorted, guests won't go and eat. While they are eating, the ushers should always remind the servers to add second or even third helpings."

It is usually the custom that a relative of the couple accompanies each guest and stays for 10 to 20 minutes until the guest finishes eating. The eldest male of the husband's *pangaali* stands at the front veranda of the joint house, and asks guests whether they have eaten. If any of the guests have not, they are immediately taken to the service quarter. "Not giving a guest anything to eat is bad. If someone is in a hurry and does not have time to eat, we would at least pack something up for the guest to eat at home."

In South Indian culture, eating food in someone else's house is an expression of respect: it shows that the guest has accepted equality of status, at least ritually. It is for this reason that people are keen to entertain and feed outsiders in their own house. If the guest accepts food in the house of a host, it demonstrates that the status of the host is either equivalent to or even higher than that of the guest. No man or woman can accept food from people of lower status.

c) *Daanam* to the Brahmans

Since conducting *saandi* in their ancestral houses is getting more expensive, there are some Nagarattars who use halls attached to the Shiva temples. According to the *puroohita* who works in the *devastanam* (temple administration) office in Pillaiyarpatti⁵, a

⁵ Pillaiyarpatti is one of the nine lineage temples of the Nagarattars. Their *devastanam* office runs several halls that are to be engaged for such purposes and they are used mostly by

convenient package *saandi* can be arranged. As part of this package, the *devastanam* office lends the *taali* for the ceremony, which is not for the wife, but for the old Brahman couple who would receive *daanam*. A small gold *taali* is supposed to be presented by the Nagarattar couple to a poor Brahman couple who are invited to receive it as the *daanam* (religious gift given to the Brahmans). Instead of giving it to them, the *devastanam* office lends it for the ritual, and the old Brahman couple is given rs. 51 instead. I was told: "The Brahmans are to imagine that a real *taali* is presented as *daanam*."

d) The budget of a modest *saandi*

A modest ceremony costs approximately rs. 4,500: rs. 1,500 for *puja*, *hoomam*, and rent of the halls and rs. 3,000 for food served to around 200 people. (When I attended a budget-conscious *saandi* even the number of pots was reduced to less than half the ideal. There were less than 30 there, because the hiring charge of pots varies with the number hired.)

The gift-giving budget, which is the largest, is not included in this amount. The Nagarattars cannot omit the gift-giving, since it is an essential step in their praying for longevity. In return for their gift-giving, the Nagarattars expect well wishes, although the Brahman priests insist that the couple's longevity is assured because of their powerful *mantras* and rituals. When the gift-giving starts in the middle of the ritual, the Brahman *puroohitas* leave the spot to take light meals because it is tedious for them, and their presence is unnecessary.

The most expensive items are the *sarees*, i.e. the '*pattu saree*'

lower-middle class to middle-class families.

(silk *saree*, see chapter 5 for more discussion). Then come the men's clothes such as the *veetti* (loin cloth worn by men) and a towel, and the children's clothes such as shirts and trousers. I was told that the most expensive gifts should be given to the 'mother's people', i.e. both the wife's and the husband's maternal relatives.

e) Gift given by the wife's brother

The *taali* which is worn by the wife on the occasion of *saandi* is made of gold and diamonds, and is presented by the wife's brother or her maternal uncle, with additional gifts and cash. The gift which is carried from the wife's 'mother's house' is called '*siir*', and as I describe in the following section, the *siir* is displayed and inspected by the *aacchis* of the wife's and the husband's relatives before it is carried to the ancestral house of the husband. Since their parents are quite likely to have died by the time the couple celebrate the *saandi*, it is essential for the wife's brother or the maternal uncle to take up this duty.

f) The *saandi* of a middle class family: case study

Meena Aacchi celebrated her husband's *saandi* in 1989, on which she spent 1.5 lakh (rs. 150,000). This came out of her own money, which she had saved and kept in the bank in her own name, and had originally been part of her dowry. Since her husband had not been able to make the family rich, Meena Aacchi had to organize and bring up her children using her own money. Her friends and relatives praised her for being able to conduct a *saandi* beyond the means of her husband.

She presented *sarees* (about rs. 1,200-2,500 each) to twenty-one women who were close relatives, and she also gave *veetti* (rs.

250) to 51 close male relatives (total estimated cost: rs. 75,250). For *puja* (rituals), around rs. 5,000 was spent. A *veetti* and a towel (rs. 50) were given to 21 priests who chanted mantras (est: rs. 1,050).

Three meals were served to the guests: breakfast, lunch, and supper (rs. 25,000). 15 cooks served and 500 people were invited. They spent rs. 6,000 on decorations, photographs, the video, and music. For the diamond *taali*, and a ring, rs. 25,000, plus rs. 6,000 for a ring for the husband, were spent. Meena Aachi had to arrange to purchase the diamond *taali* by herself since her brother was unable to buy one for her.

200 relatives were given stainless steel trays, rs. 10 in cash, betel leaves, areca nuts, and one coconut each (total: rs. 6,000). Meena Aacchi gave each of her adult children a 1kg silver basket (rs. 30,000). She gave an old Brahman couple a small *taali* (rs. 1,000) and donated a *saree* and sandal paste to the temple (rs. 1,000).

She hired a car (transport expenses including petrol: rs.2,000). Rs. 61 was paid to each of the attendants, and one plastic bag was given to 100 guests. (rs. 8 per bag =total rs. 800). A religious book (Ramaayana) was also given to 100 guests (rs. 3 x 100= 300). An electric generator and gas light were necessary for illumination (rs. 500). After the function, Meena Aacchi and her husband went to Rameshwaram for two days with their children and grandchildren. Altogether, 12 members went (rs. 1,000). Meena Aacchi calculated the total cost to be rs. 156,150.

Meena Aacchi received 50,000 rupees from her elder brother as a gift but although this amount was more than the cost of the diamond *taali*, she still complained that it was not sufficient. She more or less paid for the whole function out of her own pocket.

According to her friends, Meena Aacchi's husband was a modest bank employee whose salary was not enough to marry off their children. It was therefore Meena Aacchi's dowry and savings which enabled their children to marry.

She was not happy that her elder brother seemed to show little affection for her. "My brother is a rich man, and since I am his only sister, he should have given me more." However, she also understands the difficulty of his financial condition: he has five daughters and only one of them is married so far. With four more daughters to be married, it would have been difficult for him to send her more. In fact, it would generally be thought that Meena Aacchi's brother had fulfilled his moral obligation, since in spite of having four unmarried daughters he had still managed to show his 'affection' for his sister to a certain extent.

4-4 *Siir* (gift from mother's house to the married woman)

The *siir* is the most important gift given in the *saandi* and is from the wife's natal family. *Siir* is decorated and displayed in the ancestral house of the wife's father, which would probably have been inherited by her brother, before it is sent to the ancestral house of the husband, where the *saandi* ritual is held.

Meena Aacchi complained that her mother's house should have arranged the diamond *taali* for her along with other gifts such as a ring, one or two *sarees* and a *veetti* and shirt for her husband. She should also have received a gift of money accompanied by fruit, nuts and sweets, coconuts etc. Although the money was given beforehand, all such arrangements were made by her, and she had to send the diamond *taali*, which she bought herself, to her brother's

ancestral house so that everything could be sent at once after having been displayed there.

Before the gifts are carried to the ancestral house of the husband, a few *aacchis* related to the wife would come to the wife's brother's ancestral house to inspect the *siir* displayed in the waiting room adjacent to the open courtyard. The wife's sister-in-law (the wife's brother's wife), should entertain the visitors with coffee and snacks. This is exclusively a women's inspection and no males accompany them.

On the morning of the *saandi* of Ramasamy, I accompanied the group of women who went to inspect the *siir* that was to be sent to Sigappi Aacchi, the wife of Ramasamy. Ramasamy and Sigappi Aachi are cross-cousins and belong to the VS line, which I discussed in chapter 3. According to the local newspaper, Ramasamy celebrated the grandest *saandi* in 1991, attracting 120,000 people to Chettinadu.

Although the scale of the *saandi* was unusually large, it still presented Ramasamy with an opportunity to express the two 'cross-sexual relationships of the kin nucleus'(Beck 1974), i.e. the husband/wife, and brother/sister relationships. Moreover, since Sigappi Aachi's brother was an adopted son, this case shows that the role of the brother can be taken over by either one of her parallel-cousins or an adopted brother. The gift, in this context, is also the expression of the alliance between her husband and her adopted brother who are united through her. Although her parents are dead, she is protected by the fact that her husband is her cross-cousin, so that the family into which she married was already known to her, and her relatives were also those of her husband. Although she has no children, and she and her husband are thinking of adopting a son,

infertility does not weaken her position because of the closely interwoven relationships of kin and affines created by cross-cousin marriage.

4-5 The Inspection of *siir*

About a dozen *sumangalis* who are related to both Sigappi Aacchi and her husband accompanied Sigappi Aacchi to inspect the *siir* in the ancestral house of her brother. No men were to be present at this informal ceremony as ^{it} is customary for the *siir*, i.e. the auspicious gift, to be appreciated first by *sumangalis*. On arrival, the women inspected the items, touching them and admiring the display in the women's area, where they normally sleep (the fig. 1-1 in chapter 1). A square platform had been set up, on which dozens of gifts were arranged with colourful decoration on an auspicious red carpet. The gifts consisted of fruit, sweets, coconuts on silver plates, and for her husband, a *veetti*, shirt, and a gold ring. For Sigappi Aacchi, there was a *pattu saree*, a gold chain, and a diamond *taali* with a bundle of money along with a container of *kunkum* and sandal paste which are essential for auspicious rituals.

Siir also functions as a public demonstration of respect payed by a brother to his sister. The more important his sister's husband is to the brother, the more he should care about the content of the *siir* sent on this day.

Women, on the other hand, appear to take a rather informal role when they inspect the *siir*. They touch the items, assess them, and discuss them over coffee. Although the atmosphere is quite informal, it is nevertheless a ritual. By touching them, and talking about ancestors in the photograph, the *sumangalis* add auspiciousness

to the gifts which are sent to the sister from her brother. Goods and money turn into auspicious objects after this ritual. In order to get the blessings and turn the materials into auspicious things, *sumangalis* are asked to come to touch, and inspect them. In fact, even ancestors are expected to participate in this kind of gathering to add some auspiciousness. In the corridor surrounding the *walavu*, there were a number of old photographs including those of Sigappi Aacchi as a child with some of her relatives, sitting with their elders. And I was told to go around the corridor to see these photographs and ask about these photographs to the women gathered there.

Seeing the old photographs and remembering the ancestors are said to be good, especially at such an auspicious occasion, and thus this procedure is also part of the custom associated with auspicious moments. Photographs are especially useful for remembering ancestors, since for the Nagarattars, ancestor worship does not extend to generations whose stories were not talked about by succeeding members. Those who are much older than them are combined as the ancestors in general and worshipped at the beginning of the *padaippu*.

This informal inspection is important to reassure the sister of the economic support of her brother who must not lose face by presenting poor items. Furthermore, the visit emphasizes the importance of the auspiciousness associated with *sumangalis* and ancestors as the protective auspicious power to be attached to the *siir* before it is sent to the ancestral house of Sigappi Aacchi's husband.

4-6 The ritual of *saandi*

The ritual of *saandi*, according to a Brahman *puroohita*, follows two

themes: one is the second time marriage and the other is the prayer for the couple's longevity. The first part is represented in the repetition of the marriage ritual which would have taken place decades ago. For example, the marriage is announced by the installation of the *muhuurta kaal* (auspicious pole) seven days before the ceremony starts. A specialist called the *muhuurta kaaran* (he is a Pandaaram, i.e. a caste who work for village temples as priests) comes and installs a pole at a corner (north east) of the *walavu waasal*. This announces their wedding, and is a repetition of the wedding ritual.

The preparation of the ritual is started on the previous day by a few *puroohitas*, and 65 pots are prepared in the courtyard. The wife wears a *kaluttiru* (hand shaped gold ornament which is given at her wedding) and the *taali* which she normally wears. Her husband wears *rudraksha*, a necklace which is a symbol of spiritual discipline.

The beads of *rudraksha* are made from special fruit from a tree grown in the Himalayas, and normally there is no decoration. *Rudraksha* is used for rituals, to count the number of chanted *mantras*. However, the *rudrakshas* worn by the Nagarattars are joined with gold, and have a large gold ornament in the centre. Moreover, the *rudraksha* worn by the officiant is usually handed down by the *pangaali* of the officiant. In other words, the same *rudraksha* is worn by the officiant's father, (probably by his grandfather), his elder brothers, and will be worn^{by} his younger brothers. Thus, sharing *rudraksha* symbolizes the idea of joint property shared among the *pangaalis*, which is represented in their ancestral house. Even though the Nagarattars wear *rudraksha* on *saandi*, this is not the symbol of a step forward to world renunciation but a symbol of worldliness: wealth and kinship ties are reinforced

by the ceremony of *saandi*.

His wife puts on *kaluttiru* to represent her auspiciousness for the evening ritual which takes place on the eve of *saandi abisheekam* (water pouring ritual, a high light of *saandi*). As I discuss in chapter 5, the *kaluttiru* is an auspicious symbol and is also considered to be an important economic asset for married women.

Brahmanic *saandi* also share the same themes, i.e. longevity and reconfirmation of marriage, yet according to the Brahman *puroohita*, their focus is on the power of *mantra* and rituals in order to live a peaceful life as a couple and to prepare for painless deaths with the help of spiritual power.

The Nagarattars also depend on the power of *mantras* and rituals as they, too, feel *mantras* are essential in the process of ritual to attain longevity. Yet this desire for longevity is particularly stressed through their dependence on *sumangalis* as ritual specialists.

The first installation of the brick platform in the courtyard is done exclusively by the *sumangalis* who are related to the couple. In the ritual I observed, the *sumangalis*, in order of seniority, placed a lotus petal on each brick before cementing it. Lotus petals are a symbol of auspiciousness, wealth, and purity, as the goddess of wealth, Lakshmi, is depicted sitting on a lotus flower.

The platform where the couple sit is also decorated by the *sumangalis*. When the couple pray to their ancestors at the *ul viidu*, they are also exclusively assisted by their relatives, again, especially by the *sumangalis*. As is the case at weddings, the Brahmans do not have any part in the ritual, nor are they allowed to enter the *ul viidu* (see chapter 6 for further discussion).

When the ancestral worship starts, the Brahman priests take a break. The gift-giving starts, in the continued absence of the

Brahmans. In the ceremony I observed, the gift-giving continued for nearly one and half hours, yet it was not an exceptionally long one by Nagarattar standards⁶.

After the gift-giving is over, the couple are accompanied by relatives to the nearby temples, usually the Vinayaga temple and the local village goddess's temple, such as the Maariyamman temple. On their return, they sit on the platform and the *puja* starts with Vinayaga *puja* in order to pray for a good beginning to Vinayaga, the elephant god. During *saandi*, the priests are supposed to chant *mantras* many times, in auspicious numbers such as 108 or 1,008 times as a whole. When the prescribed number of chants is completed, the attendants pour holy water onto the couple. Since finishing the chants takes quite a long time, priests start chanting on the eve of the *abisheekam* ritual so that they can reach the required number by noon on the day of *saandi*. The *puroohitas* start chanting *mantra* from early in the morning.

As soon as the ritual is started on the eve of the *saandi abisheekam*, people come one after another and prostrate themselves in front of the couple to receive gifts, and on the day of *saandi abisheekam*, the couple receive gifts from the visitors. In the meantime, breakfast is prepared and people go and eat. Traditional music is played whenever there is an important ritual, as it is supposed to drive away any evil in the atmosphere. Several close relatives come with gifts for the couple. Garlands, a ring and a chain, *sarees* and a *veetti* are put on plates as gifts from the couple's children. These gifts are blessed by the children and then presented to the couple.

⁶ Sometimes, gift-giving is done separately from the ritual, especially if those who are given gifts are numerous, as was the case in Ramasamy's *saandi*.

Three hearths are temporarily set up for the *saandi*, in which special wood with a herbal mixture is burnt to add religious power to the *mantra* chanting. According to the priest, the wooden sticks are believed to create smoke with beneficial medical effects when inhaled. The priests contrive to chant *mantras* until the *muhuurtam* (auspicious moment), during which a new diamond *taali* is put around the neck of the wife. As with the wedding ceremony, the *taali* is placed on a plate, carried by either the son and daughter or by the wife's brother and his wife, and is blessed by close relatives by being touched. The *taali* is then kept in the *ul viidu* until the most auspicious moment comes.

Before the couple takes *abisheekam* (the water pouring ceremony as an expression of ritual blessing and purification) the priest brings sesame oil in a black iron bowl. *Abisheekam* is a purification ritual which is to bless the receiver. It is also part of temple rituals in which the priest pours water onto the sacred idol to 'cool' the deity and to keep the divine in good humour. While kin and affine can perform this ritual, servants are not supposed to do so. The water contains lime juice, milk, turmeric, etc., which are traditionally supposed to 'cool down' the body and thus make the person ritually pure and auspicious (See chapter 6 for a detailed discussion). Since the *mantra* has been chanted for two consecutive nights and the water is believed to have absorbed both the effect of *mantra* and the herbal effect which has been created from the smoke of the hearth, it is the ritual of pouring water itself which is believed to increase the longevity of the couple.

The black iron bowl is believed to ward off evil and the sesame oil is the essential material for an oil bath, the most auspicious ritual bath. The couple do not smear oil over their body

but merely dip their fingers in it and put a few drops over their head, merely to signify the oil bath.

When the priests complete the required number of *mantra*, the chief priest starts to pour the water from the pot onto the couple, and the guests come in front of them, and pour water. Most of the guests come as a couple and the water pouring ceremony continues for nearly one hour until the last few pots of water are poured by the couple's sons and their wives.

The role of the son is crucial, since he is the last one to finish pouring, as heir of the house of the officiant. If there is no son, the paternal nephew takes over this position. (In the case of Ramasamy, since there was no child, the water was poured by the adopted son of Ramasamy's deceased brother's widow.)

After this is over, the couple go to the changing room, change into a new *saree* and a new *veetti* which are given by their children, and then return to sit on the platform and prepare to give *daanam* to a Brahman couple in order to ward off evil before their own ritual of *taali* tying.

At the *saandi*, it is usual for a poor and elderly Brahman couple to be invited onto the seat on the platform. They are given a garland and one small gold *taali* by the recipient of the ritual. The *taali* given to the Brahman is a *daanam* to make the *taali* giving ritual of the Nagarattars auspicious: it is usually approximately one sovereign of gold, which is a symbol of the blessing the Brahman couple gives to the Nagarattar officiant in exchange for receiving a gift. The Nagarattar officiant and his wife, after giving a *taali* to the old Brahman couple, accompany them to the entrance of the house to show respect for the elderly couple.

The couple then come back to the seat and the *puroohita* starts

the ritual to conduct the marriage of the couple again. The husband blesses the diamond *taali* and the gold chain on the plate putting *kunkum* on them for auspiciousness, and the husband's *pangaali* touches the *taali* and hands it to the husband. The *sumangali* from both the husband's *pangaali* and the wife's side help in this ritual. As soon as the *taali* is put around the neck of the wife, the *kunkum* is smeared on the forehead of the wife and the *taali* itself by the hand of the husband, and then the couple exchange garlands three times, just like in their original wedding.

At the 'real wedding', the Brahman priest is asked to leave the house just before the *taali* is tied as the Nagarattars believe him to be highly inauspicious. At this ritual of *taali* tying at the *saandi*, the priest stays. This is partly because plural number of Brahman priests are not as inauspicious as a lone Brahman. (According to local people, seeing more than two Brahman priests at a time first thing in the morning is ritually neutral, i.e. neither auspicious or inauspicious.)

There are a number of Brahman priests who are chanting the *mantra* and moreover, the priest is needed as soon as the *taali* is tied. However, the *taali* is never to be touched by the Brahman and is handled only by the close relatives who surround the couple.

After the *taali* is tied, the couple's relatives come one after another to receive the yellow rice as a blessing. Those who are older than the couple sprinkle the yellow rice on the head of the couple to bless them for longevity. Yellow rice is supposed to be highly auspicious (see chapter 6).

When this is over, the couple come out of the house, where a cow is waiting for them. The cow faces away from the entrance, and the recipient's wife conducts the *aaratti* (a lamp waving

ceremony) on the back of the cow and decorates its head with a garland⁷.

When the whole ceremony is over, the couple and their relatives settle their accounts as they return to the house⁸.

4-6: The *saandi* of the 'Palace of Chettinadu'

In the afternoon of Ramasamy's *saandi*, well before the *siir* was carried in to 'The Palace of Chettinadu', the crowd had swollen to an uncontrollable size. Even well before 7 o'clock in the morning, the entrance of the Palace was blocked by the police as a huge crowd had already flooded into the palace from all over Chettinadu. The *walavu waasal* where the whole ritual was held became as hot and humid as a steam bath, since the opening of the *waasal* was completely sealed with the decorative roof and the space was crowded with more than a thousand people. When the turmeric water was poured onto the couple, the *waasal* was full of thousands of people pushing and clashing with each other and the police started to worry about accidents. Even on the day before the *saandi* there had been a huge crowd at 7 o'clock in the morning, which had blocked the approach to the entrance of the Palace. On the second day, the crowd had already begun to build up at 6 o'clock, and the courtyard where the ritual was held was again very hot because of

⁷According to elderly Nagarattars, seeing the back of a cow first thing in the morning is always auspicious, therefore, the procedure of the ritual is arranged so that the couple can see the back of the cow as soon as they come out from the house.

⁸ Relatives are paid for performing rituals for the couple. The amount and the gift given depends on the financial condition of the couple.

the crowd and the closed ceiling.

The weather was hot outside and there was no breeze. In the crowded huge space, all attendants were drenched with sweat, but neither the officiating couple nor their close relatives could come out from the *waasal* to rest.

Those who were not known to the couple were the most liberal in their consumption of food and snacks; in addition to the villagers there were hundreds of gypsies and beggars who were camping around the area in an attempt to reach the food in the service area. This was tolerated as it is a taboo to refuse meals and it would be a bad omen for the auspicious ceremony. A lot of the close relatives left the palace without eating, as the food halls were fully packed and nearly impossible to enter.

People who were known to the couple even came from abroad to show their goodwill. For example, Sigappi Aacchi's brother's children, some of whom are now settled in the United States, all came with their babies to attend. Even those who rarely left their houses came, as not coming at all signified the cessation of the relationship. At the main hall of the palace in the two days before the *saandi*, Ramasamy was constantly receiving male guests, while Sigappi Aacchi was surrounded by her male home stewards and women guests in the women's quarter, busily giving gifts.

As the celebration of *saandi* approached, the whole of the Chettinadu area and Madras city were full of posters of Ramasamy's *saandi*. Along with Ramasamy's posters of *saandi*, others who were close political allies were displayed: one was Chidambaram, the ex-minister, and MP, who was one of the closest relatives of Ramasamy, and the other was Muuppanaar, the president of Tamil Nadu Congress I. All the local newspapers and television covered the

saandi, and a video film was taken, to focus on important guests.

As this shows, *saandi* serves not only to renew the tie with relatives but also to demonstrate the wealth of the officiant. The element of competition in holding a grand function permeates the weddings and *saandis* of the Nagarattars more than other caste, since the scale of the function becomes a powerful indicator of wealth and prosperity. If they succeed in impressing their relatives and business partners by holding a grand function, they are given augmented social status in return (i.e. increased business credibility). Ample gift-giving is also an expression of the generosity and prosperity of the giver, which is also a factor in the construction of their social status.

a) Feeding the guests

For 9 days, between the 20th and the 28th of September 1991, the Palace in Chettinadu received a constant flow of guests. During this period, meals were served four times a day: breakfast with coffee or tea, lunch, a light meal in the evening with sweets, and supper consisting of *idli*, *dosai*, or *idiappam*, with some sweets and coffee and tea. The menu was purely vegetarian and chosen several days ahead by Sigappi Aacchi. Except for the 26th, 27th and 28th, the meals were served in the two dining halls of the Palace. However, because they expected the number of the guests to increase from the 26th, food halls were arranged in six places in adjacent houses, which were Ramasamy's *pangaali's* houses. These houses were entirely open for use during the *saandi* function since additional cooking facilities and resting quarters for relatives were needed.

Invitation cards were sent to 30,000 people, yet the real number of people who visited the Palace from the 10th of September

to the 26th of September alone reached 20,000. On the 27th September, the number of visitors reached 40,000, and by the 28th, it was 60,000. Therefore, the total number that attended the *saandi* was 120,000, according to the servants who supplied plantain leaves on which to serve food to the guests. Not only the meals but also small snacks and cold drinks were given whenever groups of villagers or guests arrived. Over 2 days (the 27th and 28th alone), approximately 15,000 bottled cold drinks provided by the Palace were consumed.

The meals consisted of at least 11 items (on the day of *saandi*, it was 22 items), and for supper alone, they served 5 to 6 items. All the attendants, including the host couple, ate the same meal in one of the service quarters.

Their food service even extended to Brahman *swamiji*, a leader of one Brahman *madam* in Bangalore. Although Brahmans never eat in non-Brahman houses, one *achariya*, a *madam* head, visited them with a group of a dozen Brahman disciples, and they all had lunch with Ramasamy and Sigappi Aacchi. The cost of each meal was also extraordinary. According to one of the stewards who organized the food section, one meal cost rs. 90 per person which was an extremely generous amount as usually middle class Nagarattars would spend around 7 to 8 rupees or less per meal.

b) Gift-giving and *Aacchis*

Several days before the ceremonies were conducted, villagers from nearby areas came in a group with a large garland to pay their respects to Ramasamy on the veranda of the entrance where he sat with his male relatives and friends. The villagers were then led to the internal area where the *walavu* is situated. Sigappi Aacchi was

seated there with her sister-in-law and several female friends. She sat beside two store rooms with a notebook listing categories of gifts to be given.

Two storerooms were filled with the stock of gifts arranged in categories, and according to the closeness of the relationship, those who came were given gifts. For example, on the day of the *saandi*, three kinds of *pattu sarees* specially arranged by Sita Aacchi were to be given to each of the closest female relations so that they all wore the same 'uniform' three times during the *saandi*.⁹

Villagers who came with garlands were given some soft drinks and a packet of biscuits, with betel leaves and betel nuts in a small stainless steel container, all put in an inexpensive cloth bag. Those who helped the family for three days were given a slightly better gift: a packet of biscuits in a vinyl bag with areca nuts and betel leaves with *kunkum* and turmeric in a small stainless steel container. Villagers who had been in the service of the family were given a *veetti* or cotton *sarees*. However, refusing to take the one offered and claiming more expensive goods seems to have been a regular occurrence, according to the house stewards: "Some villagers demanded a *saree* or *veetti* even though they haven't worked for the Palace at all !"

The work of gift-giving was left entirely to Sigappi Aacchi. After Ramasamy received his guests and exchanged a few words, he told most of them to receive gifts from his *aacchi*. The selection and purchasing of gifts is all in the hands of the *aacchi*, as well as

⁹ There is a photo of all the *sumangalis* surrounding Ramasamy and Sigappi Aacchi. It is interesting to see that the couple is surrounded only by the auspicious women of the relatives, as if the attendance of their husbands is implied by the presence of the *sumangalis*.

organizing the 'poor feeding' (meal service to the poor which is held in temples). Sigappi Aacchi sat beside a small desk, checking the items with a small notebook and her steward then brought out the gift, and handed it to her. She then handed it to the receivers --who prostrated themselves in front of her, and with a word of gratitude, the receivers would leave her.

4-8 Discussion 1: Gift giving in the *saandi*

After observing an apparently endless series of gift-givings for several days, I wondered about the motives and what it was meant to achieve. The Nagarattars I questioned instantly replied that the gift-giving was not just useful but absolutely essential.

"First of all, Ramasamy is supposed to be the richest Nagarattar, and he is the heir of the aristocratic family. It is therefore necessary to have a grand ceremony to match his status and wealth. It is also a good demonstration and advertisement for their business. In addition, the couple is childless (although they are going to adopt a son), and so they haven't conducted any marriages after their own and to compensate for their lack of opportunities for grand ceremonies they are having a particularly grand *saandi*."

The Nagarattars would consider a man most worthy if he were trustworthy and socially credible, as well as having a degree of religiosity which would lead him to make donations to charity. In order to meet these requirements, the Nagarattar men engage in business wholeheartedly, and are never wasteful. Excessive consumption at ceremonies is not considered to be a waste, but a part of the expression of generosity, since by feeding hundreds and thousands, a man can increase his religious merit.

Therefore, their purpose in spending large amounts of money on ceremonies is similar to their expenditure on charities and patronizing temples. According to Bayly, Indian merchants consider 'name' or 'credit' as an essential element of their effectiveness (Bayly 1983). Their constant capital investment in temples and pilgrimage centres was combined with their interest in wide business activities as traders and merchants in an attempt to acquire credibility in the places where they could not depend on local kinship support.

Although the daily life of the Nagarattars is said to be frugal, the heavy expenditure on ceremonial occasions such as weddings and *saandi*^{does} not contradict this ethic. The capital investment is made in order to attract publicity and also to renew the ties not only with kin and affines but also with friends and business partners. Employing the mass media to demonstrate a family's wealth is similar to the traditional Nagarattar strategy of investing in temples to acquire prestige and merit.

c) The *Aacchi* as *sumangali* and protector of the house

Among the Nagarattars, the arrangement of a big function is mostly done by the *aacchi*, and for this, cooperation and help from other *aacchis* is essential (what Beck calls the uni-sexual relationship is highlighted in this cooperative network). Her mother-in-law, and some elderly wives of the *pangaali* as well as her mother, sisters and cousins would help. If the house is large, she has servants and home stewards who are engaged for both business and domestic activities. For example, during the whole ceremonial procedure, Sigappi Aacchi was surrounded by her managers who came from the offices of their companies. In South Indian society, having male servants at home is quite exceptional in an ordinary house, although for

mercantile houses it is more common. On the night of the *saandi* ritual, Sita Aachi had to work late at night after all the other family members and guests had gone to sleep. She took a late supper with her dozens of home stewards who were sitting on the floor beside the dining table. While eating, they chatted and gossiped about the people who were known to both parties. A sense of cooperation and unity existed between the male servants and the *aachi*, which confirmed her position as the manager of the house.

In mercantile communities, keeping clerks and domiciliary managers at home is unavoidable, and if the business is on a small scale, women sometimes engage in money-lending, turning their house into an office. If this is the case, the help of male servants is quite essential, as the *aacchi* can then maintain a distance from the male customers, and they can manage their business by sending male servants as messengers and even money collectors.

The *sumangali*'s work starts from the moment when installation of the auspicious pole (*muhuurta kaal*) is over. The installation of a pole in one corner of the *walavu waasal* is an announcement of an auspicious ceremony, just as it is at a wedding. Three days before the ceremony, *sumangalis* start to build the platform in the centre of the *waasal* where the pots are supposed to be placed and where they carry out the lotus petal ritual as I mentioned earlier. After the first brick was placed by Sigappi Aacchi, the *sumangalis* from her side and her husband's relatives installed each brick while praying for the longevity of Ramasamy. A conch shell was then blown by one of the women to announce the ceremony.

These *sumangalis* then decorated the platform with auspicious signs (*koolam*) as well as the front door and the plank on which the

couple sit. They lit auspicious lamps both in the *ul viidu* and at the entrance of *walavu*. All the *sumangalis* wore the *saree* given by Sigappi Aacchi, and they all accompanied the couple to the temple where they prayed for a good beginning to the ritual, a simulation of *sumangali praatanai*, which I discussed at the beginning of this chapter. When the photograph was taken, Ramasamy was surrounded by the *sumangalis* of his relatives who were dressed in the same *pattu sarees*, as if he were protected by the auspiciousness of these women.

Even after the *saandi* was over, and the whole group including Ramasamy had gone to bed and the downstairs of the Palace was deserted, the work of Sigappi Aacchi was not yet over. At 8:30 pm, she was still sitting with her stewards in the corner of the *walavu* facing a mound of garlands and the leftover gifts, sorting them out to be carried into the store room. In another room, there was also a huge mound of unused gifts. After this had been arranged, she still had to go round the *walavu waasal* paying her respects to all the ancestors in the photographs, touching them and receiving blessings from them. She also visited the room where an enormous photograph of Ramasamy's mother overwhelmed other photographs of Ramasamy's grandfather, grandmother, his father and his elder brother who was already dead. She applied *kunkum* to each one of the photograph, and did the same to her forehead and to her two *taalis* which hung around her neck in order to obtain blessings from the ancestors.

This aspect of a *sumangali*'s daily life shows that she is the protector of the house. She needs her husband to maintain her auspicious status, and, for this, she prays to the ancestors for protection. Both the wife's and the husband's ancestors' interest are

combined in protecting the husband. The prosperity of the house and the life of the husband are essential to the *aacchi*, and in this respect, cooperation of all the *sumangalis* of kin and affines are requested especially at auspicious ceremonies: being *sumangalis* of his kin and affines, they have every reason to protect the life of Ramasamy by giving blessings.

The auspicious status of a *sumangali* is not affected even if she does not have a child. Although Sigappi Aacchi is childless, she could adopt a son from the clan temple division of her husband, and after arranging his marriage, she would be called '*periyaacchi*' (big *aacchi*) and exercise leadership in her own house. This shows, that at least among the Nagarattars, the *sumangali*hood is more highly regarded than motherhood itself.

When I commented that it was rather hard for Sita Aacchi to deal with all the tedious work well after all the other family members had gone to bed, one of her relatives, a middle aged *aacchi* objected: "Of course, she has to do it. However tired she may be, it is after all, her *saandi*." As this comment clearly shows, the *saandi* is in fact a celebration of the *sumangali* who has prayed for her husband's longevity so that her status may be preserved.

Discussing the position of a woman in Tamil society, Beck (1974: 7) writes about the presence of a 'kin nucleus', i.e. that the woman is surrounded by males: her husband, her brother, her son and her father. In Tamil society, rights and duties stem primarily from men's relationships with other men (i.e. father-son-grandson, or brother-in-law/son-in-law and father-in-law), while women, at the centre surrounded by men, are the source of power. A goddess, in a myth, provides the energy potential from which all else, including her husband, was later formed.

However, a mythical woman or a goddess is a highly ambivalent figure, as she may bring not only prosperity and rain, but also famine and disease. In folklore, if a female was not treated properly, she could cause a calamity to befall a male, or 'burn' those who behaved wrongly. Therefore, in order to maximize the constructive application of their power,

women must at all times be connected to and contained by their male relatives, and in compensation such men stand to benefit from the blessings and good luck that flow from a woman who is chaste and whose power is controlled and well managed. A virgin sister's blessing can win battles for her fathers and brothers, while a chaste wife can increase a husband's prosperity and fighting power. But if a man should mistreat a woman who is under his protection, or ignore her just demands, he opens himself to her curse, (Beck 1974: 7)

Four male relatives, i.e. her father, brother, husband and son, protect the woman in order to direct her energies towards constructive ends, which in the case of the Nagarattars, as well as of most Tamil castes, is the prosperity of two families through cooperation.

According to Beck therefore, the relationships between males and females in Tamil kinships are of a different order than those between persons of the same sex, such that cross-sex links have to do with the general themes of prosperity and power while uni-sex relationships have to do with descent, authority, and rights and obligations of a more formal and everyday sort. It is from this that the difference between cross and parallel relationships stems. Cross relatives are people with whom one should be friendly and familiar, and exchange gifts, while parallel relatives are people with whom more formal and more restrained interaction is expected.

In the South, the woman's husband and her brother are classificatory cross-cousins in terms of kinship terminology and behavioural patterns express cooperation and friendship. The

Nagarattars fit Beck's argument well, and the role of the *aacchi* in the context of Tamil culture is defined in the way Beck claims. Sigappi Aacchi who is married a cross-cousin, is protected by the kinship nucleus, as discussed by Beck, even though she does not yet have a son. A child, in her case, can be adopted. The woman in the centre, even if she cannot have a child, is protected, and serves to 'cement' the relationships of four males, while men are the 'girders or beams of the structure' (Beck 1974: 20).

4-11 Discussion 2: Auspiciousness and exclusiveness

Pure and impure, as Dumont (1970) maintains, is an essential value system in Indian society and structures social hierarchy in India. Between men and women, there is also an hierarchical difference based on this value system: women suffer from menstrual pollution while men do not. Therefore, men are fit to officiate over rituals without much difficulty while women are not. However, as Dumontian argument also stresses complementarity of the pure and the impure, since both need the other to make a complementary opposition, husband and wife are complementary and indispensable to each other. Husband and wife make a pair, which is considered to be a basic unit in Tamil society.

For a married woman, especially of higher caste, her essential virtues are associated with purity (*suttam*) in the form of chastity and cleanliness since it protects her family and brings prosperity. There is a Tamil saying: "Cleanliness can feed you for life." As the guardian of home life, a woman is expected to be neat and clean. In this sense, cleanliness, purity and auspiciousness are interrelated as they are all closely associated with reproductive activities and home

life.

Although women are classified as socially inferior to men, and their reproductive capacity is under the control of men, women are essential to give men a social identity. Only after marriage can a man or a woman achieve an acceptable proper social status. A woman as a wife is strongly associated with auspiciousness (*mangalam, or subam*).

As soon as a *sumangali* becomes a widow, she has to remove her *taali*, as it is an object which is only to be associated with auspiciousness. It is melted down or disassembled, and given to her daughter or granddaughter. However, if a woman dies as a *sumangali*, neither her *taali* nor her *kaluttiru* are melted down because they have remained with a *sumangali*, and are still auspicious objects, and so they are handed down to her daughter as such. Because of the history of the object, i.e. *kaluttiru* and *taali* which are associated with the life of a woman who died as a *sumangali*, they become the emblems of auspicious agents.

Auspicious events, states or auspicious objects are pure as they are symbolically associated with the reproduction and prosperity which is sometimes stressed as the feminine power, i.e. *shakti*.

Generally, the physical transformations that women pass through entail simultaneous transformations of their religious status. A girl (*kanni*) as a virgin is pure and auspicious and is fit to participate in religious rituals. Sometimes, these girls are requested to become the vehicle of the divine spirit at village festivals. She loses this ritual purity when she begins to menstruate, although she is still auspicious. However, she is still pure in another sense, since, her reproductive potentiality is under protection as a virgin. This potentiality can be utilized through the right channel (i.e. correct

marriage) in the near future, and because of this potentiality, she is still said to be 'pure'. When she becomes a *sumangali*, she is no longer a virgin, yet her status as a 'pure virgin' is replaced by another stage as a married woman whose sexuality is properly channelled to her husband's family. Therefore, she becomes the most appropriate person to deal with auspicious household rituals, but she loses this status the moment she becomes a widow. Losing her husband, she loses the proper channel of reproduction, and since there is no replacement (remarriage), unless her reproductive power is channelled into a religious path (ideally), she becomes a threat to her affine. Choosing to be a religious widow is the only way for her potential reproductive power to benefit her family and the affine.

On the other hand, a man's significance in relation to ritual purity and auspiciousness does not really fluctuate. Excepting a few occasions when he is affected by the external circumstances, his ritual purity is less affected by his physiological process. However, a man suffers from the gravest pollution, i.e. the death pollution, when he becomes the chief mourner at a funeral both for his unmarried children and his parents. Although his wife and daughter also suffer from death pollution at this time, their degree is not as grave as his since, being women, they can never become chief mourners or attend the cremation. At the funeral, women send off the corpse which is accompanied by men who are close kin to the dead. As soon as they are gone, women start to clean the house to ward off death pollution.

Men accept death pollution from their parents partly because they receive most of the property left behind, and partly because they are not reproductive agents. Women, on the other hand, suffer from pollution, when she gives a birth to a child. Yet because of this

reproductive capacity, they should not be polluted by death. In this respect, there is a sexual division of ritual pollution: women suffer from birth and menstrual pollution while men suffer from death pollution. In addition, sexual division of auspiciousness and inauspiciousness is attached to these two kinds of pollution: the former is auspicious but the latter is inauspicious. When his wife gives a birth to a child, a man does not go to the temple for a few days, since he is supposed to share certain degree of birth pollution, in the same way as his wife shares death pollution from his parents to a certain degree. His wife undergoes a longer period of ritual pollution after giving a birth, just as he undergoes the gravest ritual pollution of death as a chief mourner. However, birth pollution is highly desirable while the death pollution is not.

Madan (1988), along with Marglin (1987), claims that auspiciousness is a progressive movement directed towards growth, life and the future, while inauspiciousness is a regressive movement directed towards destruction, death, and the past. Similarly, Good (1991), in his life-cycle ritual analysis, formulates a scheme composed of four elements: the wedding as auspicious and pure, the ritual for the ending of mourning as inauspicious but pure, birth and puberty ceremonies as impure but auspicious, and last, the funeral as both impure and inauspicious (1991: 209).

Good's focus of argument, however, is more on the dichotomous structure of the two levels, i.e. the auspiciousness / inauspiciousness on one level, and pure/impure on the other (cf. Good 1991: 210).

However, in the analysis of the ritual symbolism of the Nagarattars, I shall emphasize the clear sexual division of rituals between these two levels, and also stress the exclusive nature of

auspiciousness (*subam*) which is rather neglected in the central part of the arguments of the authors above mentioned.

Tiruvaadurai, the puberty ritual, and *padaippu* (ancestral worship) represent this exclusiveness in their rejection of the professional priest (i.e. Brahman *puroohita*). Although the Brahman *puroohita* is needed as funeral priest for purification (I shall discuss this in chapter 6), once purified, and the deceased has become an ancestor, there is no need for further purification. Therefore, as the desirable and pure agents, the ancestors are worshipped by the members of the lineage (mostly the members of the joint family). For this ritual, the chief ritual officiant is the eldest male while women are only the assistants: although the situation is auspicious, the ancestors are not really directly associated with procreation: being kin, they alone, cannot become the symbol of reproduction.

Exclusiveness of auspiciousness at the wedding is directly connected to procreation, on the other hand. At *muhuurtam*, when the bride receives the *taali*, the Brahman priest is requested to leave the house, as his presence is believed to be inauspicious. The *taali* and the *kaluttiru* are to be handled only by the close relatives, especially *sumangalis* or maternal uncles and their wives, since by being affines of the bride and the groom's families, they are auspicious and generate procreative symbols. Even in the rituals of *saandi*, although the Brahman priests do not disappear from the spot, the couple is surrounded by their close relatives, and the diamond *taali* is handled only by such people. In other words, the interactions of kin and affines as demonstrated in the wedding is strongly auspicious and pure as the representation of procreation.

The auspiciousness is also exclusive, expressed as the web of kinship in which professional specialists are avoided as unwanted

elements: although a Washerman, Muhuurta kaaran, and a Brahman priest are employed in the preliminary stage, they are unwelcome at the crucial moment, since they are not kin or affine. Auspiciousness is generated only from the close interaction between the kin and affine: since the kin cannot reproduce without affine, the presence of cross relatives i.e. the maternal uncle and cross-cousins, is essential in auspicious rituals.

In order to generate auspiciousness in the purest atmosphere, both kin and affines are needed to symbolize procreation, while at the funeral, the deceased should be looked after only by the family and the *pangaalis*. The auspiciousness of a *sumangali* is guarded and generated by the web of kin and affines and she functions as the mediator and adhesive between her kin (i.e. her father and her brother) and her husband and son.

- 4-1 Ramasamy gives *daanam* to the Brahmans on the eve of *saandi*.



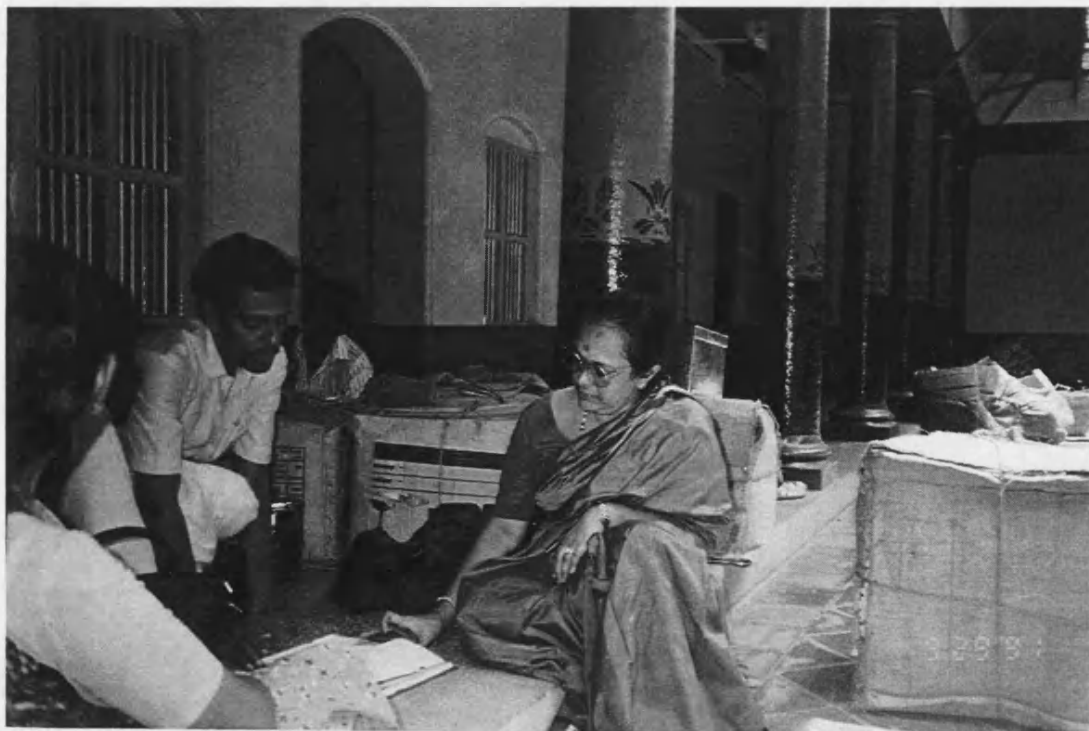
- 4-2 *Sumangalis* prepare for the rituals at the *kaliyaana viidu* (*ul viidu*).



- 4-3 *Sumangalis* decorate the ritual platform on the eve of *saandi*.



- 4-4 An *aacchi* checking the list of gift-giving with her 'agent'.



- 4-5 The officiant couple of *saandi* is surrounded by *sumangalis* who are their kin and affines.



4-6 The wife receives *siir* from her three brothers during the ritual of *saandi* (a photograph taken in 1970s)



4-7 *Sumangalis* inspect the *siir*.



- 4-8 A senior old woman who is related to the couple blows the conch shell before the couple worships the ancestors in the *ul viidu*.



- 4-9 Tying the diamond *taali* at the *saandi*. The couple is surrounded by their kin and affines. The man holding the *taali* is the husband's father's brother, and the man holding the plate is the husband's father's sister's husband.



4-10 Servants cleaning the vessels after a grand feast of *saandi*.



5

The economics of marriage**5-1 Economic difficulties of marriage**

When I began this research in January 1991, one pound sterling was worth approximately rs. 25 to 26. The Indian rupee was devalued by around 25 per cent in July 1991, which led to an acute price rise. While wages in semi-urban and rural areas remained almost unchanged, the cost of goods in these areas rose by up to 30%. During 1991, I stayed in Kaaraikkudi, one of the large towns in the Chettinadu area. At that time in Kaaraikkudi, a chauffeur earned rs. 750 to rs. 800 per month, a school teacher earned around rs. 1,500, and a college professor earned rs. 4,000 to 7,000 per month.

Although the middle income group would regard a college professor's salary as more than adequate, it would still be difficult for a family on this income to provide the necessary amount of dowry for their daughter. Anxiety over dowries was expressed by parents everywhere. Unless the daughter inherits most of the jewellery from her mother¹, the father has to make extra provisions. The situation could be quite difficult even for a well-to-do, middle-class Brahman family and of course, amongst the poorer sections, the problem is even more acute. I was told that a good number of unmarried girls are kept at home in Chettinadu, and that this practice

¹ Although most of the mother's jewellery is given to the daughter on marriage, a few items, such as the *taali* and *kaluttiru*, which are associated with her status as *sumangali*, cannot be relinquished until the mother's death. To lose them would signify the loss of her own auspicious status and so new ones are made for the daughter.

was particularly prevalent amongst the Nagarattars, although this statement is difficult to prove. The Nagarattars are generally regarded as a rich caste, but in reality this is not always the case. The standard amount of dowry among the Nagarattars is high, and this can create difficulties in finding partners especially amongst the poorer sections.

The following stories were collected during lengthy interviews while I was staying in Kaaraikkudi. They mostly originate from lower-middle class Nagarattars, who spoke of the difficulties they encountered when they were getting married. When I saw the vast discrepancy between their monthly income and the money required for a proper marriage, their problems become apparent and ^{this} went a long way towards explaining their parsimony in everyday life: it would be difficult to marry off a daughter unless money had been habitually saved over several years. The Nagarattars believe that money should only be lavishly spent on important functions, such as marriages, funerals, *saandi*, etc.. If they are poor, they eat cold rice with salt in order to save money for their daughter's marriage.

Case study 1: Saala is female, 22, unmarried and the sixth daughter of seven siblings.

When Saala's mother married Naagappan 42 years ago, he was unemployed and they survived on her dowry. Later they started a small 'mess'² using money from her dowry but any profits they made were lost through her husband's gambling. She brought one diamond *taali*, a *kaluttiru*, some other gold jewellery, and cash to the

²² Locally, people commonly use terms such as 'hotel' or 'mess' to signify a restaurant or an inn.

marriage. Saala did not know how much they had cost, but most of them were lost through her father's weakness.

Saala's mother had seven children. The second daughter worked as a nurse for central government but is currently employed as a typist. She started work at 17 and helped all her sisters acquire an education using her own income and money borrowed from her office and money-lenders. In this way she provided an education, food and clothes for Saala and managed to raise enough money for the third daughter to be married.

None of Saala brothers and sisters are married to relatives because they are too poor. They found partners either through friends or 'brokers'. Those who go to brokers are usually poor, and are unable to find anyone to arrange marriages for them. If the broker manages to create an alliance, he charges rs. 500 to both parties. The brokers do not make a profession out of finding people partners; all of them are Nagarattars and the job is only part-time.

In Saala's family, whenever one of the daughters got married, they received rs. 1,000 for Deepavali and rs. 500 for Pongal as a gift from the mother's house during the first year. The first, second, and third daughters received this money from their mother but by the time the fourth and fifth daughters got married, their mother had died and so the money was sent by their sisters.

Saala is very pessimistic about her prospects of marriage. "Nowadays, even a boy who earns below rs. 1,000, who is a temporary worker and without a degree, demands at least rs. 40,000. If he has a degree, he will demand between rs. 60,000 and 100,000. Even if a girl can raise rs. 40,000, there is no guarantee of a happy marriage. Yet people talk about marriage all the time in the village. If a girl is not married, people gossip about her. In the city, people

do not care. If a man is not able to make a woman happy, why should she marry? Even after marriage, the groom orders his wife to get things from her mother's house. Rather than being miserable in this way, I would ideally prefer to remain unmarried, and help my sisters, although I realize that it puts a woman in an untenable position."

She has been depositing money into the Life Insurance Cooperation every month for 4 years, and her sister Valli also deposits Rs. 1,000 annually. They plan to continue saving for 15 years so that they can live on the interest as their pension. They also deposit Rs. 54 per month in the Provident Fund. Saala, who has a Bachelor of Commerce degree, earns Rs. 650 per month working at the school where she has been for 4 years. She is also currently studying for the B.Ed. (teacher's training course) and M.A. by correspondence and if she manages to complete these courses, she will be able to earn Rs. 800 per month. Saala manages to save Rs. 237.30 in total (Rs. 100 is deposited in the bank, Rs. 83.3 in Life Insurance and Rs. 54 in the Provident Fund). She is financially independent and table 5-1 shows her monthly expenditure out of an income of Rs. 650. She adjusts the deficit by cutting some expenses each month. For example, she manages without entertainment or purchasing sweets and if her relatives bring her some wheat or rice, she manages without purchasing it for a few days.

After having 7 daughters, Saala's mother at last had a son. He went to school for 10 years and now at 20 years old, works in Madras. He has health problems, and finds it difficult to cope with night duties. However, Saala expects him to marry someone quickly and to receive at least Rs. 100,000 on his marriage from the bride's side as *maamiyaar siir danam* (cash payment to the bride's mother-

in-law before marriage). Out of this money, she would purchase *pattu sarees* (silk sarees), 1 sovereign of gold for the bride, and give a feast on the night of the wedding. In addition, she wants to give her second sister a large share of this money, as she has spent a great deal of money on her other sisters and she would also like to buy sarees for each sister. Any money remaining would be kept in the joint account of the couple.

Saala's maternal uncle is rich, but he has 5 daughters and so is unable to help Saala's family, which she understands. As maternal uncle, he gave each of his nieces Rs. 51 when they came of age, and at each Pongal, he still gives them rs. 11 each. N, the owner of the school where Saala works, gave Rs. 500 when they married.

N's wife's father, who was related to Saala's father, would regularly help Saala's family financially, but since he died, N's family has not continued their support. Saala's mother has two friends who also helped by giving Rs. 2,000 on the sisters' marriages. However, they do not help out as much now as they used to.

Saala understands that it is difficult for poor women to find marriage partners, but she still hopes to get married some day. It is necessary for a woman to be married in order to protect herself from scandals. A single woman is placed in the same category as divorcees who are likely to be a topic of gossip and who are shown little respect.

-----Table 5-1-----

Saala's monthly expenses³

expenditure	Rs.
rice	43.20
coffee and tea	15
sugar	10
vegetables	40
kerosene	30
wheat and gram(chickpeas) (4 grams, 1/2 kg each)	40
cooking oil	40
milk	100
fruit and sweets	20
electricity	12.50
loan (debt)	nil
gift exchanges	nil
education (correspondence course)	83.30(x12) ⁴
clothes	83.30(x12)
transportation (bus fare to visit relatives, etc.)	41.60(x12)

Savings

bank	100
L.I.C	83.30
P.F.	54
<hr/>	
total expenditure	796.20
monthly income	650.00
deficit	146.20
<hr/>	

³ Since Saala lives alone, the expenses are only for her.

⁴The Nagarattars calculate some of their finances on a yearly basis and so where I have had to divide the amount of money by twelve for the average monthly expenditure, I have placed 'x12' in brackets.

Case study 2: Umayaal is female, aged 35, unmarried and lives alone.

Umayaal's parents died several years ago, and she now lives alone in a quarter in her father's ancestral house. The quarter in which she lives has no electricity but the other side, occupied by her relatives, does, and she manages with the light which comes from their side at night. She has sold all of her mother's silver vessels and most of her other vessels, but she has set a few brass vessels aside in case of emergency. Her elder married sisters suggest that she marry at around rs. 50,000, but Umayaal does not know how she could possibly come up with so much money. A nearby Nagarattar Sangam (a caste association for the welfare of the community members) may give her around rs. 30,000 to rs. 40,000 if she is lucky enough to be selected from a large number of candidates⁵. But she will still need another rs. 10,000 to meet the expenses of a wedding.

Umayaal is a tailor and earns around rs. 300 per month. She still hopes to get married and has asked a marriage broker to find her a partner in Coimbatore where her relatives live. None of her relatives are willing to make the effort of trying to find an alliance for her because she is poor, and it has been suggested that her family depends on 'donations' from rich Chettiars. Couples and relatives sometimes visit the Chettiars with printed invitation cards asking for help. They take the cards with them to prove that their marriage is finalised because they cannot obtain any money before this.

⁵Nagarattar Sangam offers to help poor Nagarattars marry by offering money as the dowry. However, there are many candidates and so the chance of getting assistance is slim.

-----Table 5-2-----

Umayaal's monthly expenses:

expenditure	Rs.
rice	54 (10 kg)
sugar	10 (2 kg)
kerosene	15 (5 litre)
milk	30
vegetable	35
clothes	50 (x12)
<i>dhal</i>	30 (1/4 kg)
oil	20
wood	free (collects her own)
coffee	6
no electricity	
total monthly expenditure	250

Case study 3: Janaki is female, aged 27, unmarried, and works as a part-time teacher.

Janaki is 27 and is her parents' third child. She teaches part-time in a higher secondary school, and earns Rs. 800 per month. She gives all her wages to her mother taking no pocket money for herself. There are 8 members of her immediate family and they live in one half of a quarter in her father's ancestral house. She has nearly given up all hope of marrying because of lack of money.

Table 5-3 shows the monthly expenditure of Janaki's household. The amount is almost the same every month and so she was easily able to give me a detailed account. It is unusual for her family to spend anything extra unless there is a special function.

---Table 5-3-----

Monthly expenses for Janaki's household

Total income in Janaki's household: Rs. 3,100.

7 members eat together.

expenditure	Rs.
rice	350
coffee, tea, sugar	150
dhali (wheat, chickpeas, etc.)	160
salt, pepper	50
cooking oil	200
milk	175
vegetables, fruits	150
fish (twice a month)	25
sweets	10
gas	nil
electricity	80
kerosene and wood	100
education	50
transportation	30
clothes ⁶	125
entertainment	30
gift exchanges	30
repayments on loan	1,000
<hr/>	
TOTAL EXPENDITURE: 2,715	

At present, they are Rs. 35,000 in debt. They hope to repay the loan in one and a half years, as they expect Janaki's salary to increase and also to obtain a dowry on her brother's marriage.

Janaki's household has a few electric gadgets including an electric grinder, an electric mixer, and a black and white television set, which is typical of a moderately modernized household of the lower-middle class. However, despite the fact that Janaki works, she has not saved any money for her marriage, even though she feels that

⁶ One piece of clothing for everyone per year. They usually spend . 1,500 on the day of Deepavali.

marriage is essential for a woman.

"After a certain age, an unmarried woman will suffer. Even if she is 'pure', people will say she sleeps with men to explain the fact that she cannot marry. A woman should marry--it is better to be married and suffer hardships than remain a spinster. If she behaves properly and bears the hardships, the whole community will be sympathetic."

Janaki says that she has not saved anything for marriage. "How is it possible?" she says. "A husband should be able to support the family, but if I want a well-qualified boy with a degree, the dowry is far too expensive. A boy with a similar qualification to mine would demand at least rs.75,000 in cash, in addition to gold. Nowadays, rs.40,000 is needed for a 10th standard education, rs.45,000 for a 12th standard, rs.55,000 to rs.60,000 for a degree holder. For a postgraduate, rs.75,000 is required. In addition, *kaluttiru* is required as the status goes up. Diamond jewellery is also needed. As the cash payment increases, the number of gold sovereigns I should bring with me also increases."

5-2 Discussion 1: Is the system of dowry 'evil'?

When people criticize the dowry system they often cite the greediness of the groom's party who 'demand' cash payment for his family. However, as was seen in Saala's case, a vicious circle develops, especially in poor families. Although Saala has given up the idea of marriage through lack of money, she wants to be repaid the money she gave to her family when her young brother gets married and it is for this reason that she does not want him to marry for less than rs. 100,000. It would be hard for her and her sisters to

give up hope of getting money from their sister-in-law. However, finding an alliance for her brother will be difficult because he is not especially attractive in terms of qualifications or occupation and he also has health problems. Moreover, no woman wants to marry a poor man with many sisters as all girls know about the financial burden of marrying into such a family.

Srinivas, in his discussion of dowry in modern India, claims that there are two types - traditional and modern types of dowries. While the traditional type of dowry is regarded as the property of woman as Tambiah (1973a: 62) also maintains, the latter one is a payment to the groom's family (Srinivas 1984: 14). While the richer and higher strata of hypergamous castes paid huge sums by way of dowry to obtain desirable grooms, the poorer members of the lower strata even had to pay bride price, or have recourse to marriage by exchange, either direct or indirect (p.14).

Srinivas denounces modern dowry as a disease and deterioration as the groom's kin regard the wedding as an occasion for securing the 'many and much-desired products of modern technology' (p. 15). The reason why this 'disease' started, according to Srinivas, was that young men who had salaried jobs, or careers in the profession, were "scarce commodities" at the turn of the century, and their scarcity was exacerbated by the rule of caste endogamy and the need to marry a girl before she came of age (p. 11).

Although Srinivas's argument about the 'modern evil of dowry' corresponds to the stories widely talked about in modern India, his definition of old and new dowries is still confusing since, in a real setting, both appear simultaneously. According to Beck, 'dowry' can be differentiated from the property given to the girl by her natal family. She maintains that 'dowry' refers to an actual lump

sum of money demanded by the groom from the bride's family, as '*warata Tacanai*' (her spellings) while the general household gifts the girl receives are simply '*kuTukka veeNTiya murai*' (her spellings) 'that which she has the right to receive' (Beck 1972:327).

Discussing the urban setting of Madras Christians, Caplan also differentiates two types of dowry, groom-price and the woman's asset, i.e. *dowry* (his italics) and dowry (*stridhanam*, or *siirdanam*) (Caplan 1984: 217). Caplan maintains that in general, in south India, the practice of making cash offerings to the bridegroom's family is a comparatively new phenomenon. As Srinivas maintains, men who engage in white collar jobs were scarce as such posts were created only recently with the British colonial government. Therefore, such grooms were sought after as a scarce commodity and the bride's family started to pay cash to acquire such a groom. This has spread almost as a pan-Indian phenomenon although in the North, as Parry's Rajputs in Kangra exemplify (1979), a hypergamous tendency in the region creates more cash payment to the groom's side from the bride's natal family.

In South India, the tendency of cash payment is said to be not as predominant as that in the North in general, as both the bride and the groom's sides tend to share the expenses incurred in the wedding (cf. Beck 1972: 326). According to Caplan's Christian informants in Madras however, they still have to pay groom-price (what they call *dowry*, using the English term) because if they do not, their daughters will remain unmarried, and the endogamy restriction means that there are simply not enough suitable boys to marry. In addition, they maintain that the groom's side should demand cash payment because they have to recoup the investment in their son's education (Caplan 1984: 220).

The scarcity of highly qualified grooms has made them attractive and sought after merchandise in the marriage market, which goes a long way towards explaining the development of groom-price. However, naming caste endogamy as one of the reasons for this payment is less persuasive, as it differs from caste to caste. As Caplan maintains in the urban Christian setting, the better educated urban white collar Christians (especially the Protestants) do not insist on caste endogamy as long as the other party is a Christian and from a similar family background, i.e. well-educated, urban middle-class professionals, and they do not demand the groom-price. My research also supports this point (as I already discussed in chapter 2 concerning the intercaste marriage of a Vellalar oculist) since some well-educated, urban white-collar men tend to prefer equally well-educated woman, often dismissing caste endogamy, as is the case with the Vellalars and the Brahmans.

Caplan also maintains that attributing the demand for groom-price to the boy's parents 'recouping' their educational investment is not a persuasive argument, since the girl's parents also invest in their daughter's education in order to make her desirable and attractive in the marriage market (Caplan 1984: 220).

A more cogent explanation is that groom-price is compensation in exchange for the economic dependence of the bride after marriage as both Srinivas (1984:17) and Beck (1972: 230) maintain, since after marriage, both wife and children should be his dependents. Therefore, groom-price becomes the real 'dowry evil' in the case of poorer women who do not have the means to earn their own money, or to have their own assets. If their family adheres to caste endogamy, they may have to give up marriage after all. Among the Nagarattars, there are a number of unmarried women

living with their families as they are unable to meet the expense of marriage.

Since the requirement^e of education in a modern Indian setting is directly connected to earning power, even if a girl is a graduate, this does not necessarily bring her a good alliance, since after all, her income may be only good enough to feed herself. Unlike the urbanized Christians, Nagarattar women who are educated cannot always find grooms who are equally well-educated, as they practise strict endogamy. In an extreme case, a woman who is a college lecturer may marry a man with a 10th standard education.

However, in reality, the problem of marriage does not solely exist in the female's side. Sometimes this imbalance may be the other way round, i.e. a man may have to accept an offer from a family of lower status (I shall explain this case later). Marriage, like any other important transaction, does not always favour both parties. There is always much hope on both sides but they often suffer when they discover the gap between their aspirations and reality.

To put it in other way, groom-price may not always be the reason for the difficulties encountered by women in trying to find a suitable marriage partner. It may^{be} due to the unrealistic wish to get a desirable groom. For example, nowadays, the most desirable groom amongst the middle-class Nagarattars and below this category, is the high ranking government officer (IAS), or the white-collar employee who is working for a bank, or a prestigious insurance company⁷ which give various privileges and good salaries. Professionals such as doctors and engineers have always been popular for their status and good salary, especially among the middle class. However,

⁷ Working for L.I.C. (Life Insurance company) or for G.I.C. (General Insurance Company), gives the groom prestige equivalent to that of an I.A.S. officer, the highest government bureaucrat.

employees working for banks have the advantage of the availability of cheap loans which are not offered to even qualified professionals. A mere clerk in the bank can get cheap loans at the preferential interest rate of 4 per cent per year, although the amount he can borrow depends on his salary and savings. Therefore, such security and privileges, combined with the inflated expectation of getting a high-ranking groom, might have also increased cash payment to the grooms who are ranked much lower in the groom market.

Of course, the access to loans in addition to the stability the job offers, is of great appeal to the bride's party. It is said that even if a person is a mere clerk or sweeper, it is easy to obtain from outside loan agencies as well. Debt may be constant because of the many occasions for which loans are necessary. Even if the employee has built up a large debt through gambling, it is unlikely that he would be sacked. The job security is the real advantage of government service. It is possible to survive on loans in this way until retirement, when the employee has to take responsibility for his actions. However, salaries in India are generally low and would hardly cover not only large expenses such as the purchasing of a house or electrical gadgets but also cash gifts for relatives' weddings, or a man's own children's marriages, and so the availability of a loan is of great appeal to the bride's family. It is therefore understandable that in marriage transactions, the groom's party demands the maximum amount available from the bride's party, as it is the most important opportunity to secure a substantial fund for the nuclear family which is going to be established.

When I interviewed college girls, it became apparent that all the girls had a clear knowledge of groom-price, i.e. 'dowry evil' and expressed their dissatisfaction and anxiety about the high dowry their

parents would have to pay. "The dowry is like the curse of our caste", one middle-aged Nagarattar woman told me. She was from the top economic group but had to extend financial help marrying off some of her husband's poorer relatives. The richer they are, the more they are expected to help poor relatives.

However, as I state above, dowry is not the only concern in deciding marriage. If a boy is made two offers of marriage and the dowries are more or less equal, the groom's party will take other factors into account. Even a cross-cousin may not be always preferred by a boy in reality, and for an individual who decides on marriage, there are no 'decisive elements' in making alliances.

Sometimes, the groom's side is not primarily interested in the 'dowry', especially if the groom is wealthy. Correspondingly, the girl's side considers several factors aside from the income and profession of the groom. For example, education, and physical appearance seem to be crucial factors in choosing marriage partners for both parties. Generally speaking, in Southern India, skin complexion is the measure of 'beauty'. It is always easy to marry off a lighter-complexioned girl, and for a boy, it is a bonus to add to his qualifications. An unmarried Brahman girl told me, "My skin colour is medium among the Brahmans, but among the Nagarattars, it is in the fairer category. The Nagarattars in general are dark and so they admire fair skin very much. When offers of alliances come for me, my parents examine the photos and reject all the dark complexioned boys however good their qualifications are. The status of their jobs was equivalent to that of my family, engineers, doctors, etc. and so they would normally work in air-conditioned rooms. Imagine then that the boy is not exposed to the sun, and if he is still dark, he must be really dark. I would not like my children to have

darker complexions than mine."

I was told that it was usual for a qualified professional Nagarattar working abroad to prefer a bride who was not particularly rich but who had a light complexion rather than a rich girl with a dark complexion. I heard some 'Cinderella' type stories that came about as a result. A son working in the U.S., who was from one of the top ranked families, chose a girl of 16 whose complexion was the lightest among all the candidates, although her family could offer only a moderate dowry. The money was deposited in the girl's name in India since the amount of 'cash' offered in India is only nominal outside India. "My son was happy because he felt the girl was good-looking, which was more important than money, since he liked her. We were in a hurry to get him married and we were not interested in money."

Similarly, I came across an old but rich Nagarattar who said clearly that he married his wife not because of her money but because of his 'affection' for her. Since she was extremely fair, he wanted to marry her even though her family was not rich. "She did not bring much jewellery, diamonds, or *kaluttiru*, but I bought quite a lot for her after marriage."

On the other hand, I met a boy with an extremely dark complexion who was realistic about the quality of his future bride. In spite of his respectable job as a bank employee, he understood that he would have difficulty marrying either a rich girl or a fair complexioned girl. In another case, I was told that a rich boy married one of his cross-cousins even though she was extremely dark. His grandmother said to me with a big sigh, "She is a bright girl with good nature. But she is so dark, just like charcoal! But my grandson says he does not mind it: Why do you make such a big fuss

about complexion!? She is an MBA, working in a respectable company, complexion is not everything! So we had to give in.”

It can be seen that there are several factors that influence families trying to forge marriage alliances: education, appearance, salary, status, family background, as well as the number of brothers and sisters, property, etc. are all factors that are considered together and assessed by both parties. So although families with daughters to be married off lament that they will have to pay out high dowries, they do not need to do so if they are satisfied with a groom of lower qualification. Therefore, a girl who is in Saala's situation may be able to marry someone who earns half her salary. Umayaal may be able to marry if she does not mind marrying a non-Nagarattar.

The latter is less likely to happen, although stray cases have most certainly been taking place for centuries. For example, I was told about a story of a Nagarattar girl who married a Muslim since she was not able to afford the dowry. As an another alternative, some of the poorer girls are forced to remain unmarried like poor women of other high castes, as they do not want to sever their ties with their natal family. However, although they appear to keep their family status by not opting for intercaste marriage or eloping, the presence of unmarried, mature women at home makes it difficult for their brothers to marry, since no woman would be willing to marry a man who has unmarried sisters. Therefore, the family wants to marry off the daughter as quickly as possible in order to obtain a bride for the son, and in this sense, brothers depend for marriage on their sisters.

5-3 Discussion (2): Will a bad marriage lead to divorce?

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Most women I interviewed said that it is still preferable to get married and acquire the status of a married woman. *Sumangali* or 'the married woman' is the highest status of womanhood. A girl commented: "A woman is treated like a street dog unless there is someone to protect her. After her parents die, only her husband can protect her. He protects her from other men as it is a matter of his honour. The woman who does not belong to anybody is in danger because she falls prey to men."

Most of the girls I met said that they did not want their grooms to have bad habits such as drinking, gambling, smoking, or womanizing. However, there is of course a chance of having a husband who has such vices. The following case study tells of the disaster that befell a married woman, although she still speaks in favour of arranged marriages because of the financial support a woman can get from her natal family.

Case study 4: Muttammaal, who is 25 years old and married, has a child, and is presently studying a undergraduate course in a woman's college at Chettinadu.

Muttammaal is in her final year of a Master of Commerce course. 10 years ago when she married, her parents gave her Rs. 50,000 in cash, out of which Rs. 25,000 was her *siir danam* (her own property which is given from her natal family) and another Rs. 25,000 was *maamiyaar siirdanam* (cash payment to her mother-in-law). The money deposited in her name has been managed by her father. She brought 20 sovereigns of *kaluttiru*, 40 sovereigns of gold, 1.5 kg. of silver, and 2 *nahai* of diamond jewellery to the marriage as part of her own property. These amounts show that she is slightly above

middle-class, like Naacchiammai, who is married to a university lecturer.

Her husband did not prove to be worth the dowry as he had all kinds of vices. Soon after marriage, he started to live with another woman, and spent money on gambling and drink. He had a good job as a bank employee and so he had some money to spare. She could not bear his ways and so she returned to her parents' house with her daughter taking her jewellery and gold with her. Now she lives in Kaaraikkudi with her parents who objected to her leaving her husband and tried in vain to patch things up. She had not actually divorced him as her parents were still against it. Her husband sends her rs.1,000 only once every three months which is of course, far from sufficient for her and her child to manage on and so most of the money still comes from her parents.

After she returned to her parents' house, she started a course at college that she hopes will lead to a job in a bank. If this proves difficult, she wants to go for higher studies and become a lecturer. Muttammaal regrets her early marriage. She was young, and did not know the possible consequences. She was 15 at the time and so her opinion was not considered important by her parents, but she feels that a girl should wait until she is 21 before she gets married so that she would already have gained some maturity. Although she admits that her marriage was a failure, she still supports the idea of arranged marriages as she believes that if her parents and relatives had been more careful to check the character of her husband, this mistake would not have happened. This case actually demonstrates one of the advantages of arranged marriages: if the man has been chosen by her parents, the woman can return home to her parents whenever she wants, because they are to blame for the failure of the

marriage, and she can even stay there with her children. If, however, she chooses her husband herself, she loses the support of her family and so has no back-up if her marriage fails.

The girls I spoke to almost invariably disliked men with any of the four vices that they had singled out (womanizing, drinking, gambling and smoking). I asked men of other castes and almost invariably they said that these vices were common, especially among the men of the Nagarattars. One Brahman professor who was teaching in a college in Kaaraikkudi even said that quite a few Nagarattar boys were addicted to narcotics. "Since their parents have money, they do not bother to lead a disciplined life. They feel they can spend money as they wish. Most Nagarattar boys I have met have had this attitude." People who criticize these vices in the Nagarattars attribute them to their wealth since if they did not have an excess of money, they would not be able to cultivate such lifestyles and this view does indeed appear to have some validity. "Unlike the Brahmans, the Chettiyars have acquired money. It is not unusual for some of them to cultivate such habits." At the same time, another young professor who is a Nagarattar said, "People tend to tolerate vices if the man is rich. If he is not, people tend to be critical. Who cares if he has a concubine, or if he drinks, or gambles? People tolerate him if he is a rich man, because he can help others, donate a lot of money to the temples and build schools and hospitals."

Even if the wife is dissatisfied with her husband, the marriage contact rarely breaks down, as divorce is not regarded as a solution for women. Since remarriage is not customarily permitted among the Nagarattars, women who do divorce their husbands usually remain single for the rest of their lives. The worst prospect for a Nagarattar woman who divorces is the loss of her prestigious status

as *sumangali* and the shame it causes her natal family, while by accepting her and providing help, the woman's natal family can at least save the worst situation. Marriage as a social contract is unbreakable for the Nagarattars. I shall now discuss the content of the marriage contract among the Nagarattars.

5-4 Marriage as a contract

As Leach claims (1961b: 107-8), varieties of what we call 'marriage' can be brought together and roughly defined as a 'bundle of rights' which involves both the legitimation of offspring and access to the spouse's sexuality, labour, and property.

Among the Nagarattars, the marriage contract is ^amuch more well-defined contract than Leach's 'bundle of rights', and the following documents and contract papers are provided in every marriage.

1) The *muraichittai* (contract paper) is exchanged by both parties on the day of betrothal in which these detailed mutual promises are listed:

the amount of dowry (*siir danam* and *maamiyaar siirdanam*); the quantity of jewellery and gold; what the bride's party should do for the groom's party; what the groom's party should do in return; how much money is to be paid to the groom's party by the bride's party; how much is to be paid to the bride's party by the groom's party; what the bride's party should do on the first Pongal, Deepavali, on the 5th month of the pregnancy of the first child, and on the birth of the first child; the list of *saamaans* (goods) carried by the bride.

• Dowry

As I maintained above, when the English term 'dowry' is used in a modern context, it has rather a negative connotation since it is considered to be the obligatory cash payment made to the groom's family. It is said that the mother-in-law of the bride will use it for her own purposes; in particular, to marry off her daughter. Therefore, money which is given out of 'affection' (*periyam*) is not generally considered to be a 'dowry', by the South Indians. "Please give whatever you want to your daughter. It's completely up to you," would be considered a very generous attitude on the part of the girl's future father-in-law if expressed to her father during negotiations on the amount of dowry before betrothal, yet people say such an attitude is becoming very rare nowadays.

For most families, it is traditional for the parents to make known the amount of 'cash' that would exchange hands on marriage during preliminary negotiations. For example, when the girl's father or a relative goes to the boy's house to make an offer, he should present the amount in this way. "The girl will bring a dowry of rs. 10,000, and 40 sovereigns of gold. " After considering other factors such as the girl's family background, her physical features (her complexion etc.) and her qualifications etc., the boy's parents decide whether they believe it to be a good alliance. If they are taken with the offer, they may agree to go and see the girl (*pen paakka*), and at this point the betrothal is nearly fixed, although the boy is still given the opportunity to reject the girl after seeing her.

Among the Nagarattars, there are two kinds of cash payment from the bride's house. One is the conjugal fund given to the daughter as her own property (*siir danam*) and among the middle class and lower-middle class, it is pooled in the joint bank account

which needs the signature of both the husband and the wife. The other payment is the *maamiyaar siir danam*, which is made to the mother-in-law, as a sign of goodwill. Traditionally, Nagarattar women's main property consists of jewellery and gold although other items such as cash, various kinds of vessels and household utensils are also common. However there has been an acute rise in the phenomenon of cash payments since the 1960s. One senior Nagarattar remembers that when he got married, people never paid cash immediately. Instead, the groom was given papers, somewhat like a draft check by his father-in-law, and in time of need, he could go to his father-in-law and get the cash. However, the Nagarattar laments, "Nowadays people do not trust each other and if the money is not paid before the wedding, the mother of the groom would think nothing of cancelling the wedding!"

Concerning this relatively recent development of cash payment, a wealthy *aacchi* recalled that her family was partially responsible. "Formerly, cash payments had never exceeded 3,500 rupees. In 1961 when I got married, my mother gave me one lakh in cash along with other assets such as stock bonds and jewellery etc.. This started the competition of cash dowries, although cash carried by the bride remains with her, and her husband's family cannot touch it, but her husband increases it. Six months later, when one of my relatives married, she carried one and a half lakhs with her. Nowadays, a lakh has become the common denomination of cash payment." This *aacchi* belongs to the top group, and from the information she gave, it is possible to deduce that this kind of competitiveness amongst the top group may also have affected the upper-middle class, and gradually might have involved the lower

economic groups too⁸.

However, the payment made to her by her parents of one lakh was hers alone, since in the top group, there is no money transaction between the two parties, and everything the bride brings to the marriage is regarded as her property. Normally, wealthy families make a separate 'file' for each member of the family and thus the bride's property as a whole is in her name (see 5-11 for further discussion of the 'file' which is involved in the forming of a woman's property). In this group, the payment of the mother-in-law does not normally take place. According to them, they are not interested in monetary gain but in getting an alliance with a good family with a good reputation. Another reason could be that a daughter is regarded as the representative of her natal family, and the chances of her own assets still being in control of her natal family is large. Therefore, demanding some cash payment may be considered to be a disgrace. Moreover, as the bride carries a large sum of assets as her own, her contribution to her conjugal family may be considered to be far larger than the immediate cash payment to the groom's family.

On the other hand, the *maamiyaar siir danam* which is paid in cash, seems to have originated in the 'goods' given to the mother-in-law (*maamiyaar saamaan*) as an expression of goodwill, since there are some *muraichittai* which still record goods for the mother-in-law. If goods are given to her, no cash payment is made. In other words, payment replaces the exchange of goods.

Sir danam remains as the bride's fund. This fund remains in her name or sometimes is put in the joint account she shares with her husband. The groom has no access to the fund if he divorces her,

⁸ For the discussion of the increase of cash payments, see section 5-7.

nor does he have any right to the bridal goods or jewellery she carried with her.

Jewellery and Gold

In August 1991, the price of gold per sovereign was around rs. 3,192. One sovereign is 8g. Therefore, 50 sovereigns are worth approximately rs.159,600. At this time, the cost of silver was approximately rs. 74 per 10 g.

In most Hindu families, the major part of a woman's property consists of gold jewellery. Among the Nagarattars, it is has even more importance. As soon as a girl is born, the parents start to collect gold jewellery. Gold is most favoured as it is a safe investment against inflation, or so it is thought. If a woman wants instant cash, she may take her gold ornaments to a jewellery shop, where the shop owner will weigh it, and pay her according to the day's price for gold. Thus, it is the weight of each ornament which counts.

In South India, the *taali* is the symbol of married status, and no woman removes it until the death of her husband as it is considered to be bad luck. There is only one *taali* for every woman. However, rich Nagarattar women change *taali* sometimes, since they have a few. Normally, the woman wears one *taali* which she will have worn on her wedding day. It is also called *tiru-mangaaliyam* since it is the symbol of auspiciousness (*mangalam*) with the image of Lakshmi (the goddess of wealth) in the centre and a very small ruby on it. In addition, another *taali* such as an oil bath *taali* (*ennei taali*) is given along with *kaluttiru*, a necklace with several large hand shaped gold ornaments. Both the oil *taali* and *kaluttiru* have the centre piece of Lakshmi with a red spot, since this is the most

essential part of *taali*. The idea of oil bath *taali* is that when they take an oil bath every week, they wear the oil bath *taali* first and remove the normal *taali* since not wearing any *taali* even momentarily is considered a bad omen. According to one middle-aged *aacchi*, the oil is not good for the gold, and so a simpler and smaller *taali* is worn to bathe. This is obviously wrong, since gold is not affected by oil. According to one senior Nagarattar man, the *taali* suffers wear and tear because the women wear them constantly,^{So} that the wastage of the *taali* (normally it is around 0.5 g or so) should be recovered at least every 4 or 5 years: "The *taali* should be maintained at the same weight, but some will ask for more gold to be added when it is sent to the goldsmith." In the meantime, the women are supposed to wear something around their necks and so a replacement or another *taali* is a practical way to be consistent with the ideal that a married woman should always wear a *taali* with a gold chain around her neck⁹.

"In our caste, *taali* has always been put on a gold chain, since we feel that it's necessary to protect it with this chain. At the wedding, the *taali* is already set in a gold chain and hung around the neck by the groom after the *kaluttiru* is tied around the neck¹⁰. Among other castes, the yellow thread of the *taali* is changed into a

⁹According to a Smartha Brahman woman, they have two *taali* : one piece is given by the groom's family and the other by the bride's family. However, in their case, both are set on one thread for the wedding, and are worn together, or one of the pieces is kept in a safe.

¹⁰ As I explain in the next chapter, the *kaluttiru* is tied around the neck with yellow thread, and tying this is the major ritual of the wedding.

gold chain later¹¹. Therefore, women of non-Nagarattar caste would wear their *taali* with yellow thread until the chain was ready. Setting the centre piece into the chain takes only a few minutes at the shop, and in the meantime, the woman merely wears the yellow thread. We don't like it. A woman should never remove her *taali* once she puts it on while her husband is alive. That's why we provide other *taalis* so that she can leave her main one at the goldsmith's for a few days. Among other castes, a *taali* was only three small gold pieces which were placed into a mere yellow thread, and they used to change the thread once a year. It is only recently that other castes have started to use gold chains, too. But we do not like to remove the *taali* for even a single moment. A wife should also wear the *taali* at its original weight, which should always be the same, or even more!"

However, as I describe in the next chapter, the most important ritual item at the *muhuurtam* is not the *taali*, but the *kaluttiru*. The *kaluttiru* is a special ornament used only by the Nagarattars as a symbol of a woman's wealth. It is customarily taken from the bride's house to the groom's house one day before the wedding. The gold for the *kaluttiru* is handed over to the goldsmith in the bride's house, and the goldsmith hits the gold with his hammer symbolically before he takes it to his house to make it into a *kaluttiru*¹².

¹¹ Those who are not well off keep on wearing their *taali* with yellow thread. However, since it gets dirty, the thread is changed every year, just like the *puunul* (white thread of Brahmans which signify the status of the twice-born, a high caste).

¹² Even if there is no *kaluttiru* to be handed over, the Asari is still called in and a piece of gold is hit by his hammer, and then added to the gold of the *taali*.

The role of the Asari is thus crucial for women. However, the Asari is considered to be inauspicious. This may be because he

The gold piece is then combined with the *taali* later.

The groom's party collects the unassembled *kaluttiru* from the bride's family on an auspicious day. The assembling of the *kaluttiru* is strictly a job for a man on the groom's side, and can only be done by the elderly males of the groom's family. They get together, and each one applies the turmeric (yellow paste, and symbol of auspiciousness) many times until the thread becomes unbreakable.

Since *kaluttiru* includes the *taali*, the symbol of *sumangali*, breaking the cord is an inauspicious omen. Both *kaluttiru* and *taali* are associated with *sumangali*, and consequently even an elderly woman who is over 80 would never part with her *taali* or *kaluttiru*. If she dies as a *sumangali*, both the *taali* and the *kaluttiru* would be handed down to her daughter or granddaughter. If she becomes a widow, both the *taali* and the *kaluttiru* are melted and the gold is given to her daughter.

The severing of the cord is extremely inauspicious as it

appears either for making a gold ornament or melting it, i.e. when a woman becomes a widow. Another explanation may be the sacred thread (*puunul*) he wears. A middle-aged Nagarattar man told me: 'Asaris are inauspicious since they wear the *puunul* like the Brahmans.' I could not pin down the specific reason for the inauspiciousness of the Asaris.

In any case, whatever the reasons, for him to be the first person or thing a man sees on leaving his house is considered a bad omen. A middle-aged woman asked her Asari not to come before 4 o'clock one day so that her husband who was leaving on a business trip would not see him on his way out.

"Seeing a black cat crossing on your way is very ominous. Similarly, seeing the Asari when you are away from home is bad. Brahmans like black cats and keep them at home. But we do not like cats. They are inauspicious."

symbolizes the death of the woman's husband, and an accidental break of the cord before marriage becomes highly significant for both parties. Leaving the job to the males of the groom's side is believed to be the safest way for both parties. First, by being the groom's party, they cannot hope for the bride to become a widow. Second, by being elder males who are responsible for the prosperity of the house, they have every reason to protect the groom, and are thus protectors of the *taali*. Third, because they are males, they would not be jealous of the wealth and happiness of the bride. Both parties are afraid that the women of the groom's side may unknowingly cast the 'evil eye' upon the *kaluttiru* if they are dissatisfied with their lives. Since it is to be worn by the bride, a woman of the other party, the women of the groom's side prefer to leave the job to their men in order to avoid misunderstandings. The ritual significance of the broken thread is grave; the *kaluttiru* is worn only by the *sumangalis* and the breaking of the cord is highly inauspicious. Since the welfare of the bride depends on the life of her husband, it must never be allowed to break.

The *kaluttiru* pieces are joined together with strong white thread. Two elders unravel a length of about the width of the outstretched arms, fold it into three, and weave it into a chain. The thread is soaked in turmeric water, and should be strong enough to sustain the weight of 34 gold pieces. It is then folded in half, making a length of 21 *paahai*, which is about the length of the outstretched arms. The gold pieces are threaded onto it, and it is then knotted at both ends.

The *kaluttiru* is very rarely used. After the wedding, it is kept in a safe. Traditionally, it is worn in the wedding ceremonies and *saandi* of close kin and affine. For the *saandi* of a woman's husband,

the wife would wear the *kaluttiru* along with a new diamond *taali*. One middle-aged Nagarattar woman said to me, "Other castes criticize the *kaluttiru* as a vulgar ornament, but to view the *kaluttiru* as an ornament is a mistake. It's significance lies in the fact that it is a woman's property, and she only wears it on very important ceremonial occasions."

Along with gold, the most valuable items amongst a woman's property are her diamonds. Although almost all married women above middle class wear diamond studs and sometimes a nose decoration (*mookkutti*), these are taken for granted and do not count as sets among the Nagarattars. Because diamonds are the most valuable assets of women, their selection is considered to be of the upmost importance. The size of diamond bought is dependent on the budget - obviously, larger stones tend to be more expensive and so people choose smaller stones and ask the goldsmith to set them in traditional designs.

Diamond jewellery is considered, in general, an essential for Indian women above the middle class and at least one piece of diamond jewellery is given to a marrying daughter unless the family is extremely poor. In Tamil Nadu, diamond is particularly associated with Brahmans and Chettiyars since these two castes used to be more affluent than others. The stone is believed to have strong powers and so special precautions are made when they are purchased. One Brahman woman said to me, "We always buy our diamond jewellery from a jeweller who is well known to us. Even if they are very tiny pieces of jewellery such as a pair of studs with small diamonds, we would not purchase them straight away, but inquire into the history of the diamond. If it was ever in the possession of another family, we need to know what kind of family they were. If

the diamond has been worn by an unhappy woman, we would never take it, no matter how beautiful it may be. When we are not sure about the history of the diamond, we borrow it, put it under our pillow and sleep for 3 nights or so. If you do not have bad dreams, the diamond is acceptable. If you have bad dreams, you return it."

Diamond is the most precious of stones, and has been so for centuries. Therefore, a piece of good diamond jewellery may not necessarily be a new one. Because diamond is the hardest material in the world and outshines other stones with its purity and clarity, the stone is believed to have *shakti*, the power. Thus diamond can work positively, making the owner prosperous, or it can work negatively because of the unhappiness of the previous possessor, and may cause the new owner harm. Even if the stone is new, people still prefer to buy from a jeweller who has had a long standing relationship with the family. If a man wants to be successful as a diamond merchant, he must also be pious and honest. For the local people these qualities are almost synonymous with the quality or worth of his diamonds. In estimating the value of the diamond, the cut, colour and clarity are taken into account as is the resale value.

According to the Brahman woman, the people of her caste care for the 'spiritual' aspect of diamond while the Chettiyars only consider its commercial value. "Each diamond has a history, in our opinion. Even if the stone is new, it has to undergo a long process before it becomes a piece of jewellery. Since it is more valuable than other stones, people take care of it more in the process. That is why it acquires more power and has been important throughout history. Beautiful diamonds circulate from person to person. Normally, if the family is well off, jewellery is handed down from mother to daughter and then to the granddaughter. If it is diverted from this

line, there is usually a good reason."

Jewellers buy diamond jewellery and then sell it to their clients. Even if it is second hand, this jewellery is traded at the price of gold and diamond of the current market. But of course the purchase of the jewellery depends on the taste of the client who may prefer the design and size of old jewellery and choose it for this reason rather than for its value on the 'antique market' in Europe (cf. Spooner 1986: 225). Diamond is very expensive, but because it retains or increases its value, it is a highly favoured investment.

According to the Brahman woman who gave me this information, one renowned English jeweller used to visit her mother every year to hear . . . stories about diamonds. "He used to listen to my mother's stories about famous diamonds and even said to me that if someone wants to know about diamonds, it is best to ask a South Indian Brahman woman."

From this woman's point of view, however expensive a particular piece of diamond jewellery may be, it is worthless if it has a sad history. "The Chettiyars do not consider the spirituality embedded in the diamond. They will simply take one that has a good value."

However, borrowing jewellery and sleeping with it underneath the pillow seems to be the accepted custom among the Nagarattars as well. I often saw the Nagarattars taking jewellery from the jeweller and then returning it after a few days. One middle-aged *aacchi* once said to me that she returned one set of jewellery after a few days because she didn't like it. It seemed that she took the custom of 'testing' the jewellery for granted, and I discovered that this custom was even practised in Madras.

While I was visiting a Nagarattar family, they called a jeweller

whom they knew and asked him to leave a pair of diamond earrings. The jeweller obliged and the family returned them after two or three days. In the meantime, the *aacchi* and her family members had examined them to see if they liked them.

This kind of relationship between a jeweller and his customers is possible only after they have developed mutual trust over a long period of time. Similar relationships occur between clients and goldsmiths. People tend to buy from a particular merchant and employ a particular goldsmith in order to avoid mishandling and cheating. This strong bond which comes about because of a woman's property may contribute to what the Brahman woman called the 'spirituality' of the diamond.

Davenport (1986: 108) discusses the difference between ordinary commodities (of economic value only) which are exchanged at markets and items which can only be exchanged in restricted ritualized contexts (i.e, those which have spiritual value). He shows that among the Eastern Solomon Islanders, the spiritual value of an item has a dual association. First, it is associated with human life itself (among the Eastern Solomon islanders, human sacrifice takes place in a very important ritual transaction). Second, the intensive labour and time invested to make the object refined and beautiful, which are thought to be the fruits of an inspired aesthetic accomplishment, is associated with the supernatural.

Yet as Davenport demonstrates, the spiritual value of an item cannot be separated from the intrinsic value which results from the material out of which it is made and the labour that went into forming it. These commodities are then invested with spiritual value through either the application of aesthetic skills or the taking of human life, and it is only after this that the object (or activity) can

become a representation of the sacred and spiritual (Davenport 1986: 108).

For the South Indians, religiosity (*bhakti*, or devotion) is equivalent to their hard work in creating something. The difference in the relative statuses of goldsmiths, silversmiths, and blacksmiths in South India can be explained by the value of the commodity they handle and the amount of labour they subsequently put into transforming that commodity into an item. Thus, because diamonds are the most expensive precious stones, and hence people put in more effort and labour into making them 'fine', they are believed to be the most powerful. This gives the explanation behind the Brahmans claim that each diamond has a 'history'.

Concerning the artistic workmanship of jewellery, a Brahman woman told me about a ring which was given to her by her maternal uncle. It was made of gold and small rubies, but since it was very delicate, one of the fine lines of the decoration was broken, and their regular goldsmith was called in to repair it. "When he saw my broken ring, he was struck with amazement, and whispered, clasping his hands: 'Oh God, this was created by a person with strong *bhakti*. Nowadays, nobody would be able to make such a fine ring! I can mend this for the time being, but I would not recommend you to repair it anymore if it breaks again, because nobody can repair this completely and it will damage the fine work.'"

This Brahman woman regards jewellery, especially diamonds, as essential items among a woman's property because of this spirituality. However, this spirituality does not exclude the economic value, as Davenport correctly argues.

Merchant-bankers view investments in jewellery, especially in diamonds, as very sensible. When the Indian rupee was devalued in

the summer of 1991, the shop of a renowned diamond merchant in Kaaraikkudi became very busy because people were eager to purchase diamonds before they suffered from sharp inflation.

Bayly (1983: 402-3), discussing 18th to 19th century North Indian mercantile activities, cites the hoarding of gold and jewellery as a means of sensible investment in those days. When a merchant of Meshed in Iran decided to retire to Benares in 1786, for example, he carried his capital in the form of eighty pearls. For similar reasons, high officials at the Indian courts bought jewellery, as it made it more difficult for the ruler to confiscate their property if they lost office.

The Nagarattars count diamond jewellery in sets when they are given to their daughters as their property on marriage. *Nahai* usually refers to jewellery in general, but among the Nagarattars, one *nahai* means a diamond necklace set in gold. Two *nahai* means a gold necklace with diamonds and a set of diamond bangles set in gold, and three means the addition of *onæennei taali*. Giving one's daughter three *nahai* would demonstrate that the family is upper-middle class.

The gold is referred to in terms of the number of gold sovereigns given to the girl on her marriage. In general, the minimum a woman would receive is 30 sovereigns. Middle-class women receive between 30 and 50, upper-middle class women receive between 70 to 100, while those from the upper class receive more than 100 sovereigns in addition to other property¹³. The

¹³ This rate is higher than those found in other castes. For example, a Brahman woman who married in 1986, said that she had brought 50 sovereigns of gold in her dowry. However, she is constantly annoyed by her father-in-law who tells her that another of his daughter-in-laws brought 130 sovereigns of gold. Since she said she used to be called a 'rich girl' by her classmates while she was at

richest families can give a very large number of gold sovereigns - one woman told me that her *kaluttiru* alone weighed 101 sovereigns.

The more jewellery they give the better, although the upper class does not seem to be so keen on jewellery nowadays. One upper-class Nagarattar woman said, "My daughter told me that she doesn't want much jewellery. She says she won't often have the opportunity to wear them when she goes abroad. So we gave her only 100 sovereigns and three *nahais*. However, she plans to run a computer company, so she was given some of the fund, real estate, and stock bonds from several companies for this purpose."

However, most other Nagarattars still think that an increase of jewellery is equivalent to increasing their property. They invest in gold because it is the easiest commodity to sell in times of need. The meagre amounts that are saved daily are spent on jewellery as soon as enough is acquired because it is a simple and dependable way of beating inflation. Historically, gold and silver has also been credited with the power of transforming and enhancing the human body, as witnessed by their use in various forms of traditional medicine (Bayly 1986: 291).

Aside from the collection of gold and silver items, the Nagarattars also collect other metals such as brass, copper, stainless steel, etc., the heavier metals are considered better. Shop-keepers price their silver and brass, and even their stainless steel goods, by weight. Jewellers handle even the tiniest fragment of gold with great care, and a delicate balance is used to weigh amounts as small as

school, and her wedding attracted 3,000 guests, the amount she carried may not be especially low. However, according to her, even though her father-in-law is rich and does not need her jewellery, taking a lot of jewellery is a status symbol for both sides, and that is why her father-in-law is concerned about the amount of jewellery that his daughters-in-law have.

0.01-0.03 g which may be a result of wastage or excess. Each piece of gold jewellery is carefully priced according to weight, and it is this rather than the design that affects the price.

The jeweller records the weight of the gold used for the jewellery on a slip of paper in front of the customer in addition to the current price of the gold on that particular day of purchase. If the customer wants to exchange the item for something else, the jeweller is happy to oblige. If the customer wants to return the goods they will be bought back at the market value of that particular day.

The care taken with tiny fragments of gold has to be understood within the context of the customer's attitude: gold may well form a large part of his assets. Gold jewellery is useful because it can be sold at any time at the current market price and it can be worn and enjoyed in the meantime. If a man loses his money through business, as a last resort he can fall back on his wife's assets in the form of jewellery. It is for this reason that husbands are well informed and consulted prior to the purchase of jewellery. Stock bonds or even bank notes are ultimately seen as nothing but paper which may lose value due to inflation, but jewellery and precious metals can be instantly converted into cash and are relatively strong against inflation. In addition, any item made from these metals (whether it be a bangle, a chain, a ring, a plate, or a bar), can be displayed as 'property' and demonstrate the status of the family, and as such would be considered 'useful'.

The Nagarattars' value-system is largely contingent on usefulness. Their love of jewellery is rooted in their belief that it is a good investment. People say the best diamonds are available only in Chettinadu because they will only invest in the highest quality and

are only interested in the best quality as an investment¹⁴. Yet it is rare for people to say that the Nagarattars have good taste. Talking about themselves, one Nagarattar scholar said to me, "People say sarcastically that the Nagarattar women decorate themselves just like the Koravas, a Gypsy caste, who wear rugs but always decorate themselves with many gold ornaments."

Each Nagarattar house in Chettinadu has a particular goldsmith (*tattaa*) who is called to their house for making jewellery. When they call him to their house, he weighs the gold there, and weighs it again when he comes back with the finished jewellery. An elderly Nagarattar woman told me that in the olden days, when the Nagarattars wanted a number of trinkets to be made for their daughter's marriage, they would employ several goldsmiths, give them food, and make them work in their own house for a few weeks until they had finished all the jewellery. On leaving, the goldsmiths were submitted to a body search. This is a normal procedure which has probably been practised for centuries. Nagarattars try to prevent the gold being stolen by the goldsmith while he is making the jewellery. As another precaution, the Nagarattars always make jewellery with 22 carat gold so that they can identify the genuineness by its colour. When I asked a goldsmith to make a ring for me with 18 carat gold, he flatly refused. He said that no goldsmith would do this in Chettinadu as it would ruin his reputation.

¹⁴ According to Brahmans, the Nagarattars are not interested in 'coloured stones' such as rubies, garnets, emeralds, and sapphires because they are not such a good investment. It is customary for the Brahmans, on the other hand, to give their daughters several pieces of jewellery containing coloured stones.

Literally, *pattu saree* means simply silk *saree* but in Tamil it refers to the Kancheepuram *saree*, which is distinguished from an ordinary 'silk *saree*' which they pronounce in English. While a 'silk *saree*' would refer to either a non-Kancheepuram silk *saree* or a synthetic *saree* made in Japan or Malaysia, i.e. an expensive 'foreign' item, '*pattu saree*' signifies a higher grade of silk *saree*. It is made of silk, usually handwoven, is thick and heavy in weight, and is embroidered with *jali* (silver thread) of golden colour. An authentic *pattu saree* is heavier, because it contains genuine silver thread with embroidery on the wide borders, while the cheaper *pattu saree* is lighter.

The giving of *pattu sarees* is essential on important ceremonial occasions. People assess the status of the host of the function by noting the quality of the *pattu saree*. Since women are normally well-versed in the quality and price of *sarees*, any woman who gives cheap *sarees* will suffer ruthless criticism behind her back. Watching a video of her relative's *saandi*, one middle-aged woman says, "The *sarees* are all only embroidered on one side and are, all in the same colours - they won't have cost more than Rs. 1,500 each - cheap ones!"

If a *saree* is embroidered on one fringe, it costs around Rs. 1,500-2,000, but if both fringes are embroidered, it costs more than Rs. 2,500. For the wedding of a rich girl, her mother-in-law would purchase a much more expensive one which may cost as much as Rs. 6,000, in order to express the family's 'affection' for the girl. For example, at a grand wedding I recently attended, a girl wore a *saree* which cost Rs. 4,800 at the reception on the eve of the wedding, two more *sarees* of around Rs. 6-7,000 on the day of ^{the} wedding, and one *saree* of an equivalent cost at another reception which was held later in Madras. (These *sarees* worn by the bride are provided by the

groom's side and so they are careful in choosing gorgeous looking *sarees*.) Because of the popularity of shooting videos at such functions, relatives and friends can assess each other's *sarees* easily. Wearing an expensive looking *saree* is therefore a matter of showing status.

A woman from North India who runs a *saree* shop in Madras said, "Here in Southern India, people think of nothing but *pattu sarees*, but it's rather boring. It is like a uniform. The pattern is very simple - all have either one or two borders. Unfortunately, South Indians do not appreciate the delicate and complicated patterns of other *sarees* such as the Benares *saree*, and see it as an insult if *pattu sarees* are not worn at weddings."

On ceremonial occasions, men are given cheaper gifts such as a *veetti* (loin cloth), shirt, and a pair of trousers which will probably not cost more than Rs. 250-500, while their wives receive a *pattu saree* or at least a silk *saree*. Since the gift should be given to a couple, even if a man has only male children, he should still buy *pattu sarees* for his daughters-in-laws. Thus the most expensive aspect of gift giving is the necessity of giving these *sarees* to women, whether it be the groom's or the bride's side. The demand for *sarees* is rapidly increasing. It is a major currency in the Nagarattar's gift exchange market. Special gifts are delivered from the wife's 'mother's house' often in the form of *sarees* for weddings, *saandi*, and puberty ceremonies. In addition, annual celebrations such as Pongal and Deepavali are also occasions when *sarees* should be given. However, it is at Deepavali that the sales of *sarees* sharply increase when the *saree* shops are packed full of customers. One Nagarattar woman who lives in Singapore lamented, "Our female relatives in the villages will only have *sarees* as their gift. They don't appreciate

perfume or chocolates. I cannot afford to go back to India as frequently as I would like because they expect a *saree* gift on each occasion."

The life of a *saree* is short lived when compared to the lasting nature of gold and silver. *Pattu sarees* will last between 10 to 15 years nowadays. In the past, they would last for up to 20 to 30 years because the materials were well-woven in comparison to the modern machine-woven ones. When the *saree* is worn out, the *jali* is melted and the gold and silver is sold. Nowadays, there are few *pattu sarees* that contain much gold and silver. The golden thread is not made of *jali*, but of metal threads.

Silk *sarees* last around 5 to 10 years, and synthetic and cotton *sarees*, 4 to 5 years. *Sarees* do not have a long life because the tropical climate in India means that people often sweat excessively so that *sarees* need to be washed frequently. In addition, the *sarees* are not looked after particularly well--instead, they are usually folded in piles and stored in a steel bureau with other materials, which has a detrimental effect on the silk. Girls often wear their mother's old *sarees* when attending a wedding in which they do not play an important role, but if the wedding is that of a close relative and a girl does have to play a major role, then she should wear a new one. A young unmarried girl told me: "If I wear my mother's *saree* it will look really old and shabby, and so I should not wear it on an important occasion as it would cause my parents shame. For my parents' sake, especially for my mother's, I should wear a gorgeous *saree* and glittering golden bangles and earrings. These days, I mostly wear imitation gold since it looks more gorgeous. Otherwise, people would say, 'What is her mother thinking of? She looks so shabby!'"

Despite the fact that the life of a *saree*, unlike jewellery, is very short, the purchasing of *sarees* has increased. It is considered to be a status symbol to wear different, good quality *sarees* on several important occasions as it reflects not only the woman's status but the financial status of her whole family.

Clothes are part of a person's identity. Clothes imply the social category to which he or she belongs. They define age, sex, and occupation, for example. In India, they can imply purity or pollution, auspiciousness or inauspiciousness, and illuminate the relationship between two parties if they are exchanged as a gift. Historically, from the symbolic point of view, transactions in clothes widely imply a pledge of future protection (Bayly: 1986: 288). Village women reserved particularly auspicious *sarees* (i.e. colourful silk *sarees*) for important days, and the king used to accept clothes on particular days as special tributes (Bayly 1986: 292). Silk is considered to be a far purer and more formal a material than cotton because of the former's rarity and economic value.

Bayly claims that transactions in clothes took place quite commonly just as grain could transfer value and honour in a way money could not. Clothes in comparison with grain or cooked food were considered to be a safer medium of transaction as they lasted longer but they did not create the same immediate bond as sharing a meal would (Bayly 1986: 302). For a man and a woman to exchange pieces of cloth does more than symbolize an act of marriage, but it is a central part of the ritual of marriage. For most central Indians and Southern Brahmans in the last century, silk was essentially the dress for ritual and worship, and this practice extended to other ritualized cultural performances. Since silk was considered to be much purer ritualistically than cotton, it was not considered necessary to wash

silk clothes before ceremonial use, although for a cotton cloth, washing was necessary (Bayly 1986: 289).

Weddings are the most important occasions for the giving of clothes as gifts. The bride's side give a number of gifts to the groom's side in the form of clothes (to the groom, his parents, sisters, brothers, etc.) and the groom's side also gives *sarees* and other clothes to the bride in exchange for the bride's use after marriage.

Even after marriage, the wife's family give clothes to the newly married couple, and this custom continues even after the birth of children. Although this would appear to imply that the party of lower rank always gives gifts to the party of higher rank (in the same way as the king accepts a tribute in the form of cloth from his subjects), this is not necessarily the case, since during Deepavali, employers are expected to give their servants a new set of cloth for the next year.

2) The *moy panam eludal* (the attendance record) is signed by all the relatives as soon as the *muhuurtam* (the major ceremony of the wedding) is over and the attendant traditionally pays 25 paise (1/4 rupee). *Moy* means payment, and according to the Nagarattars, its collection is quite commonly practised among other South Indian castes for weddings, puberty rituals and funerals in order to cover the cost of the expenses incurred by the function (cf. Dumont 1983: 231, Good 1991: 105-7, 120). However, among the Nagarattars this collection of money does not have real economic meaning, but is merely treated as token money.

3) The '*Isai padimaanam*' (mutual agreement) is signed by the fathers

of the bride and the groom as soon as the *muhuurtam* (the auspicious moment, i.e. tying the *taali*) is over. The form is fixed and is written in a special notebook : '____'s son whose lineage Shiva temple is ____ married to ____'s daughter whose lineage Shiva temple is ____, on the date of ____.'

Until the early 1960s, the *moi panam eludal* and the *isai padi maanam* were recorded on palm leaves, but nowadays, special notebooks are used that are sold in Chettinadu.

5-5: How to arrange a marriage

a) Going to see the girl.

It is usual among the middle-class and upper-middle class Nagarattars for alliances to be offered either through relatives or friends. When a potential candidate arises, information is passed through the family and friend network and the larger the network the more likely the family is to make a good alliance. It is acceptable for the boy's or the girl's side to suggest the possibility of an alliance, and then the two sides will acquire information about family background, education, qualifications, etc. and whether the girl is physically attractive. Some members of the family go to see her in a gathering without letting the bride's party know. Temples, relatives' or friends' houses are the commonest places for this to occur especially when a function is being held. Once the offer of an alliance is made, it becomes difficult to reject.

If the girl's side takes the initiative, her elders visit the boy's house to gain information and begin negotiations. In addition to giving a detailed account of the girl's background, they also discuss the amount of dowry (cash, sovereigns of gold and diamond

jewellery) they are prepared to give her. In addition, the girl's property in terms of sovereigns of gold and diamond jewellery is discussed.

According to an elderly informant, showing photographs is becoming common nowadays because of the lack of opportunity for public meetings between a prospective couple. Among the upper-middle class Nagarattars, attending relatives' weddings is a good opportunity to search for suitable alliances for their children, since almost all the relatives and affine come together for the ceremony.

When an offer of marriage is made, the boy's family considers several factors, and after comparing the offer with any others given, they decide whether they are prepared to accept it. If the boy's family are satisfied, they start the negotiations. According to my research however, it is rare among the upper class to find a completely unknown suitor because people become well acquainted with one another during functions such as weddings. As I explained in chapter 3, cross-cousin marriage is quite frequent among the upper class because the status of both parties will be well-balanced. I was also told by a middle-aged, middle-class Nagarattar: "The top group do not use intermediaries, but prefer to negotiate directly among themselves."

b.) *Pen paakka* (seeing the girl)

One of the families will visit the others' house for the *pen paakka*. At this stage, the alliance is almost fixed and although the boy can still refuse, it is very rare for him to do so. The relatives and the boy visit the girl and usually the boy's mother asks her what she is studying, whether she can cook and whether she can sing. Tea and snacks are provided but no meal is served to the boy's party because

this would symbolize an intimate relationship between the boy and the girl which is only allowed after marriage. (If the girl's party want to entertain the groom's party by offering food, they may eat out at a restaurant.)

A middle-aged woman explained these pre-marriage precautions to me. She said that intimacy ought to be avoided until the *taali* is tied in case the marriage is suddenly cancelled because of a change of heart or a calamity befalling either side: "If the boy dies, or something goes wrong, it is always the girl who suffers. It is a pity if she loses her partner before she is even married. Who will then marry such a girl even if people know that she is pure?"

The boy's party is given a room in the bride's house, where they discuss whether they approve of the girl. If they do approve of her, they fix the date of the wedding then and there, but if they do not like her or cannot decide immediately, they say that they will write a letter informing the bride's party of their decision in a few days. This process is very similar in both Brahman and non-Brahman castes.

c) Betrothal: *peesimudittal*, or *nicchaittal*

The marriage date is fixed at this ceremony which should fall on an auspicious day. Both parties bring a plate of betel nuts and betel leaves with lime as a formality. A middle-aged Nagarattar said, "The exchange of this plate is a symbol of 'fixing up' the marriage and once it is fixed, neither party should go back."

At this point, the detailed contract *muraichittai* (marriage contract paper) is exchanged and the groom's family bring a piece of gold for the *kaluttiru* to the bride's house. (If the girl is not going to bring a *kaluttiru*, this piece is included in her *taali* later.) It is

only one gold sovereign but has an important symbolic significance as a gift from the groom's side. Fruits, betel leaves, areca nuts, tamarind, and bananas with a two rupee note should be given in a plastic bucket to all the relatives who attend the formal giving *kaluttiru* piece. Half or one-third of the fruits, betel leaves, and areca nuts should be returned with some money to the groom's party since not reciprocating is considered bad manners because it is an ominous sign. Fruits given by the bride's party are distributed among the relatives. The elders of both parties have major roles yet neither the bride nor the groom attend this transaction.

5-6 *Muraichittai* (contract paper)

Nowadays, the average amount used for a *taali* is 16 gold sovereigns (128 g) among the Nagarattars. It is unacceptable to give less than 10 sovereigns as a *taali* to a daughter. One Nagarattar lamented that because of inflation and the increase in the price of gold, giving *kaluttiru* to their daughter had become more and more difficult.

Naacchiammai married in 1981, and her *muraichittai* was as follows¹⁵:

¹⁵ For convenience, I did not follow the method of Naacchiammai's father who uses both g and mg to note down the gold jewellery. Although it is convention to write 31 grams and 600 mg as 31.6 g, he wrote it as 31 g. 600 mg. Among some families, gold is not mentioned in the *muraichittai* at all as a tax evasion policy.

table 5-4

Naacchiammai's *muraichittai*

items	weight(g)
<i>kaluttiru</i> 32 pieces ¹⁶	22
<i>taali</i> chain	53
small <i>taali</i> chain	31.9
<i>puuchalam</i> (diamond <i>taali</i>)	529.6
bangles (8 items)	91.2
ring (1)	6.4
old diamond earrings	6.8
(1 and 1/4 carat)	
new diamond earrings	4.2
bead earrings	6
small chain for the groom	23.9
watch strap (for the groom)	32
diamond ring (for the groom)	6.5
<i>tombu</i> (small gold piece for <i>kaluttiru</i>)	42

Naacchiammai's mother who married in 1968 followed a different measurement system for the calculation of gold and jewellery, and old Nagarattars say the system has changed several times.

In Naacchiammai's case, the future promises and obligations of both parties were not listed in the book although it was supposed to be included in the *muraichittai*, as I mentioned above. Naacchiammai's father made the *muraichittai* much simpler and allowed it to be omitted. (As for Naacchiammai's husband's expenses - Manickawaasagar's side, see appendix.)

The gift exchange record starts on the day of the marriage, when a piece of gold is brought by the bride's party as part of *kaluttiru*. At that time, the groom's side should give some money to the bride's relatives. Those who are given money are both the paternal and maternal close relatives of the bride, i.e. her parents and

¹⁶ Kaluttiru is a necklace which consists of 32 small pieces of gold.

grandparents. Forgetting to give money to them is a sign of disrespect, although the amount given to each member is minimal. As shown in the following table, the list of relatives to whom money is given, the money is considered to be a token used as an essential ritual item rather than money itself.

As I explained in the case of *moi panam eludal*, money is handled mostly as an auspicious ritual item among the Nagarattars. *Moy* collection on ceremonial occasions is quite common among South Indian castes (Dumont 1983: 81-3, Good 1991 :105-7) where it makes up a substantial part of the ceremonial expenses, especially among the poor sections, as Good recorded (Good 1991: 105-7)¹⁷. However the Nagarattars do not regard the *moy* as a money collection, but as an attendance token, since 25 paisa or 1 rupee does not have much value by itself especially to the middle class Nagarattars. Similarly, the following payments to the relatives may be seen as a ritual payment of money in the same way.

Table 5-5

Money-gift exchanges at Naacchiammai's wedding

receivers of bridal gifts	amount(rs.)
bride's father and mother	10 (rs.5x2)
grandfather and mother of the bride	21
bride's grandfather's brother	7

In addition, they receive some buckets of fruit, betel leaves and areca nuts.

¹⁷ For example, when I was studying the Maariyamman festival in 1985-6, the *moy* collection added up to a substantial amount especially among the Scheduled Castes, even though the amount donated by *pulli* was around rs. 1 to rs. 2. Similarly, as Good's case shows, lower castes seem to collect *moy* from most of the attendants including neighbours and friends both at the weddings and funerals in order to cover their expenses.

bride's paternal uncle	4
bride's maternal uncle	4
three brother-in-laws of the groom	6 (3x rs. 2)

In addition, the party receives a brass bowl, a plastic box, one *kottan*¹⁸, 7 small plastic buckets and 2 plastic plates.

to the bride's maternal grand-uncle with a plastic bucket with a lid.	7
--	---

Gifts from the groom's house to his *pangaalis*:

To the groom's maternal grandfather with one plastic bucket	7
To his son, i.e. the groom's maternal uncle with one plastic bucket.	4
To the groom's father-in-law with one plastic bucket.	4
His bride's sisters' husbands (two people) with two plastic buckets.	4 (2 x rs.2)

To thirty-one <i>pulli</i> (close relatives, both maternal and paternal) with 31 plastic plates.	62 (31 x rs.2)
--	----------------

When the groom is invited to the bride's house, the following are given to the bride's relatives in return for the gifts given to the groom. ¹⁹

One aluminium box, one bag, one box, one *kottan* with rs. 21 inside.
9 aluminium boxes and 3 stainless steel containers.

When the *taali* is tied, the following is given by the bride's side to the groom's relatives:

groom's grandfather	10
groom's father and mother	31
betel nuts and betel leaves	10
groom's 3 younger brothers	21 (3 x rs.7)

When the bride is invited to the groom's house (*pen alaippu*), the

¹⁸ A basket shaped container made originally of bamboo, but these days, it tends to be made of stainless steel.

¹⁹The elders from the bride's side meet the groom in the temple and he is given a gold chain, a watch, a scarf and a ring from the bride's party then and there. See the next chapter for details of this ritual.

groom gives the following to the bride's relatives:

groom's father and mother-in-laws	31
groom's father-in-law's father	10
father-in-law's grandfather	10
father-in-law's father's three daughters' families (to 3 <i>pullis</i>)	30 (3 x rs.10)

From the bride's side to the groom's relatives:

groom's eldest brother	10
bride's maternal aunt's husband, i.e. groom's elder brother's wife's father	10
groom's paternal uncle	10
maternal uncle	10
two other close families	20
given instead of fruit	21
goldsmith (given as a token of <i>kaluttiru</i>)	4
betel leaves and areca nuts	4
to the female relative who does the <i>aaratti</i> for the <i>padaippu</i>	2
to a servant	2
another servant	7
fruit	16
vegetables	21
areca nuts	4
food	4
groom's maternal grand-aunt's husband	7
maternal grand aunt's sons and daughters	10
grandchild of maternal grand-aunt	49 (rs. 7x7)
to another grandchild	5
<i>ditto</i>	5
paternal granduncle	5
paternal uncle	10
groom's brother's father-in-law	11
31 <i>pullis</i>	29
35 <i>pullis</i>	155 (rs. 5x31)
	70 (rs. 2x35)
eldest brother's father-in-law	31
second brother's father-in-law	31
third brother's father-in-law	31
maternal grandmother	101

As another example, I cite the marriage record of Janaki's brother which took place in 1981.²⁰

²⁰The groom is Janaki's brother who married in March 1981.

Table 5-6

Money gift-exchanges at Janaki's brother's wedding

items	amount(rs.)
<i>siir danam</i> from the bride	2,001
In exchange for <i>kaluttiru</i>	2,001
In exchange for <i>maamiyaar saamaan</i>	10,501

Bride's party should do the following:

When the boy comes and sees the girl (*pen paakka*), the girl's party should give one plastic bucket, 2 bunches of bananas, 4 mangoes, and rs. 16.

When the groom's relatives come to see the girl, they are given 6 plastic buckets, and rs. 30.

After tying the *taali* to the bride (at the wedding), the groom's party is given one big plastic bucket, one stainless steel container, one embroidered bag, one towel, rs. 31, 6 oranges, and 6 apples.

For the mother-in-law's ritual²¹:

mother-in-law: one plastic bucket.

4 daughters: one plastic bucket each. In addition, they all receive one bunch of bananas and 10 oranges.

The 5 relatives (as above) who perform the ritual are given rs. 31 each. To those who fix the date of *muhuurtam*, 2 members (i.e. the parents), are given 2 plastic buckets and rs. 10 each.

When the bride takes leave of her natal house to go to live at the groom's house:

6 people are given one plastic bucket and rs. 5 each.

At *pen alaippu* (inviting the bride to the groom's house):

The bride's house give the groom's parents the following:
2 plastic buckets, 2 buckets of bananas, 4 oranges and rs. 22.

Promises for the first Pongal:

7 buckets (for salt and tamarind)

3 cylindrical-shaped containers (stainless steel) with lids and handles

²¹This is called *manaavalai sadangu*. See chapter 6 for details.

1 plastic plate
 2 iron stoves for Pongal preparation (for the first Pongal)
 2 pots
 2 stainless steel vessels
 1 small vessel
 2 big spoons
 2 small spoons
 1 sackful of rice (50 kg.)
 half a sackful of paddy (25 kg.)
 21 plastic buckets
 2 cylindrical vessels for oil
 1 aluminium oil container
 rs. 10
 1 kg *shikkaai* powder.

Janaki's family is middle class, and so the above wedding list is not spectacular, but is fairly average among the Nagarattars.

Included on this list are the promises of the first year Pongal, and according to Janaki's mother, the items listed above are already given on the day of marriage. In addition, the items listed in table 5-7 are given to the groom's side in the basket carrying ritual (*veevu irakka*). As I explain later, the *veevu irakka* ritual is supposed to be done after one year of marriage, the idea being that it should be a gift of provisions carried by the bride's maternal uncle and her brother to her house. "We do it on the day of the marriage now since we live in a busy world where the couple can not be sure whether they'll be able to receive the gift in the traditional manner."

²² *Veevu*, is a caste dialect of the Nagarattars which means *veelvu*, or marriage presents (cf. Fabricius 1972: 906).

Table 5-7

Record of wedding money transactions (1)

When the groom's family say that they accept the daughter²³ (*peesimudittu*), the bride's party gives:

the first instalment of her dowry	1,001
<i>maamiyaar siir danam</i>	10,501
to the groom's house	1,001

For the *veevu irakka* (basket carrying ritual)

Rs. 25
 10 coconuts
 1 kg. sugar
 1 pumpkin
 10 *adukku* (50 banana leaves)
 2 bunches of bananas
 betel leaves and areca nuts on a plate
 sugar cane
 a bunch of turmeric with rs. 5 note

These are given to the groom's party in a basket.
 In exchange, rs. 31 are given to the bride by the groom's side.

From the bride's side to the groom the following should be given:
 1 small chain, 1 gold ring, 1 gold watch, 1 table fan, 1 radio.

The following was noted down as the record of the money transaction.

²³*peecimudittu* is the ceremony of betrothal in which the groom's side formally states that they will accept the girl as the bride, thus the payment must have been over before the wedding. However, Janaki's family notebook recorded this payment here.

Table 5-8

Record of wedding money transactions (2): Janaki's brother's wedding (groom's side)

26/4 /81:

Rs. 6,000 is handed to the groom
The remaining Rs. 3,500 is to be given on the day of the marriage. ²⁴

151 *murukku* (snack)
7 measures of sweets
One cylindrical vessel to make *biryani*
5 close relatives were given Rs. 25 each.

When the bride performs the ritual of holding the idol²⁵ in the *pallu* (the flapping part of the *saree*), Rs. 16 is given to her by her parents.

As seen in Janaki's brother's record, there are two noteworthy things about the gift transaction. First, the exchange takes place as a mutual gift exchange, but the gift from the bride's side to the groom's side is excessive and even the money and goods are always accompanied by ceremonial gift items such as fruits, betel nuts and betel leaves, plastic buckets, and sweets. On the other hand, the groom's gift to the bride's side is more ceremonial, and even simple, signifying the fact that the gifts given to the daughter on marriage are part of her share of her father's property. Therefore, the immediate need of the couple is catered for mainly by the bride's family while the groom's share of his father's property comes much later after his father has died.

The money is an auspicious token in the ceremony, as the

²⁴As this record shows, they paid the *siir danam* and *maamiyaar siir danam* by instalments.

²⁵This is a ritual to symbolize the birth of a child. For a detailed description, see chapter 6.

amount given to each member is always a number considered to be auspicious such as 31, 7, 21, etc.. (Even a large sum of money such as the dowry should be an auspicious number such as 2001, 101.) Those who participate in a ritual (e.g. the goldsmith, a female relative) receive a small amount of money (2 to 4 rupees), with betel leaves and areca nuts. The money given to the relatives is not a substantial amount, but used as an auspicious ritual object since money itself is the symbol of wealth. The Nagarattars also believe that sending the participants and relatives away empty-handed is not good, since the host should show his respect to the participants and return their goodwill in the form of gifts. The giving of gifts at the wedding assures the continuation of gift exchange for several generations. Those who are given money and gifts should reciprocate by giving gifts on their children's marriage. Children who were given money this time will invite their uncles and aunts to their wedding feasts. In this way, reciprocal gift exchange extends the social relationships based on kin and affinal networks.

A daughter and her dowry become vehicles for setting up a relation of affinity between the bride's family and the husband's family and this relationship of affinity is accompanied by gift-giving which persists long after the marriage rite.

While the man's ancestral property is traditionally pooled in his natal family which is patrilineally organized and cannot easily be divided from the main line, the woman's property forms a large part of the conjugal fund. Ideally speaking, it should be kept untouched until their daughter gets married. However, if the husband needs an immediate fund for his business, he can utilize it with the consent of his affine. However, the transaction in marriage is based on reciprocity and even the groom's side should spend a large sum

although it is normally not as much as that of the bride's side. The following table shows that the groom's side also gives money to the bride's relatives, as part of the reciprocal exchange between the two families.

5-8 Increase of dowry

According to Manickawaasagar, the husband of Naachiammai, the amount for *siir danam* and *maamiyaar siir danam* has been increasing for the past two decades. The record of 5 brothers including him is as follows:

-----Table 5-9 -----

Dowries received by five brothers

	year of marriage	<i>siir danam</i> (rs.)	<i>maamiyaar siirdanam</i> (rs.)	amount of gold &jewellery
1st	1969	3000	6000	55 sov. + 2 <i>nahai</i>
2nd	1973	3000	6000	60 sov. + 2 <i>nahai</i>
3rd	1975	10,000	11,000	60 sov. + 2 <i>nahai</i>
4th	1981	10,000	21,000	60 sov. + 2 <i>nahai</i>
5th	1991	10,000	65,000	50 sov. +2 <i>nahai</i>

The following are the records of their mother (married in 1946) and Naacchiammai's mother (married in 1962).

-----Table 5-10-----

Dowries brought in by two mothers

	year of marriage	<i>siir danam</i> (rs.)	<i>maamiyaar siirdanam</i> (rs.)	amount of gold&jewellery
	1946	5,000	3,000	100 sov. +3 <i>nahai</i>
	1962	3,000	2,500	75 sov. + 2 <i>nahai</i>

The economic status of the bride is judged by the amount of gold and diamond jewellery she can bring to the marriage. The mother of Manickawaasagar must have been from an upper-middle class income group, since she carried 3 *nahai* and 100 sovereigns. Her husband, on the other hand, would not be able to place all five of their sons such a good financial position.

As I mentioned before, the status of the groom is affected by the family property. The father of a daughter takes into consideration the number of sons and daughters in the groom's family when he arranges his daughter's marriage. Having five sons

in a family would not be favoured by the bride's party as the ancestral property would be divided equally among the five.

However, Naacchiammai's mother managed to give 60 sovereigns of gold and the same amount of diamond jewellery that she received on her own marriage to her daughter, because she is the only female child.

5-8 List of *saamaans* (bridal goods)

I shall now go back to Naacchiammai's record and discuss the detailed list of *saamaans* carried by her. The list of goods is divided into several categories: 1) silver items, 2) bureaus, 3) stainless steel items, 4) brass items, 5) items for the groom, 6) items for the bride, 7) *sarees*, 8) miscellaneous items.

Table 5-11

Naacchiammai's list of *Saamaans*

<Silver items>

- 1 lamp (about 3 feet tall)
- 1 small lamp (about 2 feet tall)
- 1 lamp for *pongal* (large)
- 1 pot (small)
- 1 slate lamp
- 1 idol of Vinayaga
- 1 conch shell
- 1 arrow (*kilikki*)
- 1 pot for Pongal
- 1 Mysore vessel (small)
- 3 small vessels
- 1 stand for kunkum and spoon for *ghee* (oil)
- 1 Mysore vessel
- 1 tray for sweets
- 2 plates
- 2 dinner plates
- 1 box to keep sacred ash
- 1 sandal paste container
- 1 tray for coconut and fruits

- 1 tumbler
- 1 very fine needle
- 1 comb
- 2 serving spoons (big and small)
- 6 *metti* (toe rings)
- 1 ice tumbler
- 1 silver match box
- 1 container for the lamp wicks
- 1 wooden cover for the flour grinder
- 1 vessel with a sharp edge
- 1 small milk feeder for a baby
- 1 rice server
- 1 anklet

<Bureau>

- 1 bureau
- 1 cupboard
- 1 Pattanam bureau
- 1 bureau with a mirror
- 1 bureau to keep mattresses
- 1 kitchen cupboard

<Stainless steel vessels>

- 1 lamp
- 2 items Tekkaluur pots with lid
- 1 big pot
- 2 sets nested Mysore vessel (10 items)
- 4 Pongal pots with lids
- 1 rice cooking pot
- 1 vessel for ground flour
- 1 set of nested tall vessels
- 1 set of nested milk containers
- 6 buckets (big and small)
- 3 tiffin carriers
- 1 ice tumbler
- 7 cylindrical shaped vessels
- 2 milk containers
- 2 vessels with lids to keep lamps
- 3 sets of nested serving vessels (15 items)
- 2 vessels with two handles
- 5 containers (*kuujaa* style) with lid
- 1 cylindrical vessel with lid (lunch box type)
- 1 pumpkin shaped vessel with lid
- 2 Tekkaluur pot
- 1 pot to keep butter milk
- 1 Chindamani pot
- 24 tumblers
- 1 Puri box
- 2 sets lunch plates (4 items)

- 1 lunch plate
- 8 plates with small cup for ritual
- 8 trays for sweets with small cups
- 1 vessel with a handle
- 4 coffee filters
- 3 ghee containers with a handle and a lid
- 2 oval-shaped plates
- 3 dosa plates
- 2 trays to keep fruits and coconuts
- 2 square plates
- 2 plates with four small legs
- 1 Kaasi plate
- 2 seven-holed idli plates with lid
- 3 five-holed idli plate with a lid
- 3 small-containers to cool the coffee
- 1 betel leaf plate
- 3 lids
- 10 *donnai*-shaped containers
- 6 small ghee spoons
- 3 small ghee spoons with deeper scoop
- 1 tin spoon
- 2 *sambaa* serving spoons
- 1 coffee spoon
- 1 spring for a baby's cradle
- 1 playing instrument
- 2 cups and saucers
- 1 tea filter
- 1 knife to prepare *halva*
- 2 knives to cut vegetables
- 1 screw driver
- 1 *donnai*-shaped big vessel
- 1 pot stand
- 4 trays for betel nuts
- 4 trays (large and small)
- 1 cylindrical oil container
- 1 cylindrical container with a handle
- 2 Karttigai lamps
- 2 small containers
- 2 *sangu* (conch shaped feeder)
- 2 flour scoopers
- 1 needle to prick the fish
- 4 spoons to prepare fish (large and small)
- 1 scissor-shaped instrument to remove vessels from the stove
- 1 spoon stand
- 1 box for *paan* paste
- 1 box for areca nuts
- 1 oval shaped box to keep calcium paste
- 4 amber boxes
- 2 spoons with holes

<Brass vessels>

- 2 tall lamps (big and small)
- 2 Tekkalur^u pots with lids
- 3 Tekkalur^u pots without lids
- 5 copper pots
- 1 pot for *saandi*
- 1 Tiruwooni pot
- 1 Tekkalur^u pot
- 2 Kumbakonam pots
- 2 Kaasani pots
- 1 large vessel to boil rice grain
- 1 large vessel
- 1 extra-big, tall vessel (cylindrical)
- 2 cylindrical vessels with lids to keep rice
- 2 vessels bought for rs. 100
- 5 Mysore vessels big
- 4 Mysore vessels small (sets 20 items)
- 1 set of large cylindrical shaped nested vessels (5 items)
- 2 barrels
- 5 round-shaped vessels for butter (large and small)
- 2 rice keepers
- 1 set of 19 holed *idli* plates (3 items)
- 3 seven-holed *idli* plates
- 3 four- holed *idli* plates
- 1 vessel to keep the lamp
- 1 Mysore bucket
- 6 bucket shaped vessels
- 1 small container for *ghee*
- 6 vessels to keep vegetable *biriyani*
- 6 U shaped vessel
- 7 cylindrical vessel with handles large and small
- 1 flower bucket with lid
- 1 barrel with lid
- 1 small cylindrical vessel with lid
- 2 Cindaamani vessel
- 1 Karahani vessel with lid for sweets
- 7 round shaped vessels with handles
- 1 round screw type lid
- 2 coffee filters
- 3 tiffin carriers big and small
- 5 plates
- 4 Kaasi plates
- 4 coffee coolers
- 3 Pongal makers
- 2 pots for washing (Tekkaluur pot)
- 1 pot for washing hands
- 2 Kaasi pots
- 1 vessel for boiling milk
- 1 vessel for boiling milk with lid
- 1 milk pot
- 1 container for dosa flour

1 tumbler
 1 pair of bellows
 1 torch with cloth wick
 1 basket type vessel
 3 vessels for boiling milk (small and large)
 4 Mysore vessels
 2 *donnai*-shaped vessels
 1 *idi appam* maker
 1 set of scales
 1 big spoon with a very long handle
 3 Kaasi plates
 3 rice servers
 9 *halva* cutting spoons
 3 Kaasi pots big and small
 1 milk pot
 1 set of vessel and grinder for making betel power
 1 set of measuring cups (4 items)
 2 sets of plates for scales
 1 plate to serve vegetable
 1 Mysore vessel
 2 tumblers (large and small)
 2 Poona plates
 1 small cup
 2 Pongal pots and lid
 4 Mysore container small
 1 oil pot and lid
 1 Kaasi pot with lid
 1 bell
 3 water jars with lids
 5 spoons with holes
 2 spoons to stir milk
 5 Kartigai lamps
 1 betel nut cutter
 1 Tippili plate
 1 spoon to prepare fish
 1 small plate
 1 comb
 3 small cups
 1 music instrument

<Things kept for the groom>

1 Citizen watch
 1 National Panasonic 'two-in-one'²⁷
 1 National table fan
 4 cassette tapes
 1 alarm clock
 1 table lamp

²⁷ Radio/cassette player.

1 Vijay company iron box
 1 suit case (Écola's)
 1 small plate
 1 suit case (ordinary)
 1 rubber-cane bag
 5 plastic bags
 1 foldable basket
 1 toothbrush
 1 table
 1 chair
 1 Gordridge chair
 1 mirror
 3 sandalwood soaps
 3 lavender soaps
 2 '501' soaps
 1 bottle of lavender face powder
 1 Sopiari soap powder (Malaysian made)
 1 bottle of liquid foundation
 1 jar of vaseline
 1 bottle of Tata hair oil
 1 *bindi* bottle
 1 bottle of ordinary oil
 1 oil bottle
 1 powder box
 1 soap box
 1 sponge
 1 comb
 1 tube of Colgate toothpaste
 1 toothbrush
 1 Gillette shaving set
 1 shaving brush
 1 bottle of shaving foam
 1 Surf powder packet (large)
 1 bundle of writing paper
 1 writing board
 1 diary
 1 Pilot pen
 1 Hero pen
 1 ball point pen
 12 pencils
 1 paper weight (ink pot)
 1 flower base
 1 ink bottle
 1 glue bottle
 2 key rings and a small knife (kit)
 1 iron knife
 1 fish knife
 1 paper weight
 1 foldable knife
 2 idols of elephants
 1 paper clip

1 key ring with bottle opener (1 set)
 1 cigarette lighter
 1 sharpener
 12 plastic clips
 1 snuff box
 1 photo album
 1 mouth organ
 1 scrubbing brush
 1 pair of slippers
 2 brushes
 1 bottle of perfume
 1 bottle of Queen Rose scent
 4 coat stands
 1 belt
 1 washing line
 1 rope (to tie around the hips of men)
 1 purse made of palm leaves(*oolai*)
 7 pieces of underwear
 2 coloured undershirts
 5 white undershirts
 1 *veetti*
 7 towels
 1 thick cloth bag
 1 bath towel
 2 face towels
 1 hand towel
 1 white hand towel
 1 muffler
 1 woollen shawl
 2 shawls
 2 pairs of socks
 1 *vibudi* (sacred ash) bag
 1 umbrella

<Things kept for Naacchiammai>

1 ladies Citizen watch
 1 wrist watch strap
 1 cane hand-bag
 1 leather purse
 2 beads purses
 2 leather cases (large and small)
 1 suitcase
 1 aluminium vanity box
 1 silver powder box
 1 plastic soap box
 1 umbrella
 2 mirrors (large and small)
 3 combs
 1 lice removing comb
 1 hair brush

1 tube of Signal toothpaste
 12 toilet soaps
 1 '501' soap
 500 g of Surf
 1 oil bottle
 1 powder tin box
 Sopiari face powder
 Snow face cream
 shampoo
 1 comb for shampoo
 1 shaving kit
 1 washing brush
 1 pair of slippers
 1 key chain
 1 lock
 1 powder sponge

<Bride's sarees>

2 *pattu sarees*
 12 polyester *saree*
 2 cotton *sarees*

<Miscellaneous items>

16 *saree* blouses
 6 underskirts
 1 Naidu Hall brassiere
 5 ordinary brassieres
 16 ribbons
 2 towels
 2 towels for drying hair
 2 Turkish bath towel
 2 cloth cradles
 1 embroidered door decoration
 2 long cloth bags
 5 embroidered bags
 3 embroidered cloth bags
 1 baby cloth
 1 towel cloth to cover the baby
 1 net bag for keeping fruits
 1 Dindikkul pillow cover
 1 embroidered towel cloth sugar bag
 1 Satin baby cloth
 3 rice bags (large and small)
 2 bags for chickpeas (small)
 1 cloth for banana leaves
 2 bags for rugs
 2 ordinary bags
 2 Kuttalam bags
 1 Kanmark mat

6 mattresses
 31 pillows
 6 Burma mats
 1 baby mat
 5 ordinary mats
 1 plastic mat
 1 square carpet
 2 large carpets
 2 long carpets
 1 mosquito net
 1 baby mosquito net
 1 silk rug
 2 Burma mats (small)
 1 Malaya mat
 1 square mat made of cigarette packets
 1 hand fan

5-9 Why is hoarding necessary ?

This is a meticulously detailed list of goods, and supports the impression other castes have gained of the Nagarattars. It is said that Nagarattar parents give their daughters everything they will need when they get married, so that ^{they} will not have to buy anything else for the rest of ^{their lives} !

The goods can be divided into consumables and durables. Items such as toothpaste, soap, detergents, as well as the clothes (suits, *sarees*, towels, etc.) are for the couple's future use. Silver, stainless steel, brass and wooden goods are to be kept for following generations although some of them are essential items for ceremonial occasions.

This detailed list of bridal goods also demonstrates the Nagarattars' tendency to accumulate goods without using them. For example, when Naacchiammai received her elder brother who had brought her a gift of diamond earrings on the previous day of Deepavali as a *siir* from her 'mother's house', she gave him a plastic

plate with betel nuts and leaves as part of the ritual. Her brother carefully put the plate into his cloth bag. When I asked him how he would use the plate, he said that he would store it somewhere until it should be needed. He would probably keep it for the marriage of his daughter.

Similarly, empty jars of Horlicks are used for storing pickles and cooking ingredients. Toys, furnishings and other items given as gifts (eg. pencils, clips, soap, paperweights, knives, nail clippers), are all carefully stored for the marriage of the daughter or granddaughter if a family does not have a daughter. Indeed, in several Nagarattar houses I saw a number of old western dolls which must have been handed down for generations.

If a couple has several daughters, they divide the goods brought by the wife and add newly purchased goods, so that all the daughters have an equal share and they accumulate more possessions in accordance with the status of the groom. If items brought to the marriage by the daughter are not used, they may be handed down to her daughter as part of the mother's property. Since this has become their tradition, the original concept of the 'usability' of the goods is no longer applicable: people tend to be more interested in preservation than use.

One explanation for the enormous variety of items that are hoarded is that the market price for each commodity differs according to the economic climate, e.g. the price of silver may go down while brass goes up. The Nagarattars consider the security of a daughter's finances to be essential and they believe that it is dangerous to put all their assets into a single commodity. Even though a daughter from a rich family will nowadays own stock bonds, company shares, real estate, bank accounts, etc., her parents

do not abandon the tradition of accumulating goods. The purchase of a house, a coffee estate, or stock bonds is based on the same principle as the collection of Horlicks jars.

Hoarding itself, therefore, is based on their rational calculations as merchants, and is not particularly unique to the Nagarattars. There are a few techniques employed to avoid financial risk and to spread their assets so that all their eggs are not in one basket to guarantee the future. And moreover, even among the North Indian mercantile families, hoarding was one of the practices taught to children through early teaching (Bayly: 1983: 402). Bayly continues by saying that court cases from the early nineteenth-century suggest that relatively small concerns in the villages deposited sums as large as rs. 1,000-3,000 in the form of bullion or jewellery, and banking firms from the 1880s through to the 1930s appear to have maintained between 15 and 25 per cent of their total assets in the form of jewellery, bullion, plate and government paper, and this acted as a reserve fund only to be called into play in an emergency or in case of partition (1983: 402). Therefore, hoarding is not peculiar behaviour and has a practical application rather than being a dump of unusable capital (1983: 402).

In his discussion of hoarding, Bayly distinguishes between the following 6 types:

- 1) Distress hoarding, which is a technique of survival, as different from the hoarding that occurred as part of the regular running of businesses.
- 2) The deposit of family jewellery. This had a ritual and social significance, as it was closely connected to the family's honour and status. The wife's jewellery was thought of as insurance at the time of the death of her husband.

- 3) The purchase of jewellery and pearls as liquid capital. They were superior to money because they were universally negotiable and not subject to money changers' discount.
- 4) Gold pieces and jewellery as collateral. This was particularly important to the merchant community as this could be an easily transferable heirloom.
- 5) Silver, as the family firm's basic reserve. It acted as an insurance against sudden demands.
- 6) Gold and silver for savings. They continued to be the commodities traded most frequently, and peasants for example, would sell off smaller quantities of gold and silver, in order to buy bullocks or provide for marriages (Bayly 1986: 402-3).

These 6 kinds of 'hoarding' were quite common among the North Indian mercantile families in the late 18th to 19th centuries according to Bayly, and are still practised by the Nagarattars to this day as a caste tradition of accumulating assets in various forms.

However, the Nagarattars hoard a much wider variety of items than those mentioned by Bayly, and so the question remains as to why they hoard 'junk' items such as nail clippers, toothpaste, plastic buckets etc. Of course, items like toothpaste, soap, detergents, as well as clothes such as suits, *sarees*, etc. would be used by the couple in the future. Clothes, towels, etc. are not durable and do not last until the next generation.

The teaching of Nagarattar parsimony encourages the marrying couple to use these goods as long as possible. When the mother buys dozens of pillows for her daughter as part of the *saamaan*, she is taking her daughter's future children into account and also the necessity for pillows when a function is held and guests come to stay. If she has more pillows than she can use, the daughter

might give some to her servants on an occasion when she is required to give a gift. In any case, according to the Nagarattars, buying consumables in bulk makes good financial sense because for example, if they were to go to the market in a hurry to purchase one pillow, it would be expensive, while if they buy dozens for their daughter's marriage, they are able to gain a large reduction.

Therefore, in the case of the Nagarattars, conspicuous parsimony is not manifested in a simple lifestyle but in their custom of purchasing excessively in order to add the items to their hoard. *Aacchis* love shopping in general, but consumption of the goods they buy is restrained by their habit of conservation and parsimony. I was often struck by the inconsistencies between their economic ethic and their collecting habits. For example, a wealthy old Nagarattar woman used to go to a bazaar in Kaaraikkudi in an air-conditioned car, driven by her servant. She was well-informed about the prices of the vegetables and provisions, and told me that a particular vegetable was 10 paise cheaper here than in Madras as was a bath mat made of coconut fibres. She said that she was well-versed in prices, and very particular in collecting the exact change from her servant. "I would count each paise and ask my servant how much each item cost, if he did not give 5 paise change, I would ask him why he didn't." This attitude is very different from women of other castes. A young Vellalar woman told me, "I don't mind even if my servant does not give back 10 or 20 paise change."

This habit of thriftiness encourages them to hoard. Children are taught to be thrifty and frugal and when a woman gets married, she tries to save money, spending as little as possible. This is partly because of her upbringing but also as a housewife she is given autonomy to manage her own nuclear family and her purpose is to

pass on her property to the next generation.

The silver, stainless steel, wooden and brass goods are kept for future generations, although some of the items are used in daily life and on ceremonial occasions.

Goods can also be categorised according to their purpose: they can be used for rituals performed at auspicious events, or can be handed down from generation to generation without specific use. Some may be used for ceremonial cooking or used in daily life.

During my fieldwork, I managed to read about 25-30 lists of bridal goods and observed consistent similarities between them, although a few items may be omitted or added according to the status and convenience of the families.²⁸

One woman told me that the system of list making had remained the same for generations. "If you do not have a list at home, you may go to a house of similar economic status, borrow it from them and follow their system. It is normally the father who makes the records, but it may be an accountant (domiciliary manager) if the family has one."

I compared a list written in 1906 with the modern lists, and found that a few modern items have been added as essential items (eg. electrical gadgets, plastics, and stainless steel goods). Although traditional goods (silver, wood, ceramics, enamel coated items, stones, *sarees*, etc.) are still carried by the bride, they are just outnumbered by the modern items.

1) Silver items

Silver has been one of the essential items as an asset that can be easily

²⁸ It is not widely known that the Nagarattars draw up these lists. They are considered to be extremely personal, and are not discussed with non-Nagarattars.

liquidated on such occasions as tax payment, purchase of bullocks, and works as the pan-regional and international trading currency. In addition, both gold and silver are used to make ritual instruments (e.g. lamps, trays) and food containers for ceremonial occasions because they are believed to be the most immune to ritual pollution.²⁹

Silver is a versatile asset, along with gold, as it can be sold immediately in time of need. Its economic value goes hand-in-hand with the 'auspiciousness' and 'purity' of the material and silver goods have become essential for the bride. Even if the family is not well off, it is necessary to provide at least a few silver items (such as a cup, a plate, and one or two lamps) for the daughter's wedding.

As the use of silver in a ritual is auspicious, and it is well represented at a wedding most commonly in the form of a lamp and a *kottan* (basket). Among the silver ritual items, lamps are important for most Hindus. Lighting is one of the most essential parts of a Hindu ritual, and the Nagarattars especially favour using different varieties of lamps for different rituals. At the wedding ritual, the transfer of a candle lamp (which is referred to as a '*slate vilakku*') symbolizes the transfer of the bride to the groom's house. As a symbol of auspiciousness and prosperity, the lamp is held by the bride's female relative and is then passed on to one of the groom's female relatives (see chapter 6).

For Hindus, lamps symbolize goodness and auspiciousness. Even if the family cannot afford a *puja*, they have to light a lamp in

²⁹ To be ritually pure or ritually polluted is an abstract notion and is often a temporary state. Thus ceremonies are held to produce a ritually pure state (e.g. before getting married) or to 'cure' someone from being ritually impure (eg. the last day of mourning ceremony).

a *puja* room as soon as evening comes so that the auspicious goddess Lakshmi will enter the house (Lakshmi is considered to be the goddess of wealth as well as auspiciousness). It is a woman's job to light a lamp in the evening so that the house can be wealthy and happy. *Sumangalis*, auspicious married women, are identified with lamps, and they should bring luck to the family into which they marry.

Kottan (basket) is also an important ritual item as seen in the next chapter, although a lot of middle-class families have started to use stainless steel ones. In addition, the *sangu* (conch shell) which is blown during weddings, *padaippu*, and funerals to announce that a significant ritual is to take place, should be made in silver.

2) Wooden, stone, and enamel-coated items

These are mostly old-fashioned, traditional items which would have been made prior to the arrival of stainless steel or plastics. Although they only use specific items (stone grinder, wooden grinder, etc.), they still pass these items on to their daughters. There are some items which are traditionally used in rituals, such as the wooden pounder. Although they no longer pound husks with a wooden pounder, this is still necessary for the funeral ritual since the daughter of the deceased should offer the pounded rice.

3) Bureau (wardrobes, chests, desks, etc.)

When there was still a large number of Nagarattars in Burma, they made wardrobes and chests in teak and rose wood, and sent them by ship to Chettinadu. These items, just like chandeliers from Europe, were costly and exotic and became the symbols of rich Nagarattars. These Nagarattars brought about a fashion which created a demand

for these bureaus in Chettinadu until the early 20th century, but the South Eastern trade zone was closed to the Nagarattars when British colonialism collapsed, and these wooden items have become very expensive. Nowadays, most of the Nagarattars (like other Indians) use stainless steel chests and wardrobes (see photographs), and modern furniture with vinyl and plastic covering has become popular and fashionable among the middle class and the upper-middle class.

4) Stainless steel and brass

Stainless steel goods are cheap, convenient replacements for traditional goods made in silver, brass, or coated in enamel. They have become quite popular in modern Indian households, including those of the Nagarattars. The Nagarattars like to use stainless steel goods partly because they are lightweight and unbreakable. The 'auspiciousness' that is seen as integral to this new substance has made it the commonest gift among the Nagarattars. A young woman told me that during auspicious and important events such as *pen paakka* or *peesi mudittal*, i.e. the betrothal rituals, guests are served using new stainless steel vessels because they are shiny and unbreakable. To serve coffee in a china cup on such an occasion would be considered an insult because it is breakable. I also noticed the frequent use of stainless steel goods at funerals, too. Even I was given a gift of a stainless steel vessel as a gift at a funeral I attended, along with all the other attendants. It has become very common for stainless steel goods to be given on all ceremonial occasions, and I presume that this is because of its highly durable quality. It rarely gets scratched or blemished, and so is considered appropriate for symbolizing the termination of mourning (a new start) and also

auspiciousness.

Brass items are still important in spite of the popularity of the stainless steel goods, because large brass vessels are considered to be essential for cooking on ceremonial occasions (see photographs). They are expensive and represent the Nagarattar's rich 'material culture'. For example, 'Mysore vessel', 'Kaasi plate', 'Kuttaalam pot', etc. represent certain characteristics of the design of the vessels. They distinguish their materials using special names as these, and also name them according to their convenience. One of the *aacchi*'s most important tasks is to go to the ancestral house once a year or so to polish these vessels.

5) Electrical gadgets and vehicles

Electrical gadgets are now an intrinsic part of the bridal goods in all Indian communities. They are quite accurate indicators of the groom's status, according to Naacchiammai's husband, Manickawaasagar. A couple of people informed me of the present price range for prestigious electrical gadgets as seen below. Although individually they are not too expensive for the middle class, it is costly when several items have to be purchased at once. Nevertheless, most Hindu (and Muslim) grooms nowadays claim that the bride should bring such modern items as part of the bridal goods: they are essential household items, especially among the urban middle class.

Table 5-12**Approximate prices of 'modern' bridal items**

items	approximate prices (rs.)
refrigerator: (medium size, for a nuclear family)	6,000- 7,000
radio/cassette player	1,500 (+)
television (black and white)	4,000- 5,000
(colour)	12,000- 13,000
scooter	14,000- 18,000
table fan (varies depending on the model).	500- 2,000

The groom will demand such items in accordance with his status as an essential part of the bridal items. Such modern gadgets are sought after for utilitarian purpose, and not for mere collections like vessels and jars, most of which are unused. In addition, possession of those gadgets classifies the family as some kind of middle class, and so they serve as a distinct marker, especially of urban lower-middle and middle class. However, in this respect, the modern gadgets are solely indicative of the groom's economic status, and have no ritual or aesthetic value like some of the other commodities (such as silver, gold, jewellery, carpets, etc.). Thus, however costly electrical gadgets and vehicles may be, they are regarded as commodities and are not included in the valuables which are exchanged in ritualized contexts.

6) Carpets and mats

Again these are necessary for big functions. When the Nagarattars hold a wedding, the bride's family spreads a large auspicious carpet

to cover the *walavu waasal* on which the rituals are held. Small auspicious carpets on which the bride greets her relatives before she takes leave of her father's ancestral house, are also very important. They are decorative, and are embossed with the family initials. Special Burmese mats which are softer and thicker than usual mats are offered to important relatives who come to stay in the house during large functions. However, these mats are no longer available on the market and so are often bought from antique shops. When someone dies, the corpse is laid out on a new unused mat, in honour of the dead. Although the mat is to be washed as soon as the corpse is taken away to the cremation ground, the Nagarattars do not feel that it is polluted and are quite happy to use the same mat on other occasions.

The use of carpets on auspicious occasions is definitely not a South Indian custom, and is probably a western influence or that of a North Indian Muslim legacy, as I have not come across any other caste in South India which uses them in traditional ceremonies. Carpets tend to be used in colder climates, and are alien to South Indian culture. The Nagarattars, while engaging in the long and tedious ritual procedures of a wedding, would be very hot in the ancestral house where the open roof of the *walavu waasal* is sealed with a decorative cloth and paper, and a thick carpet all over the floor would appear to increase the discomfort. However, the Nagarattars insist on carpets being spread on any auspicious occasion. This custom probably originated during their interaction with the West, ^{where} since the Middle Ages, 'oriental' carpets have been popular items for palaces as well as ordinary households (cf. Spooner 1986), or they might have taken it up during their interaction with Mughal royals in North India.

Along with the Burmese mats and other foreign items, carpets were picked up by the Nagarattars as 'exotic' and this gradually led to the demand by all Nagarattars for these items to be an integral part of the property of the bride.

5-10 *Saamaan* as women's property

Saamaan is the essential property of women. Everything is carefully counted and checked off on the list before being carried to the groom's house. After or before the wedding, at whatever time is convenient for the bride's party, several people come to check the items against the list. (There are two copies of the list of *saamaan*, one for the bride's parents and the other for the groom's house.) A senior Nagarattar commented: "It normally takes 2 or 3 days to check the list. Yet we get used to it. It is not difficult to differentiate varieties of *saamaans*." The major goods are placed in store rooms of the groom's ancestral house, the key is given to the bride and they should not be touched by anyone without her permission.

Saamaans can be useful especially if the Nagarattar women are uneducated. A middle-aged *aacchi* said, "I remember one widow of my relatives survived for a few years by selling her *saamaans* until her sons grew up. She took them one by one to the shop, asked the shop owner to weigh them and was given money in exchange. Uneducated *aacchis* cannot handle difficult paper documents so they may be cheated and lose money. Selling *saamaans* is the easiest way to avoid being cheated. You can sell them on the spot without any complications."

The custom of counting the *saamaans*, and leaving the wife in

charge of the storeroom's key is in keeping with the economic autonomy of the nuclear household. "When the bride gets married, she lives with her in-laws until they set up a new family. A family is usually set up when the wife gives birth to the first child. If her husband is an only son, it may not take place, but even so, they will either build a new house nearby or set up their own independent kitchen and quarter for themselves somewhere in the big compound."

Until then, the bride is not supposed to use the goods she brought from her natal family. The couple's immediate needs are provided for by her mother-in-law who purchases things for her daughter-in-law either from her own pocket or from the money she was given as *maamiyaar siirdaanam*. While the newly wedded couple live with the groom's family, they are under the custody of the groom's family.

5-11 The 'files' of the richest group

The marriage of a daughter is seen as prestigious and an honour for the girl's father who provides her with assets. In many cases, these assets, continue to be supervised by her natal family after marriage, and provide another financial source for her natal family if they are engaged in business. This was the case for Naacchiammai whom I discussed in chapter 3.

According to one senior Nagarattar, Veerappa, who belonged to the top group, when his daughter married in 1966, he gave her 30-40 carats of diamonds, 300-500 sovereigns of gold (or more), 40 kg of silver and a cash dowry of rs. 10,000. He estimated that if her marriage were to be conducted today the jewellery alone would cost

5-6 million rupees and her dowry would be 1 million rupees. In addition, he gave his daughter a house in Deevakottai in which she never lived but rented out. He still collects rent for his daughter. According to him if a woman is from the top category, her property should amount to 10 million rupees.

Veerappa still manages his daughter's account. Her dowry money is invested in several funds, her house is let, and the rent is collected by his agent. Her gold, silver, and jewellery are kept in the safe unused, and he awaits the day on which they will be handed down to his daughter's children on marriage. If necessary, he says, his grandchildren or great grandchildren may sell them in future for re-investment or to purchase real estate.

He employs 11 accountants and manages the assets of his wife, his two sons, his daughter, his son-in-law and son-in-law's parents, as well as his own. He has three offices in India, three in Malaysia, but the headquarters of his business are still in Chettinadu where he has his ancestral house and where he set up two primary schools, and one college. "It is better to set up the headquarters in a small town. The fees of accountants are cheaper there."

His son-in-law is an engineer who works for a foreign affiliated company. His salary is good enough to maintain the family in Coimbatore, a city in northern Tamil Nadu. According to Veerappa, his daughter's time is taken up looking after her husband and children and so she hardly has any time to spend money. The accumulated income from her property is in the hands of Veerappa and if he ever needs to borrow money for business development, he uses his daughter's fund and returns it at a higher interest rate than the bank's. In this way, he scatters his capital in several channels which are closely connected through kinship and affine networks.

He runs a business which combines the property of his sons, daughter, wife, and his own property forming a limited partnership.

If one of his son's children marries a child of his daughter, Veerapa's fund would still be maintained unchanged.

5-12) Discussion: Dowry as auspicious property

According to Tambiah, female property is largely confined to movables both in classic Hindu law and also in most parts of present India (1973a: 68). Women are given cash, jewellery and household goods which constitute *stri dhanam* (female property) while men are given immoveables, particularly land³⁰. Although women are not entitled to inherit the ancestral property, dowry is still the woman's property which gives her security after marriage. This tendency is further encouraged by the Nagarattars because of their strict caste endogamy, and as a consequence, the status of married women tends to be supported by this fund which is still looked after by her natal family members even after marriage.

Mercantile castes in general tend to give away a large proportion of property to their daughters. Bayly, for example, cites as an example a family where approximately 20 per cent of their entire capital assets was reserved for the marriage of the daughter (Bayly 1983: 376 footnote 16). As Bayly claims, this is a significant amount but it was seen as an investment in social relationships which might have definite financial advantages on occasions when the

³⁰ However, as Tambiah says, this is a generalisation and in Southern India and in Sri Lanka, women are sometimes given agricultural land and a house by their parents, and their husbands move in so they can look after the land and cooperate in agricultural work with their wife's brothers.

family had to fall back on resources to raise cash speedily (1983: 376). This is in fact a rational expense, since, as I demonstrated above, the asset given in the daughter's name is not wholly given away but is still part of the business fund of the father. A grand wedding ceremony for the daughter is also an advertisement of the mercantile house, which is comparable to the companies of the capitalist West spending a large proportion of their profit money on advertising.

Grand weddings are regarded as necessary to 'advertise' the house and those who cannot marry off their daughters through lack of funds face shame and are seen as failures. Detailed lists of *saamaans* and their display are part of the demonstration, although the detailed contract form also protects the right of a woman as a member of her natal family: if she is divorced or if she returns home voluntarily, all the *saamaans* and dowry have to be returned with her to her natal family. Although this may not always happen in practice, the well-defined marriage contract makes divorce extremely difficult (and therefore rare) particularly for men who would lose a lot of money and advantageous business relationships. By divorcing his wife, a man and his *pangaalis* lose not only the moral support of her natal family but also the 'economic support'.

The high position secured for the married women of the Nagarattars partially derives from the economically intertwined relationships between the man's natal family and his wife's natal family. This position is also supported ritualistically as *sumangali* is the protector of her husband and his lineage as I described in chapter 4.

The woman who is marrying into the family carries property of her own: it is economically valuable, but property as

'commodities' is not the only significance her property has. As the term *siir danam* (the gift from the woman's mother's house) signifies, they are not mere marketable commodities but 'gifts' which are 'valuable'. Gold, silver, diamond, cash, lamps, carpets, etc. are all highly 'auspicious' items. Even the money given to the daughter has the significance of a gift with affection: auspiciously valuable.

Like the traditional valuable items (decorated necklaces and armshells) which circulate among the restricted members of the Trobrianders, the valuables carried by the Nagarattar women as part of their *saamaans* and dowry acquire what Weiner calls the 'historicity' of the valuables (Weiner 1981: 211). These items, passed on from mother to daughter and then to granddaughter, become a symbol of the 'authenticity' of the Nagarattar who possesses them, and gives her status and power. For a woman, they are the symbol of her reproductive power, i.e. auspiciousness, and for a man, they symbolize his social status--without marrying an authentic Nagarattar woman, i.e. an *aacchi*, his social status is non-existent.

Similarly, women's property is different from that of male property, but they complement each other. While men's are immovable, women's property circulates whether it is money, real estate, jewellery, or *saamaan*. They serve as fluid capital (especially gold, silver, and jewellery), making the new conjugal life economically stable. The custom of giving *saamaans* cultivated hoarding among the Nagarattars based on their economic rationality. It encourages parsimony, but as often is the case for the Nagarattars, hoarding has become an end in itself: their parsimony leads to excessive care in using goods, so that they would rather keep them in the storeroom unused, but to be handed down to their daughters.

Siir danam has economic and non-economic significance: it is the property which allows a woman to be economically autonomous after marriage and it is auspicious property which accompanies the woman to the house and endows the receiver (the husband) with the status of a married man. A Nagarattar woman is identified as a wife by her property (*siir*), so that without her property, her married status ceases to exist. Jewellery, *taali*, *kaluttiru*, etc., are the essential status signifiers for her, as are the traditional *saamaans* which she carries at the wedding. The property she brings in is to be increased during her marriage life and when her daughter gets married, the *siir danam* should be given away with accrued interest to another house. Only by giving away their daughter with *siir danam*, can the house take a bride for the son, who brings her own property. Because of this reciprocal exchange which is maintained within the caste, a Nagarattar entrusts to his daughter a large share of his property, as this is not given away but pooled in the network created by an alliance. The preferential pattern of cross-cousin marriage and caste endogamy are thus part of their economic strategy as a mercantile caste, which, as a consequence, secures for married women a relatively autonomous status from their husband's natal family after marriage.

At the wedding ritual, when the bride receives her *taali*, the symbol of her married status, she stands on a platform which places her higher than the groom. She is the representative of the groom's affine, and as such is to be honoured and treated with respect as a symbol of the reciprocal relationship between the two families. In the following chapter, I shall discuss how the reciprocal gift-exchanges that take place in the rituals are symbols of woman's auspiciousness and fertility.

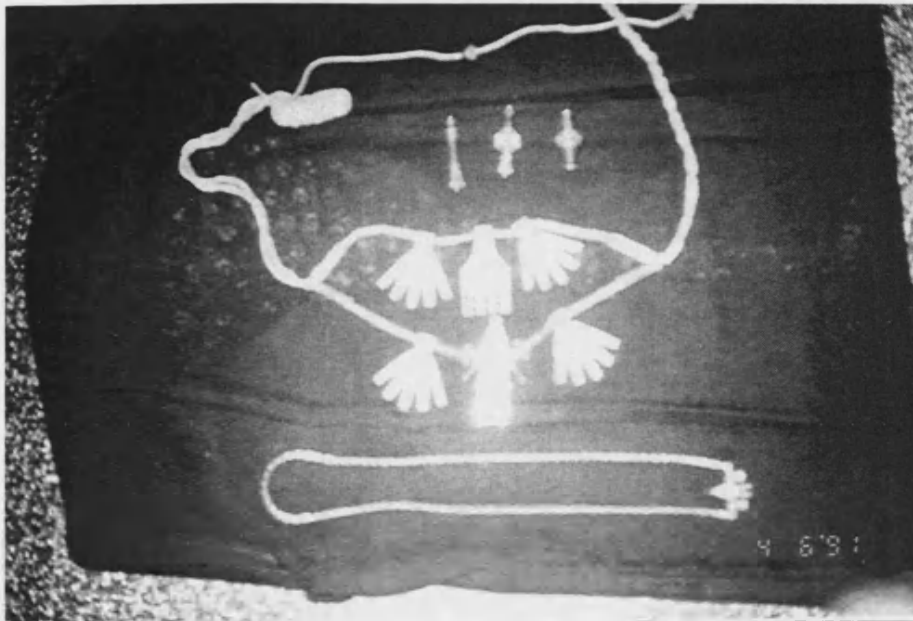
- 5-1 Preparation of the wedding: the grandmother of the bride sorts out vessels for her granddaughter.



- 5-2 The grandmother sorts out for her granddaughter's wedding the linens with the help of her friends and agents.



- 5-3 *Kaluttiru* (the hand-shaped ornament), *tombu* (small gold pieces to attach to *kaluttiru*, and small *taali* (*ennei taali*).



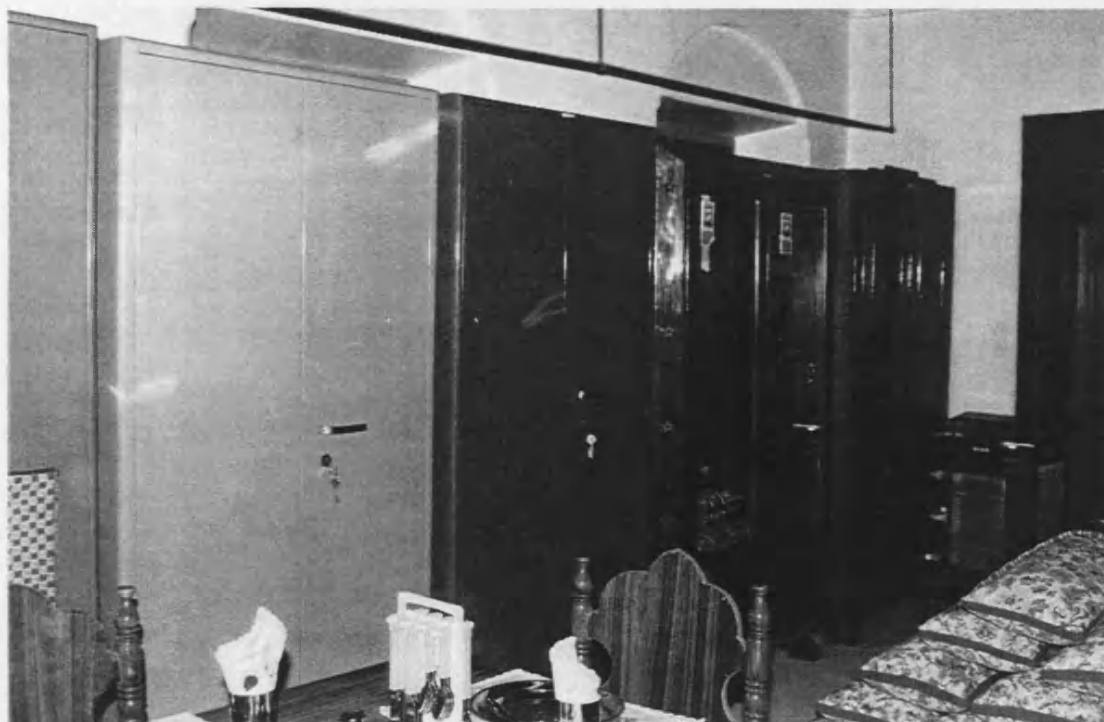
- 5-4 Plastic *saamaans*, jars, bottles of Horlics^K, etc.



5-5 Stainless steel *saamaans* and brass *saamaans*.



5-6 Modern *saamaans*: steel lockers (used as wardrobes), steel chests, and pillows.



5-7 Gifts for the groom and toiletry goods for the couple.



5-8 An 'agent' works on the wedding account



Appendix D : The groom's account

Marriage is a costly affair even for the groom's side. Manickawaasagar's account book at his marriage shows this quite well. As seen below, he borrowed money both from his mother and his brother until the *siir danam* came from the bride's side. The following money was borrowed from the family members in the beginning.

money borrowed	amount (rs.)
=====	=====
from the second brother.	8,000
from mother	23,000
from mother, another instalment	5,000

The following is the record of the expenses during the wedding.

items of expenditure	amounts(rs.)
-----	-----
<i>sarees</i>	15,000
(purchased for the bride and the groom's brothers' wives)	
tumeric and food provisions	223
soap	12.5
8kg <i>ghee</i>	220
0.5 kg sesame oil	14.5
betel leaves and areca nuts	48.7
garlic	17
<i>papadam</i>	1.6
coffee	1.9
fruit	2
chilli	19
onions	10
coffee powder	4.5

For the invitations to the marriage function:

postal expenses	4
gift bags	360
stitching charge for 4 jackets	28
bar soap	10
for the nearby Mariyamman Koil;	
offering of a <i>saree</i>	60
offering of a skirt	80
Wednesday <i>saree</i> (offering to a deity)	51

plastic plate	248.5
one dozen plastic buckets	129
bus fare	3.1
stainless steel vessel	124
stainless steel boxes	195

Income from the bride's house (given in money);

cloth for trousers	260.4
for skirts	107.1
for skirts	100
for sandals (chappals)	77

Purchases;

Balaji ready made shirt	354
cloth for trousers	245
onions 5 kg.	10
bus fare	7.4
shirt cloth	136.5
bill from 'London Shop' (local tailor)	69
sweets	88
snack	15.5
shirt	77
3kg. <i>papadam</i>	48
a stove	21
milk powder	28
SPL. electric grinder	2,350
3 tins ground nut oil	1,026
deposit on an empty tin	45
1 litre oil	19
<i>dhal</i>	1,165
20kg. small onions	30
20 kg. big onions	30
Maltova	34
8 kg. salt	88.5
vegetables	14.8
milk	9
advance for a banana tree	5

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List of provisions (purchased)

<i>Idiappam</i> and <i>murukku</i>	82
<i>Dosai</i> container and ladle	34
sweets	15
shirt cloth	15
areca nuts	0.5
mustard	5
stainless steel vessel	120
bus fare for Kaaraikkudi	21.5

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bread	3
for flour grinding	2
donation to a shrine	1
snacks	4.8

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milk for 3 days	16
lead used for coating the brass vessels, and engraving of name on the stainless steel vessels	41.5
0.5 litre ground nut oil	11.3
for <i>archanai</i>	1.7

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milk	10
Savina powder	3.5
for stitching (shirt and trousers)	65

11/8/ 89

milk	10
<i>idli</i> plate with 5 holes	52
4 kg. <i>jagri</i>	28
<i>Idi appam</i> flour	9

to Venkatarama for shopping	7,000
given to the elder brother's wife for purchase of fruit	
and to give the relatives who signed the <i>murai</i>	30
expense for <i>puja</i>	5
electric generator, lorry hire, car hire, bus fare, etc.	91.5
vegetables	31.3

house tax for 1989-90 (ancestral house)	27.3
house tax (the second brother's house adjacent to it)	27.3

12/8/89

milk	10
<i>Isaipadi maanam</i>	3.5
turmeric	2
musician, advance payment	25
flowers, advance payment	5
to the elder brother for shopping	50
van hire, advance payment	200
bus fare	12
Wednesday <i>saree</i> for a deity	51
invitation card	165
for printing	100

150 cloth bags, advance payment	300
stainless steel articles	2,886.5
bus fare to Madras , two people	114
plastic bag	28.5
firewood	800
milk can, advance payment	1,190
video shooting, advance payment	400
transportation and shopping at Madras	1,500.2
tailoring charge	20
sugar	261.3
<i>rikshaw</i> hire	14
van hire	240
100 inland letters	12
stamps	21
to an elder brother for shopping	100
for a <i>taali</i> ruby	242
provisions	625
petrol	65
to one elder brother for shopping	22,843
bus fare to Sivagangai	4.1
money given by the bride's side (income)	<u>544.5</u>
well water cleaning	180
bus fare, advance payment	100
biscuits	124
tailoring	5
13/8/89	
milk	10
14/8/89	
milk	10
butter milk	1
for the watchman	1
for the installation of Kottahai	300
given by the bride's side for the expense of the betel nuts and leaves (income)	<u>37.5</u>
15/8/89	
milk	10
butter milk	1
<i>ghee</i>	11
Pottiyarpatti marriage tax	21
petrol and electricity expenses	80.5
stamp and paper	1.3
3 tins biscuits	372

325

electrician	10
firewood	312.5
for <i>puja</i>	65

16/8/89

milk	15
festival donation for a nearby temple	137
<i>jagri</i>	39
butter milk	1

17/8/89

milk	15
at the groom's house for 9 <i>pulli</i>	40.8
amount given to the bride's parents in the groom's house when the bride is taken there.	16

At the bride's house:

given by the bride's party in return for rs. 16(above)	<u>12</u>
bus fare	6.4
gift by the maternal uncle (income)	625
coffee	168
betel leaves and areca nuts	85
bus fare	3.2
coconut tree	48
given to the brother for shopping	500
vegetables	1,014
mother's fixed deposit in the groom's name (income)	<u>375</u>
<i>dakshina</i> to a Brahman purohita	1.2
buttermilk	1
borrowed from mother (income)	<u>500</u>

18/8/89

bundle of wicks	40
drumstick (vegetable)	5
plastic bag	2.3
milk	10
buttermilk	5

After receiving the first instalment of *siir danam*:

given back to mother	500
advance to the musician	100
returned to mother	24
hearth installation	23.5
buttermilk	1.5
banana tree	30
advance payment for a photo frame	5.4

banana tree excess returned (income)	<u>5</u>
milk from Sivaganga	5
borrowed from mother (income)	<u>2,500</u>
for the purohita dakshinai	6.3
to the bride's house	31
for the temple garland	24
for <i>puja</i>	21
green gram	22
<i>papadam</i>	12.8
vegetables from the local market (lemon, ginger, greens, etc.)	64
van hire advance returned(income)	<u>200</u>
diesel	926
milk can	15
bus fare	12
for the donation to Mariyamman temple	11
banana leaves	43.8
donation for a local temple	10
donation to a library	11
groundnut oil	142
video	500
hiring a minibus	1,000
a mike set hire	500
bus fare to announce the marriage	2
<i>puja</i>	2
announcement at 3 houses	3
<i>moi panam</i> donation ¹ (income)	1
	1
	1
	1
	0.5
	1
borrowed from mother (income)	<u>500</u>
sweets	360
stitching charge for a shirt	29
expenses in Madurai	35
borrowed from mother (income)	<u>1,000</u>

20/8/89

small gold for *kaluttiru*

207

¹Those who are listed in this account are the ones who failed to be present at the wedding and who sent money through someone. Those who signed the *moi pana eldal* gave rs. 1 or 0.25 paisa already. This money is not counted in the account book-- only the money of those who signed later is recorded.

for goldsmith	113
bus fare	10
to a <i>puroohita</i>	18.5
donation to the Nagarattar Sangam	76
kerosene	7.5
<i>Isaipadi maanam</i> money to other house	12.5
to the servant	4

21/8/89

drumstick	1
banana	6
<i>jagri</i>	10
for <i>abisheka</i> in a nearby temple	50
borrowed from mother (income)	<u>4,000</u>
mutton	360
eggs	31.5
gas light	32
photo film	92
tube light	30
<i>ghee</i>	40
sand	32
Kottahai kaaran	200
bus charge	4.8
fruit	284.2
vegetables and fruits	286.6
milk	5
for the musicians	575
advance returned for the gas light (income)	<u>125</u>
milk	5
betel leaves and areca nuts	40
to the third brother's wife for shopping	
for a servant, salary	127
bicycle hire	92
tiffin carriers	1,570
milk	45
advance returned (income)	<u>550</u>
gift money for Moi panam (income)	<u>189</u>
<i>idiappam</i> deposit returned (income)	<u>82</u>
flower deposit returned (income)	<u>5</u>
milk deposit returned (income)	<u>200</u>
firewood returned (income)	<u>800</u>
bull cart hire charge	468
latches	4
paper	30.7
for Tandakaran (Pandaaram)	15
shirt stitching	44
stitching	1
milk	7.5
electrician	5
goldsmith	5

washerman	15
electric generator and lorry hire& bus fare	42.5
servant's wage for 20 days	225
charge for transporting a bureau	137
bus fare	32
vegetables	13
maid's salary	100
van hire	173.6
vehicle	10
groundnut oil advance returned (income)	<u>45</u>
van hire advance returned (income)	<u>675</u>
garland flower charge unused (income)	<u>105</u>
returned to mother	3,000
returned to the second brother	3,000
 silk skirt	 200
from a relative (income)	<u>500</u>
 apples	 5
photos	302.6
video camera hire	100
biscuit box returned (income)	<u>122</u>
diesel	200
bus fare	38.6
vegetables	6
apples	21

6

Marriage and funeral rituals

6-1: Woman's life stages

In Tamil culture, ^{women's lives} are classified into 5 stages (cf. Reynolds 1980: 36). A female is classified as a girl (*kanni*) before menstruation, and becomes a mature woman (*pen*) after puberty. When she reaches puberty, she loses the pure status of a girl, as the menstrual cycle ritually pollutes her body, although this is necessary if she is to become a fertile woman (*pen*). A virgin is auspicious because of her potential reproductive capacity, although she has to suffer from menstrual pollution every month. On the other hand, a female's natal family has to arrange marriage for her as soon as she has attained maturity, because as an unmarried female, her reproductive capacity poses a threat to her natal family. Her natal family should 'protect themselves from the consequences of any sexual activity she may engage in' (Good 1991: 5) providing means to control her sexuality. It is a great concern for her family, since any sexual activity in which she may engage, particularly with partners of unsuitable status, may lead loss of status for her family in their caste group (p. 5). From the point of view of her future bridegroom and his family, her virginity should be protected until she marries, since it is a pre-requisite for the endowing of proper status for the offspring of his family.

Therefore, some castes prefer to engage in child marriage and transfer the girl before puberty (as was the case among the Brahman castes) to the groom's side. Others segregate a mature woman at home under strict surveillance until she gets married. The pre-

puberty ritual of the Nagarattars involves the maternal uncle tying the small *kaluttiru* on his niece. This is intended to symbolise the transfer of part of the responsibility to the future affine, i.e. the maternal uncle. The second stage, i.e. the puberty rite, which symbolises the sealing of the virginity of the girl is officiated over by women only.

The sealing of virginity is symbolically removed on the morning of the wedding, again by one of her woman relatives (e.g. her paternal grandmother), and her maternal uncle gives her the first blessing as the representative of her affine. The wedding ritual transforms her into a wife (*sumangali*). With this new status acquired at the wedding, she is expected to engage in sexual activities with an authorized partner, and give birth to a child. After giving birth to the first child, she becomes a mother (*ammaa*), and as both a *sumangali* and a mother, she reaches the peak of the status of womanhood. Her status suddenly changes however, if her husband dies and she becomes a widow (*vidavai*, or *amangali*). She has to remove her *taali* and live a life of religious austerity. She is considered to be inauspicious on ceremonial occasions because, being a widow, she has already renounced her reproductive capacity.

Therefore, as Good maintains (p. 5), there is no substantive distinction between 'puberty rites' and 'weddings', since all rituals deal with different stages of controlling female sexuality. The major theme of the wedding ritual, therefore, is focused on the transformation of a woman from a virgin to a wife: removal of protection of her virginity is followed by a symbolic sexual union with her husband. The marriage ritual also focuses on affinal ties. The maternal relatives are directly related to reproduction, as the classificatory affine, and they play crucial roles in the wedding,

blessing the couple, giving gifts, and representing auspiciousness.

This contrasts with the inauspiciousness of the funeral ritual which I discuss in the later part of this chapter, since, in the funeral ritual, no gift-exchange takes place, and no role is assigned to the affine or maternal relatives.

6-2 Rituals of the wedding

a) *Padaippu*: ancestor worship

The ritual of the wedding starts from the worship of the ancestors, as I explained in chapter 3. *Padaippu* is a form of ancestor worship performed only by the close *pangaalis*. While the worship of the dead is extremely inauspicious, *padaippu* always takes place prior to any important auspicious ceremony. It should ward off evil by appeasing the dead and asking for their protection. Therefore, the dead, already appeased by their funeral, become benevolent protectors, especially when the living continue to worship them. For this worship, Nagarattars (and most non-Brahmans) do not summon a Brahman priest. According to the Nagarattars, since *padaippu* is an auspicious occasion, a Brahman priest is not necessary since the ancestors are already pure and auspicious.

b) *muhuurta kaal* (auspicious pole)

Padaippu should be held before the installation of the *muhuurta kaal* (auspicious pole, or auspicious pole erecting). Good (1991: 111-113) describes the installation of the auspicious pole among the non-Brahman castes such as the Pillais (Vellalars) as follows. A hole is dug at the south-western corner of the courtyard 3 days before the marriage takes place, and the Ooduvar priest (a non-Brahman

agricultural caste) sprinkles coconut water and waves incense and burning camphor over all the items on the banana leaves, and the guests take turns pouring cow's milk into the hole. Beck (1969: 564-5) also reports this ritual as a necessary beginning for all auspicious life cycle rituals.

Among the Nagarattars, the pole is not dug in the *walavu waasal*, since it is paved with concrete material, nor do they use a branch with milky white sap. Their ritual is much more simple. Either 7, 5, or 3 days before the marriage, both the bride's and the groom's families tie a long bamboo stick to the roof of their respective ancestral houses at the north-east corner of the *walavu waasal*.

The modern version of *muhuurta kaal* which I saw was simplified, but the emphasis was the same. They prayed to the ancestors and the local spirits for the welfare of the house. When I attended the house ceremony of a groom who was marrying a cross-cousin, before starting the ritual of installing a pole, the paternal grandmother of the groom, an elderly widow who is also the maternal grandmother of the bride, prayed at the *puja* room in her house, and then went out to the nearby shrine of Muni (a local guardian deity), and prayed again. This demonstrates that the Nagarattars give priority to the local deities who are appeased before all important life-cycle rituals take place.

A man whose title was Kottahai kaaran (a man who installs *kottahai*, a marriage pavillion) had been invited and he installed the pole at the corner of *walavu*. Kottahai kaaran was a man of the Pandaaram caste, whose family was hereditarily in charge of this work in the village. '*Kottahai*' signifies the temporary hut which is

set up for the wedding.¹ The Kottahai kaaran comes alone, and, as an auspicious figure, he is welcomed by the family, making a striking contrast with the lone Brahman priest who is considered to be an inauspicious figure at otherwise auspicious occasions.² He turns up alone for another auspicious ritual (*arasani kaal*) on the night before the wedding. Among the Nagarattars, the distinction between auspiciousness and inauspiciousness is clearly based on the difference between the wedding and the funeral. Therefore, the same hut is given different names according to whether it is being used for a wedding or a funeral.

According to Beck (1969: 564-5), all auspicious rituals begin with the tying of a branch with a milky white sap (*muhuurta kaal*) to a pillar of the house³. However, the Nagarattars do not use the branch with a milky sap, but use instead a bamboo pole, and mango leaves and flowers are tied to the upper end of the pole, in the same way as that of the Vellalars described by Good (1991: 111-113). The participants were given milk and betel leaves and areca nuts as the auspicious *prasaadam*, and in a similar ritual the *arasani kaal* is installed on the eve of the wedding, using milk and coral as the key symbols of auspiciousness and fertility.

c) *Arasani kaal*

On the eve of the wedding, a wooden plank for the marriage was

¹ The similar type of hut used for funerals is called '*pandal*'. But the Nagarattars do not use the same term for wedding and funeral huts, the latter being inauspicious.

² The Pandaarams work as the priests of the village deities, and, by caste, they are non-vegetarians.

³ In the temple festivals I observed, a similar ritual was held at the beginning of the festival. A flag was hung on the pole, and milk was poured on it (Nishimura 1987).

placed on the *walavu waasal*, and a *koolam* was drawn at the entrance and in front of the *walavu waasal* in the bride's house. Simultaneously, *arasa malam* (*neem* leaves) were twined around and a pole was inserted upright into a hole in a concrete block. Inside the hole, small corals were put with milk, which should never be allowed to dry. At the *muhuurta kaal*, the white milk combines with the red corals to symbolize sexual union and fertility.

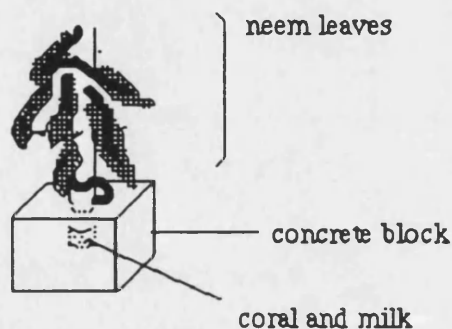


fig. 6-1 *Arasani kaal*

The block was then placed in the centre of the platform by the *kottahai kaaran* who also installed the pole for *muhuurta kaal* with the assistance of the bride's male kin. The block with the hole combined with the pole, a symbolic sexual union, and the Washerman brought a red silk cloth and tied it around the beams of the *walavu waasal*, signifying auspiciousness.

d) The symbolism of red and white

As Beck (1969 : 553) argues, red is the colour of blood, the source of energy, a substance which is essential to all life processes, but its connotations become negative when it is linked with the spilling of

blood, i.e. death, and so it becomes a pollutant.

Red, according to Beck, also symbolizes heat. While body heat is associated with life and fertility, excess body heat is believed to create problems as it is the energy which can both activate and nullify life. For example, while heat warms the body, excessive body heat kills; the funeral fire burns the body, but at the same time, it purifies the body, and sends the soul to the heaven.

However, Beck argues that heat has to be consumed and controlled and then it can be used as a source of power by humans. Without this control, heat is considered to be dangerous. Red substances symbolize a 'heated' state and white substances symbolize coolness. White, like red, changes its meaning depending on the context: it symbolises both coolness and death and is considered to be the colour of milk and water. Red, on the other hand, if used in the temple and at weddings, is a sign of auspiciousness and purity. In South India, both water and milk are cooling agents, and in this context coolness represents auspiciousness as cool weather brings rain and leads to a good harvest. Milk and water have a close association in temple rituals: *abisheka*, the purifying and cooling ritual of the deity, involves these two cooling agents⁴. People are given a little milk to drink by the priest at the ritual for purification, and it is also recommended for diseases which are supposed to be created by heat, such as boils. White, the cooling colour, is, however, also the colour of death. A widow's *saree* is white and symbolises death and infertility. White is auspicious when stability, well-being and the absence of evil are primary concerns, especially

⁴ Normally, for this purpose, fresh water taken from a well or sacred river by temple servants is used, but for further purification, they add cow urine and rose water, and chant *mantra* (esoteric verses) into it.

when it is combined with red, as is the case in the temple and at a wedding. Red cloth is often tied around the major ritual participant who wears a white shirt and a *veetti* at the wedding, puberty ceremonies, and *saandi*. In the temple festival, red cloth is tied around the pole, from which hangs a white flag representing the image of a deity.

Beck claims that white is desirable when one wants to indicate the end of some climax or disturbance, while red, on the other hand, supersedes the ordinary. The combination, therefore, of red and white, is desirable when they want to symbolize (red) surrounded by purity and stability (white).

In the case of the wedding ritual of the Nagarattars, milk (white) and coral (red) fits into this combination, representing auspiciousness and fertility; white as the stability and purity surrounds the red which represents the life force or procreation. The coral, by its red colour, represents new life, while the milk represents semen and also the seed (Shulman 1980: 103). The combination of the pole (phallic symbol) and the concrete block depression (female organ) also represents procreation, and the hope for progeny. This combination is also repeated when the bride receives the *taali* at the *muhuurtam*. The bride wears a red *saree* while the groom is in a white *veetti* and shirt.

e) Puuram kalikkiradu ⁵

This ritual is held early in the morning of the wedding, before sunrise, as soon as the bride has taken her first bath. She wears an ordinary *saree* and a small garland sent by her father's lineage Shiva

⁵ *Puuram* means "fullness", or "completion" (Fabricius 1972: 733), and *kali* means "to pass" (Fabricius, p. 214). Therefore, the ritual is meant to mark the maturity of the girl.

temple (*koovil maalai*), and sits on the plank which will be used for the wedding. The ritual is linked to the puberty ritual discussed in chapter 2, in that the protection of her virginity is sealed at the ritual of puberty. This protection is now to be removed as the preparatory stage of marriage, as she is transformed from an unmarried girl (*kanni*) to a marriageable woman and then to a wife (*sumangali*).

After the bride prays with the guidance of the Brahman priest of a local Vishnu temple⁶, her paternal grandmother puts margosa leaves on the seven spots of the body which were touched during the puberty ceremony. Using a longer margosa twig, the grandmother touches each spot three times, and after that, the bride shakes the leaves from her body. Margosa leaves are believed to be auspicious and are used for medical purposes. It is also associated with the virgin goddess, Maariyamman, and is believed to ward off evil effects and purify the atmosphere.⁷

The ritual is assisted by one of the maternal uncles of the bride⁸. He wears a red silk cloth around his hips, and a spotless

⁶Although the Nagarattars are Shaivites, i.e. worshippers of Shiva, they do not mind using Vaishnava Brahman priest (worshippers of Vishnu) for ceremonies such as this, which again represents the relative negligence of the Nagarattars about the sectarian differences concerning the religious doctrine.

⁷When someone has contracted boils, smallpox or chicken pox, people hang margosa (neem) leaves at the entrance of their house or room in order to ward off heat and contamination. It also symbolizes faith in the goddess Maariyamman who is believed to protect the patient.

⁸In one of the weddings I attended, the bride had 3 maternal uncles, one of whom happened to be her father-in-law, and so did not play the role of the maternal uncle in the ritual, leaving the other two to play the role by turns.

white shirt and *veetti* washed by a washerman⁹. Thus the symbol of auspiciousness predominates in this colour combination as the white surrounds the red. He takes the hand of the bride, and guides the bride to the platform and assists her until she sits down.

The maternal uncle is crucial in this setting. As Good (p. 200) points out, the maternal uncle becomes an intermediary between the bride's natal family (her father's lineage) and the family of her future husband. As a cross-relative, and as the classificatory father-in-law of the bride (*ammaan* ¹⁰), the maternal uncle initiates the social process of removing her from her father's jurisdiction, and assists the process of the transfer of her social identity from her natal family to that of her husband. Therefore, he plays a key role both as an initiator and a gift-giver to the couple in the ritual.

As a symbol of purification and auspiciousness, the maternal uncle sprinkles rose water and petals on seven spots of her body, symbolizing both the removal of the protection of her virginity, and a blessing. As soon as this ritual is over, the bride goes back to the main house, takes another bath, and prepares for the wedding.

f) *Maappillai alaippu* (inviting the groom)

In his ancestral house, the groom takes a bath, dresses for the wedding, and proceeds to the Vinayaga temple (or Shiva temple) closest to the bride's house, accompanied by his relatives and parents, where the whole group waits to be served breakfast. Vinayaga is an

⁹ He should wear the clothes specially washed by the washerman, who is believed to remove ritual impurity from the clothes.

¹⁰ I have explained the kinship terminology in chapter 3; the Nagarattars call their maternal uncle 'ammaan' while, according to standard Tamil, it is 'maaman'.

auspicious god who is worshipped to secure a good beginning. Waiting for the bride's party at the Shiva temple is less common, but still an acceptable beginning since Shiva is the god of resurrection.

The food is sent to them from the bride's house, as everything is on their account until the evening. Eating food at the bride's house has a symbolic significance for the groom. In Hindu culture, food nurtures the body, and so accepting food from the other party is a sign of accepting an equal ritual status¹¹. In marriage, eating together is a sign of mutual assimilation, since the husband and wife are going to eat the same food throughout their lives.

The bride's party go to the temple to fetch the groom with a band of musicians at an auspicious moment. Entering the temple at an auspicious time is important, as is the music which wards off evils. The father and the paternal uncle (or some senior old *pangaali*) of the bride bring a garland and several presents to the groom with the group. This almost always consists of a gold chain, a gold watch, a ring and a set of *veettis*, a towel, a shirt, jasmine flowers, lime fruits, *kunkum* (red powder which is worn on the forehead to signify auspiciousness), *manjal* (dried turmeric) and a big garland. The groom is also given a silk turban when he greets the party¹². When the groom walks from the temple to the bride's house, the townspeople come out from the houses to see him.

The groom, along with his male relatives, enters the *walavu*

¹¹For example, Parry (1985: 613-4) stresses the special importance of food intake in Hindu culture both as a source of life and a key symbol of nurture and kinship as well as a source of danger and contamination (if one eats improper food).

¹²According to the Nagarattars, wearing a turban at the time of wedding was a privilege allowed to them by the Chola king.

waasal of the bride's house¹³, and *aaratti* is performed by an old woman who is a relative of the bride. At the wedding I attended, it was the bride's paternal grandmother who did this. The paternal grandmother also applied sacred ash to the forehead of the groom.

Procession of the groom along with the troupe is important (cf. Good 1991: 174). According to the Nagarattars, it is intended to show the groom to the bride's villagers. The introduction of the groom to the villagers is also a demonstration of the status of the bride's house.

g) Praying to the gods: *bhagavadyaanam* and tying the yellow thread

The groom enters the *walavu waasal* which is now covered with an auspicious carpet, and sits on the platform (*manaavalai*). The *purohita*, i.e. the Brahman priest,¹⁴ starts the ritual of

¹³When the groom is about to enter the house, in some regions, he waits for the bride to welcome him first at the entrance. The bride comes to the entrance with her uncle or aunt (either paternal or maternal). The uncle or aunt lifts the chin of the girl three times so that the groom may see her face. I saw this custom still taking place in the villages of Southern Chettinadu. I was told by the people of the eastern region that this custom was practised on the eve of a 5 day marriage function, when the groom would ride to the entrance of the bride's house on horseback to catch a glimpse of the face of the bride.

¹⁴ At the wedding I attended, the priest who officiated over the rituals in the wedding, including the *bhagavadhyaanam* on the *puuram kalikkiradu*, was a Vaishnava Brahman priest. Since the Nagarattars are supposed to be Shaivas, this shows that they do not attach much importance to the difference between the Shaiva Brahmans (Shiva temple priests, also called Gurukkals), Smartha Brahmans (home priests), and Vaishnava Brahmans (Vishnu temple priests).

bhagavadyaanam , the prayer to the gods, before the important part of the ceremony. Following the guidance of the Brahman, the groom pours yellow rice on the ground. He sprinkles it on his head as well, and knocks both temples with his fists to beg the gods' forgiveness for any mistakes before he starts the ritual, and also to pray that the function goes well. A large plantain leaf is spread on the ground on which a mound of white rice and a pot with a coconut and mango leaves are placed. A red spot of *kunkum* is smeared onto the coconut as well and the pot and the groom sprinkles yellow rice over this too.

In front of the groom are 5 cups which are used for *muraip̣aali*. *Muraip̣aali* is a mixture of 5 grains soaked in water and grown before the wedding. It is a symbol of auspiciousness, fertility, and growth¹⁵, which is also used in temple festivals and in auspicious rituals.

After the *muraip̣aali* is carried in, the groom mixes the rice in the bowl. The priest places betel leaves and areca nuts in the groom's hands as an auspicious gift. Holding these auspicious things, the groom has a thread yellow with turmeric and a red silk cloth tied around his right wrist by his maternal uncle. They are called *kaappu* , and symbolize the protection of the groom to ensure that nothing inauspicious happens to him until the ritual is over. When the *kaappu* is tied around the groom's wrist, he should not be empty handed, as it is a bad omen. The Nagarattars say that empty hands are a sign of poverty.

The groom places a coconut on top of the yellow rice in the bowl. Coconuts are a symbol of fertility and an essential offering to

¹⁵ Growing *muraip̣aali* is also practised in the village festival. (cf. Nishimura 1987).

deities in expressing one's devotion, since the white colour inside the shell is supposed to represent the purity of the devotee's heart. Both the groom and the bride should hold a coconut smeared with turmeric yellow with both hands when they tie *kaappu*.

Another pot which contains milk, water and flower petals is carried in for the ritual of purification and the flower blessing. As the initiator, the groom's maternal uncle soaks his fingers in the pot, and sprinkles the water over the groom, symbolizing his blessing and purification. This is repeated by other male relatives.

This is a preparatory stage of purification given both to the groom and the bride before they tie the *taali*. After the groom sits in front of the priest and goes through this process, he leaves the platform and sits with his relatives. The bride then comes to the platform and repeats the same process.

As for the colour combination of the whole ritual, the white and red, auspicious and purifying colours, are combined with green and yellow. As Beck (1969: 559) explains, yellow is the colour of saffron and turmeric, both of which are very cooling substances. Green, as represented in the bunches of leaves, expresses growth, thus the future prosperity. The auspicious colour symbolism of the ritual, especially that of red and white, is strongly expressed by the clothes of the bride and groom. While the groom's clothes are always white, the bride normally changes her saree three times. For example, at one wedding I attended, when the bride entered her father's ancestral house, she wore a yellow and green *pattu saree* with gold embroidery, changed to a red one with gold embroidery before the *muhuurtam*, and wore a light blue one with silver and gold embroidery when she attended the rituals in her groom's ancestral house at night.

Fuller and Logan (1985: 91), discussing the colours associated with the Goddess Meenakshi at the Navaraatri festival, maintain that the red colour which Meenakshi wears on the 8th night symbolizes her full sexuality and union with Shiva while the white one which she wears on the succeeding night symbolizes her state of penance. A red *saree* is a symbol of *asumangali*, i.e. married woman, who is at the peak of her sexual capacity, while a white saree is a symbol of a widow, an inauspicious and infertile woman, though she is pure. Similarly, at the wedding of the Nagarattars, the colour of the bride's saree symbolizes the state of auspicious fertility. She changes her saree from a modest, auspicious colour to a very auspicious red one, and then to a colour of cooling.

h) *Mangaaliyam puujai*

After the purification ritual of the bride and groom, the *kaluttiru* and *taali* are carried in on a plate with limes, jasmine, betel leaves and areca nuts, and the groom applies *kunkum* to the *taali* and the *kaluttiru* (*mangaaliyam puujai*). The groom puts *kunkum* on the *tiru mangaaliyam* and *kaluttiru*. *Kunkum* is a red powder which is always used as an auspicious symbol whether it is in a temple or a house ritual.¹⁶ Lime, jasmine, betel leaves and areca nuts are all cooling substances while the *kaluttiru* and *taali* are made of auspicious gold (yellow) and there is a red spot at the centre which is made by a small ruby.

The plate is carried by the bride's maternal uncle and his wife

¹⁶ The red colour is mainly associated with fertility, and while in the temple of the goddess both *kunkum* and sacred ash are given to the devotee. *Kunkum*, however, is not used in the Shiva temple. Neither *kunkum* nor sacred ash is given to the devotee in any Vaishnava temple, but only a sandal paste.

to all the elders, who assemble around the *walavu waasal* for blessings. Elders, both male and female, touch the *taali* as an indication of their good wishes for the marriage. After this, the groom leaves the platform and sits with his male relatives and friends in a seat near the *walavu waasal*. While he waits for the most auspicious moment to come, the bride is taken into the *kaliyaana viidu* by her female relatives to change her saree.

The seclusion of the bride at this stage is symbolically important as it is meant to protect her purity until the climax of the wedding. As discussed by Good (1991: 197-9), the seclusion of a woman symbolizes an intermediary stage: at this point, she is not yet married, since the *taali* has not been tied.

According to Good, the women are secluded on two distinct occasions, i.e. during menstruation and at weddings. When a woman is secluded in a hut during menstruation, the liminality exists between the hut and the house, since she is not in a ritually pure state yet she is neither wholly excluded nor included in the house which represents 'normal purity'. The hut where the menstruating woman stays demonstrates the intermediary stage a person is in when they are ritually impure, while the house^{where} her family stay represent normality, i.e. it is ritually not impure, and thus shows 'normal purity' (p. 197). On the other hand, at the wedding, the marriage pavilion (*pandal*¹⁷) represents positive, pure liminality in relation to the other areas where normal life takes place (p. 197).

Good's analysis, however, is partially invalid in the case of the Nagarattars, since the particular space where a woman stays, i.e. both the room in a house during the menstruation and the wedding

¹⁷ Among the Nagarattars, the wedding pavilion is called the *kottahai* as '*pandal*' is used to signify the pavilion installed at the time of a funeral.

pavilion, seem to have the significance of protecting the woman from the evil effects which come from the outer area. Since women are supposed to be particularly susceptible to evil during both menstruation period and before the *muhuurtam*, they are to be protected. As far as the Nagarattars are concerned, the factor of protecting the ritual purity of the other house members from the menstrual pollution of a girl is less likely, since she is expected to remain at home even during the menstrual period. There is no separate hut arranged for a menstruating woman. During the wedding, the temporary seclusion in the *kaliyaana viidu* also intensifies the theme of protection.

At the climax of the ritual, the importance of the *ul viidu* (*kaliyaana viidu*) is highlighted. After the preparatory ritual officiated over by the Brahman priest, she goes back to the *kaliyaana viidu* and awaits for the auspicious time (*muhuurtam*), surrounded by her female relatives. She is also expected to change her *saree* there with the help of her female relatives, as it is usual for a bride to wear red with gold embroidery when she comes out to receive *taali* at the climax. Since the *kaliyaana viidu* in which she stays belongs to her father, this stage demonstrates that she is still under her father's jurisdiction and he protects her from evil until the most auspicious time comes. In some areas, the *taali* is tied in this room itself, as an extra precaution.

i) *Muhuurtam* (the auspicious moment)

Before the bride comes out from the *kaliyaana viidu* dressed in a red saree, the Brahman *puroohita* and his Brahman assistants leave the spot temporarily until the *taali* is tied around the neck of the

bride.¹⁸

The Brahman priests are asked to leave as their presence at the most auspicious moment is undesirable (i.e. inauspicious), because of their association with funeral rituals. This makes a striking contrast with other non-Brahman wedding rituals in which the presence of the Brahman priest is essential at the *muhuurtam*, as Good reports in the case of household weddings among the non-Brahmans (Good 1991: 114-5) as well as temple weddings (p.117).

On the other hand, the Nagarattars only require Brahman priests when formal rituals are necessary for praying to the gods, thus explaining his presence at the wedding. In any case, a Brahman priest is required at the wedding. The couple pray to the gods for protection before tying the *taali*, and it is with this that the Brahman priest assists the couple and he also guides them in Sanskritic ritual. The Brahman priest again assists the married couple to pray to gods for protection at *saandi*. Brahman priests are most required for the purification of the ritual setting. When they celebrate puberty and/or Tiruvaadurai, the Brahman priest is unnecessary.

After the bride changes her *saree* in the *kaliyaana viidu*, she comes out, and stands on the platform while the groom stands below¹⁹. As the higher position of the bride signifies, she is

¹⁸ Since Brahman priests are not supposed to eat in any non-Brahman house, the Nagarattars arrange for a Brahman house in the village to provide light meals. During the various rituals at weddings and *saandi*, I noticed that the Brahman priests took drinks such as coffee, milk, juice, etc. in the Nagarattar houses; although there were strict Brahman priests who would drink nothing but milk.

¹⁹ In the Southern region, the couple enter the *kaliyaana viidu*, and tie the thread of the *kaluttiru* inside the room, surrounded by the closest relatives of both parties, expressing the exclusive character of this auspicious but critical moment.

accorded honour and respect as a representative the affinal side of the groom, thus implying that the groom's side accept the bride as a 'gift of ^a virgin' (*kanya daanam*) with respect, honouring the giver. After two knots of the *kaluttiru* are tied by the groom, the final knotting is done by the groom's mother and/or his sister.²⁰

According to Kolenda, the help of the groom's sister or mother tying the *taali* in South Indian wedding makes a striking contrast to that of the North Indian wedding. In the South, the groom's sister helps marry off her brother's wife, thus signifying the cooperation between the groom and his female kin in getting the bride to become part of their family, while in the North (eg. among the Rajputs), it is the bride's brother's wives who help marry off their husband's sister by massaging her, by grinding rice and by rubbing *dhal* (gruel made of ground chickpeas), rites which end her virginity (Kolenda 1984:110).

Among the Nagarattars, during the whole process of tying the *kaluttiru*, the auspiciousness embodied in the *kaluttiru* is stressed. After the *kaluttiru*, the *taali* is put around the neck of the bride by the groom. Nowadays, quite a few brides from the lower-middle class cannot afford *kaluttiru*, yet the customary ritual of tying the *kaluttiru* before putting on the *taali* still takes place. The bride's family hire the *kaluttiru* from one of their relatives, and return it after the wedding is over. As this clearly shows, the ornament is

²⁰ According to an elderly Nagarattar, tying the knots of the *taalis* was done by the elders until the early 20th century. In one letter he mentioned as a record, the groom was expressing his satisfaction at having acquired the right to tie the *taali*, as this was done by the groom in other communities. The custom of asking the elders of the relatives to tie the *taali* also appears to imply that the tying of *taali* was considered to be a crucial moment which needed to be protected by the kin and the affine.

supposed to have such strong powers of regenerating auspiciousness that it is imperative that they have the *kaluttiru* at least for the ritual to ward off evil before they tie the *taali*. The auspiciousness of the *kaluttiru* reflects the status of the *sumangali*. Even if the woman is 80, if she is still a *sumangali* she will not give it to anybody, even her daughter. She may lend it to a relative if it is needed, however. Therefore, the *kaluttiru's* association with the *sumangali* is strong, and it should not be melted down while she remains a *sumangali*. If the woman dies as a *sumangali*, the *kaluttiru* should be handed down to her daughter or granddaughter, but if she loses her husband, the *kaluttiru* is melted down or disassembled, and what is left is given to her daughter. If a daughter receives the *kaluttiru* from her mother or grandmother, it should be worn as it is. The receiver may add some more gold pieces, but because of the 'auspiciousness' of the *kaluttiru* handed down from her mother/grandmother, the receiver is not supposed to have it melted down or disassembled.

j) Getting the blessings

After the *taali* is tied, the couple exchange garlands three times to reconfirm their unity and they then approach the audience to receive blessings. They are also guided by their relatives to the entrance hand-in-hand, and also to the back of the house so that all the ancestors can bless the couple and all those who are in the house can see the married couple and give them their blessings (*kumbitta kattikiladu*).

According to a middle-aged *aacchi*, showing the couple to all the people in the house has a dual significance. In the past, widows did not attend weddings nor did they enter the *walavu waasal* to observe the ritual. They stayed in the kitchen and the couple had to

go there to receive blessings from them. The couple also seek blessings from their 'ancestors' who are represented by the old photographs hung in several parts of the house.

Among some non-Brahman castes, a procession seems to be practised after the *taali* tying, consisting of the couple and a few close relatives (Good 1991: 116- 117).

k) Signing the *isai padimaanam*

After this is done, the *isai padimaanam* is signed by the fathers of both parties. As I have explained, this is a document stating the marriage contract arranged between the two families. The importance of the *kaliyaana viidu* is represented here as well, as this is where the two parties should sign the contract. After this is done, the couple worship the deities and the ancestors attached to the *kaliyaana viidu* and then come out of the room.

l) *Manaavalai sadangu* (the ritual performed at the platform)

The groom sits with his relatives while the bride remains at the platform waiting for another ritual to be performed. The bride's mother comes with a plate on which a yellow triangular mound of turmeric is placed as a symbol of Pillaiyar (Vinayaga). There are also seven cups containing salt²¹, rice (uncooked), tamarind, cotton, turmeric, sacred ash, betel leaves and areca nuts.

The groom's mother applies each item under the chin of the bride three times and she also applies it to her own neck. The

²¹Kolenda(1984: 109) ,reporting the wedding ritual of north Indian Rajputs, maintains that the symbolic significance of salt and rice used in the wedding ritual, put in a pot and heated up, is that of semen and egg, a combination of sexual union.

groom's sisters, if there are any, do the same to the bride both in the house of the bride as well as in the house of the groom in the evening. After these applications, the groom's mother pours water on the mango leaf held by the bride. The bride receives it, worships it, and pours it on the ground three times. The same thing is repeated by her sister-in-law.

The significance of this sequence of the ritual was explained to me by several Nagarattars, both male and female, as that which establishes the relationship between the bride and her mother-in-law. According to them, the ritual symbolizes a 'promise' that the bride makes that she will follow the instruction of her mother-in-law thereafter, while her mother-in-law accepts her as her daughter.

The application of materials by the bride's mother-in-law can also be interpreted as the assistance of a female affine to help her daughter-in-law assimilate into the groom's family symbolically, since at the wedding a woman becomes a wife, who shares food with her husband and his family, and as Parry (1985) says, food intake is the crucial part of the ritual.

Assimilation of the bride to the groom's family is also encouraged by the groom's sister; thus she, too, should repeat the ritual done by the bride's mother-in-law. In case the groom has no sister, a classificatory sister of the bride, i.e. the groom's female parallel-cousin would take part. In the case I observed, the groom's paternal uncle's daughter took on this role both at the bride's house and at the groom's house. At this point, both the bride and her mother-in-law (and the sister-in-law) stand on the same level and the sister-in-law could be junior to the bride. Thus, the ritual does not consider the importance of hierarchy between the two based on seniority of age but appears to stress cooperation between the bride

and the groom's female family members, i.e. the mother, grandmother, and the sister of the groom. The grandmother's role, however, is not as central as that of the mother and the sister: she welcomes the couple at the entrance of the ancestral house in the evening, greeting them with the ritual of *aaratti*, although any senior female relative of the house may take up this role, according to the Nagarattars. She also blesses the *taali* before it is tied around the neck of the bride, but again it is usual for this to be done by other senior relatives and friends as well.

The wedding ritual contains the process of the transformation of the bride from a girl (*kanni*) to a mature, marriageable woman. As I already discussed, the role of the maternal uncle in the wedding is crucial as he is a mediator between the bride's lineage and that of her husband's. When the bride is transferred to her husband's lineage, the process of transformation is symbolised in the application of food (rice, salt) and other items such as sacred ash and cotton which are also daily household materials which are taken from the house of the groom. By applying these both to herself and to her daughter-in-law, the mother-in-law expresses that the bride has now become her 'daughter', i.e. a family member who will share the same substances that make up the body and the same items which are necessary for daily worship (sacred ash and cotton which is used for the wick of the lamp).

Eating together in the same house implies that the participants are of the same family. If a man and woman eat together there are sexual connotations (i.e. husband and wife), as I explain in section 0. By applying both the sacred ash and the cotton used as the wick of the lamp, the bride has become part of the groom's family and as such, will worship the same ancestors and deities.

m) The transfer of auspicious materials

After the mother-in-law's ritual, three ritual items are brought in to express the newly established relationship between the groom's mother and the bride. First, there is a silver container with paddy and aubergine on top. The mother-in-law touches the aubergine and repeats the same action to her daughter-in-law as above (touching the neck of the bride and that of herself as soon as she touches the ritual object). Next, a plate with a tiny silver doll (*kolavi*) wrapped in a red cloth is handed to the mother-in-law, and she repeats the same action. Both the aubergine and the silver doll represent the future offspring of the bride, and thus the bride's mother-in-law is expressing her wish for grandchildren and blessing the bride in this ritual.

The ritual plates used by the mother-in-law are carried into the *kaliyaana viidu* by the female relative of the bride who stands beside her. Third, a *slate vilakku* (a large silver lamp stand with a candle inside) is carried in by a female relative of the bride to the place where the *koolam* is drawn. Without being touched by either party, it is transferred to the bride's mother-in-law's side. The Brahmans are not supposed to enter the setting until this ritual is over.

There is thus a sequential transfer of goods--first, the aubergine and paddy implies the prosperity of the household, as both are essential food items and symbols of fertility (they are also used in the puberty ceremony). Second, the transfer of the symbol of a child, i.e. *kolavi*, wrapped in red silk, symbolizes hope for progeny. This ritual is repeated when the bride takes leave of her father's ancestral house, and also when she enters that of her husband.

n) Agni puujai : the ritual offered to the fire god Agni

The *puroohita* returns to help the couple conduct a ritual for Agni, the fire god. The fire is lit, *ghee* is offered to the god, and the couple walk round the fireplace holding hands, taking seven steps. After this, the couple enter the *kaliyaana viidu* for a prayer to the gods, jumping over a straw bag (*kottan*) of paddy.

Binding the couple's hands with a red silk towel and walking around the sacrificial fire is a typical Sanskritic ritual called 'seven steps' which is common among the Brahmans (Good 1991: 173). According to Good, this ritual is more important to the Tamil Brahmans than the tying of *taali* (p. 173).

A Tamil Smartha Brahman woman told me, "Even if the *taali* is tied around the neck of the bride, anybody who is against the wedding can stop the wedding and nullify the unity while the *saptapadi* (seven steps) is performed. The most important and essential ritual in our wedding is the *saptapadi* as this is when we take a vow in front of the fire god."²²

o) Feeding the groom

As soon as the couple returns to the platform, the bride feeds the groom for the first time (*manaavarai saappaadu*). A silver plate with ghee, rice, dhal, and vegetable curry is placed before them. They sit on the platform, and the bride feeds the groom twice with her right hand and then she washes her hand.²³

²²Kolenda writes that circling of the fire has now become a regular part of non-Brahman wedding ceremonies, although this does not seem to have been so until recently (Kolenda 1984: 106-7).

²³Unlike some other Hindu castes, the Nagarattar bride does not eat the left-overs.

A woman is only allowed to feed a man with her own hand if he is her husband, and so this ritual signifies that the bride and the groom have become husband and wife. After this ceremony, the couple approach the elders for their blessings and the relatives of both parties sign the notebook as a record of their attendance (*moi panam eludal* ²⁴).

p) *Manjar niir*: taking oil and turmeric baths

At the end of the ceremony, the couple take a ritual 'bath' in order to 'cool down' their body and return to their normal condition.

According to senior old Nagarattars, it was a custom to take a real bath by pouring water from the pot onto the bodies of the couple. This is no longer practised as the Nagarattars have stopped 'infant marriages' in which the participants were children. Nowadays, the couple simply wet their heads, and soak part of the end of the saree and the *veetti* in the yellow water. They are given a handful of oil to put onto their heads, and then a small quantity of *shikkaai* (shampoo). The relatives of both sides then splash the couple with turmeric water which causes much enjoyment. Ritual bathing of turmeric water is supposed to cool the body and make it ritually pure. Thus after the climax of *taali* tying which symbolize sexual union (i.e. the heat), the couple is cooled down by this ritual to regain normality.

Taking an oil bath is an essential purifying ritual before

²⁴As Good (1991:121) reports, the *moy* collection among the non-Brahman castes in Terku Vandanam, which consists of contributions of small amounts of money by the attendants of the wedding constitutes a substantial amount for non-Brahman castes in general. However, *moy* collection among the Nagarattars takes place only at weddings and it is regarded as a token money accompanied with the attendance signature of close relatives.

attending any auspicious ceremonies or visiting the temples on auspicious occasions. A turmeric bath is believed to be auspicious. Applying turmeric to the skin is believed to beautify women and the Hindus in Southern India consider its yellow colour to be auspicious. Taking an oil bath and/or applying turmeric over the face and body is auspicious; it is believed to 'cool the body', and makes the person ritually pure.

The ritual climax of the wedding is represented by 'heat' and should be cooled down, in a similar way to the rituals in a village goddess festival. The goddess, when accepting the blood sacrifice, is at the peak of expressing her *shakti*. After she is satisfied with the offering, she is cooled down and appeased by the purification ritual (Shulman 1980: 91, Fuller and Logan: 1985:91). Similarly, the climax of the wedding ritual representing the 'heat' i.e. sexual union, should be cooled down, so that the couple can resume a normal life. The purifying bath symbolizes this process.

S) *Kudi alaippu*: Bidding farewell to the mother's house

In the evening, the bride goes to the *walavu waasal* of her father's ancestral house, and prostrates herself before her close kin, i.e. her grandfather, grandmother, father, and mother. Because of her newly acquired status as a *sumangali*, her younger cousin sisters and her junior brothers and cousins formally prostrate themselves in front of her and bid her farewell while she is standing and she receives their greeting. This kind of formal prostration is done towards senior people, but is not performed until the receiver gets married and acquires a formal social status. This formal expression of respect confirms that the bride is already a *sumangali*.

Her paternal grandfather, representing her natal family, gives

her a plate of gifts and the cash dowry, and a few coins are tied to the end of her *saree* as a charm to maintain her financial security. The bride is then taken by car to a house near the groom's ancestral house until it is time for the *pen alaippu*.²⁵

The coins tied to the end of the *saree* are considered to be auspicious agents, essential to the ceremony. When money is used on auspicious occasions, it is usually accompanied by a ceremonial gift of betel leaves and areca nuts, and it is expected to be reciprocal, i.e., those who are given money and ceremonial gifts should give something in exchange either immediately or at some point in the future. However, if the ritual is inauspicious, eg. a funeral, the relatives refuse to accept any money gifts. Only the service castes i.e. Brahman *purohita*, Barbers, and Parayas (undertakers), receive money. As I explain in the later part of this chapter, gifts given at funerals symbolize the expiation of sin and pollution, and so any money in this context is strictly regarded as a 'payment' (*sambalam*) for professional services (cf. Good 1991: 124)

r) *Pen alaippu*: (inviting the bride to the groom's house)

The bride arrives at the groom's house with her relatives at an auspicious time in the evening, and is welcomed with *aaratti* by an elderly woman of the family. Even widows are allowed to do the *aaratti* ritual, especially because the ritual is now at the final stage.

²⁵ Traditionally, the bride's party prepares a snack for both the bride's and the groom's parties. In the past when people travelled to the groom's village on a bull^{ock} cart, they had to spend a lot of time on the journey and so a packed light meal was necessary. Even though now a car is used and it is only a few minutes ride, they still follow the tradition: both parties stop beside the temple tank of the groom's village and they eat the meal even if they are not hungry. It is customary to eat by the temple tank as people used to search for water so that the bull could drink.

Three large pots (*padayal*) of water are put in front of the *kaliyaana viidu*, and the couple are supposed to search for the silver idol of a small child once again (*kulam waarum pillai*). As soon as this is over, the bride enters the *kaliyaana viidu*, with the groom and the relatives, and prays to the ancestors in front of an offering of food on banana leaves, comes out and repeats the ritual (*manaavalai sadangu*) that she had performed with her mother-in-law in her father's ancestral house.

The bride then participates in basket carrying rituals with the relatives of both sides (see the next section), and after the *undiyal* (final money calculation) is over, the guests start to leave, bidding farewell to the members of the house. Finally, the bride's relatives and parents take their leave after they have talked and said goodbye. The bride is then introduced to every member of the groom's family.

6-2 Gift giving: *Veevu*

During the wedding ceremony, there are three gift-giving rituals which are symbolized in the act of carrying '*veevu*' (it is also spelled as *velvu*), or the wedding gift. The first one is called the *ammaan veevu* and is the gift sent by the maternal uncle of the groom to the bride's house. The second is the *kaliyaana veevu* (wedding gift), and the third is the *mudaru warusham veevu* (first year gift) 'which comes from the bride's family as part of the *siir* (gift from the bride's mother's house) written in the marriage contract.

The gifts which are carried in the *veevu* are an essential part of the *siir*, i.e. gifts from the bride's mother's house. In addition, *maamaa veevu* comes from the groom's and the bride's maternal uncles, symbolizing the financial help of the 'mother's people' from

both sides. If the bride and the groom are cross-cousins, the chances are that the bride's father-in-law is also her maternal uncle or the groom's father-in-law is his maternal uncle, who gives the present. *Veevu* symbolizes the financial assistance from both the bride and the groom's family and the exchange relationship between the two houses.

As Dumont also reports about gifts from the bride's house (*siir*) carried by a number of baskets (1983: 81), giving gifts in a basket seems to be quite widespread all over Tamil Nadu as part of the *siir*.²⁶

1) *ammaan veevu* (or *maama veevu*)

It is the traditional gift from the maternal uncle at the wedding of his sister's first child. *Maamaa veevu* is given to the first married child only, whether it is male or female. It consists of sweets, biscuits, fruits, pumpkin²⁷ (*palangi kaai*), banana leaves, sugar, and traditionally a live goat with red silk tied around its neck which was cooked for the celebration meal after the wedding, but nobody gives a live goat these days. In addition to this, 2 measures of paddy are carried in a *kottan* (a straw bag).

The most peculiar aspect of the *veevu* is its carriers. The *maamaa veevu*, after being carried into the *walavu waasal* by the

²⁶However, I could not verify whether gift-giving in a basket is combined in the wedding ritual among other castes as well. I did not come across ethnographic reports that '*veevu irakka*' exists as the wedding ritual among other castes.

²⁷Pumpkin is believed to be a 'hot' vegetable which heats the body (Beck 1969). It is also believed to increase sexual desire, and so Brahmans avoid eating pumpkin when they have to conduct special rituals.

servants from the house of the maternal uncle, are picked up and carried by the bride and the relatives of the bride and the groom, to the *kaliyaana viidu*. Each *veevu* is carried by two people, one from the bride's family and the other from the groom's family. The bride has to carry the *veevu* several times as the significance of the ritual is to demonstrate her status as the housewife of the new *pulli* she has established. The groom sits on the floor observing the ritual, and does not participate, because the domestic economy of the *pulli* is controlled by the wife with the help of her relatives and her husband's relatives.

The transfer of *veevu* also signifies the mutual respect shown by both parties. When the *veevu* is carried into the house, the maternal uncle places it on the *koolam* drawn at the entrance of the *walavu waasal* on which there is also an auspicious lamp carried from the bride's side. The groom's paternal grandfather or paternal uncle then hands it to the bride's party who place it back on the *koolam*. When the groom's paternal grandfather or paternal uncle lifts it, he places it on top of his head to show respect to the other party.

The Nagarattars told me that these acts are symbolic of the way the *veevu* were carried to the house of the bride in the past. According to one elderly Nagarattar, the gift of provisions is the legacy left by the days when the wedding lasted for 3, 5, or even 11 days. "In those days, we used to have only one ritual per day. We carried all the provisions in *kottans* from the groom's village to the bride's house on foot. The bride's side received them with great respect, which they showed by receiving it on their heads before placing it on the floor."

2) *Kaliyaana veevu*

This is the gift from the parents to the couple. A number of *veevu* are carried from the entrance to the *walavu waasal* by servants, and placed in the *kaliyaana viidu* by the bride and the male relatives.

The significance of both *veevus* is that the manager of the household economy is now the newly married wife, and the male relatives of both sides show their willingness to cooperate with her. The non-participation of the groom in this ritual is important because it shows that he is ready to endow his wife with the responsibility of the household management, while his wife, by carrying the *veevu* with the relatives of both sides, expresses her readiness to cooperate with the relatives.

3) *Mudaru warusham veevu* (the gift for the first year)

This is the gift which was traditionally given at the couple's first celebration of Pongal and Deepavali. The gifts used to be sent by the bride's family on each occasion as the fulfilment of a promise written in the *isai padimaanam*, but this custom has changed so that the bride's family send them all on the day of the wedding itself. The transaction takes place in the same way as the *maamaa veevu* and the *kaliyaana veevu*. The gifts consist mostly of food provisions and pots for cooking *pongal* (rice gruel), in addition to the auspicious gifts of betel leaves and areca nuts. Banana leaves and brown sugar are also given as they are essential for preparing ceremonial meals.

In the ritual which I observed, five stainless steel *kottans* of fruits and coconuts and a lamp were carried in to the house by the bride's grandfather and uncles. They were placed on the *koolam* drawn at the entrance to the *walavu*. Each male relative of the groom's side tied a towel around his head before lifting the *kottan*

with the bride, as if he had carried it a long way, and then the stainless steel *kottans* were carried into the *kaliyaana viidu*.

6-3)Undiyal: settling the account

After these rituals are over, the bride and groom's parties sit in a corner, face to face, and settle their accounts. Traditionally, this is the occasion on which the bride's party hands over the cash dowry to the groom's party on a plate with betel leaves and areca nuts.

On one occasion I witnessed where this took place, the groom's father, after receiving the dowry on the plate from the bride's father, handed it to the couple with an application form to open a joint bank account which was filled in by both parties at that time so that the money would go immediately into the couple's account. The money for the groom's mother (*maamiyaar siir danam*) had already been handed over before the wedding took place.

Concerning the *undiyal*, one senior Nagarattar explains that they want to clarify the money matters referring to the *muraichittai* and *moipanam eldal* in front of the both parties. If they have forgotten to give any of their relatives money that was due to them, they have to rectify the situation there and then.

6-4) The bride's party's departure

After the bride's closest relatives are given money and gifts, they are ready to take their leave. The bride's father, mother, grandfather, grandmother, brothers and sisters, and even the bride herself are all given an auspicious amount of money such as rs. 21, rs. 101, rs. 51, etc., with some gifts by the groom's parents. (In one case I witnessed,

this took place at 10 pm.)

They take their time in bidding farewell to the groom's party, and at this point the other guests bid farewell and leave without any gifts. Around 200 gifts, consisting of stainless steel vessels with betel leaves, areca nuts, *kunkum* powder, turmeric, and a packet of sweet biscuits are given to the close kin members of both parties. A token amount of ritual money is also given to the closest kin of the bride before they take leave.

6-5 Discussion 1: Gift-exchange and 'mother's house'

As the whole process of wedding gift transaction⁵ shows, the exchange between the bride's party and the groom's is mutual and ceremonial. Dumont, reporting cases among non-Brahman castes like Piramalai Kallars, Nangudi Vellalars, and Ambalakkarars, stresses the mutual gift-giving involving the bride's and the groom's houses (1983: 82-83). However, there are a few significant differences between such cases and the Nagarattars. Firstly, there is no gift-exchange between the two families at funerals (see later).

There are further differences between Dumont's non-Brahman castes and the Nagarattars. According to Dumont (pp. 80-86), marriage gifts are categorized into several 'prestations' and 'counter-prestations'. He names *parisam*, a sum of money which is paid to the bride's side from the groom's family as a gift. This amount becomes part of the expense on jewellery which the bride's side spends (although the bride's side should spend at least twice as much on the bride's jewels, according to Dumont).

Secondly, among the non-Brahman castes like the Piramalai Kallars, each ceremonial visit of the groom's side to the bride's

house is accompanied by a number of baskets (*siir*), containing foodstuffs and other articles for consumption, and this is increased and handed back from the bride's side. These cyclical prestations and counter-prestations between the bride's house and the groom's house are both called '*siir*' by Dumont, and are defined as external prestations. On the other hand, the money collected among both families on marriage, called *moy*, which helps the relatives contribute to the expenses of the marrying families, he calls internal prestation (he maintains it is often called *surul* by local people).

A number of differences distinguish the case of the Nagarattars from what Dumont reports. First of all, *parisam* given to the bride's side by the groom's side is only token money, such as rs. 11 or so, although this money is always accompanied with the gift of gold of a few sovereigns, as an auspicious accompaniment. The gold given by the groom's side is more important, and it is combined in the *taali* or *kaluttiru* by the bride's side later. Therefore, Dumont's contention of gift-exchange (prestations and counter-prestations) is applicable at this level. The groom's side also sends the gift of wedding *sarees* and a few toilet items for the bride, accompanying the gold pieces (see appendix D : the groom's accounts of the wedding).

Secondly, among the Nagarattars, *siir* means only the gift sent from the married woman's mother's house to the married (or marrying) daughter at the wedding and after the wedding. The counter-prestations which are returned as a gift from the groom's side to the bride's side such as the case of fruit, baskets and sweets etc. are not called *siir*. However, as Dumont mentions 'masculine *siir*', there seem to be some castes which call the prestations from the groom to the bride *siir* as well (1983: 82). Thirdly, *moy*, as I

have already mentioned, is not a substantial contribution since the amount is less than rs. 1 (mostly between 25 to 50 paisa). Moreover, the distinction between the internal prestations (*moy*) and external prestations (*siir*) does not appear to be of much use in the case of the Nagarattars, since the sole importance of the gift centres around the gift from the 'mother's house' to the married woman, and this alone is called *siir*. Even if the gift included her husband's clothes or children's clothes, the receiver of the *siir* is the married woman.

Among the Nagarattars, the successive gift-giving from the mother's people starts on the day of the wedding, and continues throughout her life, and the relationship between her and her brother is inherited by her children. The day after the wedding, after the newly married couple have been to the temple to worship the deities, they go to the bride's natal family's house for lunch or supper. The bride's family give rs. 21, or rs. 101 to the couple in addition to fruits and betel leaves and areca nuts as a ceremonial gift. The couple again visit the bride's mother's house the following day, for another meal (*rendaam wali*), and then visit the maternal uncles' houses of both sides, and have either lunch or tea there. Such visits made by the newly married couple are rewarded with the money gift given by the bride's natal family and maternal uncles. According to the Nagarattars, it is only after these three visits are made to the close kin of the bride's side that the couple may go to the houses of others, and this is when the couple becomes 'ordinary'.

This custom may be practised to ease the psychological isolation of the bride from her natal family as the relationship between her newly established house and her mother's house is cemented by these visits. However, cementing of such relationships between the couple and the wife's people are made by the gifts given

to them on their visits, particularly just after they get married. The rule that the newly married couple cannot begin an ordinary routine life until they visit the wife's people is consistent with the latter being the most important gift-givers.

Because of this 'cemented relationship', the importance of the bride's mother's house to neutralize abnormal situations can be observed even after a man has taken a trip abroad. The Nagarattars believe that long ocean journeys are dangerous and so after a man has crossed the ocean and has returned to his natal village, he must visit his wife's 'mother's house' and have at least one cup of coffee or tea. Then after he has resumed 'normality' he goes back to his own house to his wife and family. A woman who has been abroad also observes this custom. She goes to her 'mother's house' to have a cup of coffee before going home to see her children.

The area in which the Nagarattars can readjust to normal life, and the safe zone for both the husband and wife, is the wife's 'mother's house' where they eat some food, which nourishes and helps the couple to return to normality before going home.

6-6 Funeral procedures

Good (1991: 132) puts the death ritual in three stages in order to give an analytical description: 1) the disposal of the corpse; 2) the rites in the cemetery^e one or three days later; and 3) the subsequent purificatory rites at which prestations are exchanged, which normally takes place sixteen days after the first stage. Following this, I shall sketch the death rituals of the Nagarattars. However, among the Nagarattars, the rites in the cemetery^e take place on the day after the cremation, and the mourning period lasts no longer than 6

days. Therefore, the interval between 1 and 3 is fairly short.

a) The day of the death

When a death occurs in a Nagarattar house, the body is cleaned with rose water and ash (and *kunkum* for a *sumangali*), covered with a white cloth (or a red cloth, if it is a *sumangali*), and kept in the ancestral house. It is first kept in an intermediary area, and then moved to the *walavu waasal* while the *pangaalis* of the deceased officiate over the rituals.



Fig.6-2 The corpse in the water garland ritual.

A white veetti with a tuft of grass tied in each corner with the mango leaves placed on it is held aloft by four poles, and this ritual is called *niirmaalai* ('water garland'), according to Good (1991: 133). Unlike the case of the Asaris reported by Good, in the Nagarattar funerals, there are no professionals like the Musicians and the Barber in the

ritual held in the ancestral house. There is no music. The conch shell is blown by one of the *pangaalis* as well.²⁸

The body, wrapped in white cloth, is covered with a bamboo mat, and taken to the *walavu waasal* where a *pandal* is put up. If the deceased is a man, his male *pangaalis* go round the body in a clockwise direction and then their wives and children do the same. Even if it is a married woman (or widow), her husband's *pangaalis* perform the same rituals. Setting up the *pandals* and preparing for the funeral is the job of the *pangaalis*, and there is no role for the *taayaadigal* (mother's people).

An *aacchi* told me: "The mother's people would come and grieve with the people in the house, but this is of course, not a formality. Compared to the mother's people, the *pangaalis* are very formal. If you try to pay for anything on these occasions, they make a big fuss, saying that they wouldn't do such things for money !"

This shows the contrasting attitudes of relatives towards receiving money: giving money to relatives in auspicious circumstances is good, but money is not to be given to relatives or not to be received from others at funerals, especially not to or from the *pangaalis*. Only service castes get payments for duties performed at funerals.

A male *pangaali* blows the conch shell, which is also different from an auspicious ceremony, when the conch shell is blown by a married woman who is related to the family. After the conch shell is blown, the body is taken out and put into a cart and only the male *pangaalis* accompany the cart to the cremation ground. There is no musical band accompanying the group, and both the Barber priest

²⁸This clearly contrasts with the case of the Asaris reported by Good(1991: 133) in which professionals such as Musicians and Barbers are engaged right from the start of rituals.

and the Parayas are awaiting for them in the cremation ground.

As soon as the body is gone, the women clean the house with water. "We do not like to keep the body on the bare floor, like the Brahmans, as it looks very crude. They keep the body wrapped in a white robe without covering it with a mat. Because they feel that only the spirit is important, they do not place much importance on the body. They treat the body as if it is rubbish, and do not show it any affection. However, we feel that the body is quite important until it is cremated, as we still feel affection for the deceased. That is why we always use a new mat out of respect for the deceased. We use the mat, after it is washed. Nothing is 'polluted' once it is washed properly."

A tall lamp with five angles is lit in a corner of the *walavu* throughout the mourning period. The same lamp is used on the auspicious occasions with five wicks, but for funerals, they use only one wick to signify that it is an inauspicious period.

b) Cremation

In the villages of Chettinadu, the Nagarattars usually have their own cremation ground which is separate from those of other castes. A few Parayas who have been hereditarily attached to the Nagarattar cremation ground wait for the funeral procession to come and assist the cremation. The chief mourner is tonsured by a barber at the side of the compound and he takes a bath at the other side where there is a well. He changes his *veetti* there and comes to the platform where the body is to be cremated.

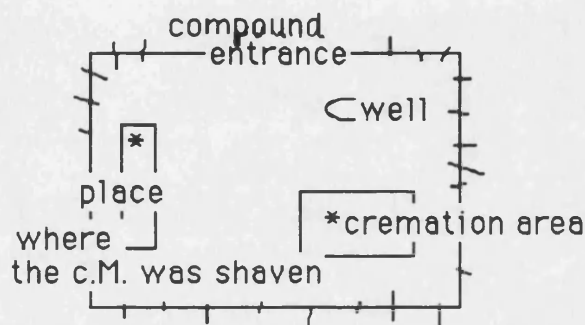


fig. 6-3: Cremation ground

The Parayas cover the body with cow dung, straw, and clay and then, after the body is covered completely, an opening is made around the face into which each participant pours rice²⁹ soaked in water, some coins and a few extra drops of water.

According to Good (1991:135), this is called mouth money (*vaaykkaasu*), and is the prerequisite of the Vettiyan. According to Dubois (1906: 485), this is meant to stop the hunger and thirst of the deceased. This opening is then sealed and the body is covered with mud. The chief mourner goes clockwise round the body three times, carrying on his left shoulder a clay pot filled with water, accompanied by a Barber. Each time the chief mourner circles the corpse the Barber makes a hole in the pot with a sickle so that the water pours out of it onto the ground (Good 1991: 135). In the

²⁹According to the Nagarattars, this raw rice should be removed freshly from the husk in a wooden pounder, and this should be done by the daughter of the deceased. If there is no daughter, either the brother's daughter or the wife's sister's daughter (*mahal*) can replace her.

meantime, the mourner kindles a fire with a wooden stick which he holds in his right hand.

After three rounds, the mourner throws the pot ^{over} his shoulder. When the fire has been lit, the mourner and his accompanying party leave the spot and they are not supposed to look back. The Parayas pour kerosene onto the fire and tend it throughout the night.

The chief mourner, accompanied by the *pangaalis*, goes to the Shiva temple. He does not enter but waits for a Brahman *puroohita* at the side of the temple tank. The *puroohita* comes to the tank and sits at the steps of the tank and is given gifts by the chief mourner.

Daanam or religious gifts are only given to the Brahmans. The purpose behind this is to create merit for the deceased. Today, the simplest way of giving *daanam* is to give rs. 50 to the Brahman, but traditionally, items such as pots filled with water (a symbol of fertility and thus auspiciousness), a new *veetti*, vegetables, and a torch, were given.

A more conspicuous gift is that of a cow or a calf (*goodaana*), which, as Parry(1985: 619) and Dubois maintain (1906: 483), is indispensable at least among the Brahman castes, if one wishes the deceased to arrive in the heaven.

This custom is popular among the Nagarattars. Purchasing a cow, according to a Nagarattar, is not as expensive as may be imagined. "A cheap one can be available at around rs. 500 to 800. It does not matter whether it is lean or old. A cow is a cow."

Early in the morning the following day, the *pangaalis* fetch the bones from 5 parts of the deceased's body, which are put in a small box.

c) 5th day: the end of the mourning period.

Traditionally , mourning ended on the 16th day but nowadays, it ends on the 5th day. ³⁰

At 8:30 a.m. the Brahman priests begin preparing for the rituals in the women's quarter. The men and women are relieved that the mourning is at an end and are happy to chat with each other in their own quarters, so they pay little attention to the Brahman and his work. 70 *donnai* cups (small cups made of leaves) are laid out with different things inside each. According to a *puroohita*, the 70 *donnai* cups are divided into 5 groups in the following manner. Three-fifths are given to the ancestors: this role is played by the *puroohita* in the ritual, and the *puroohita* receives them as *daanam*. One-fifth is given to lord Vishnu: this role is played by a Vaishnava Brahman or a Brahman connected with a Vishnu temple. One-fifth is to be given to lord Shiva: this role is played by a Brahman Shiva temple priest (Gurukkal).

The *donnai* cups should contain a minimum of 10 items such as black grams, chickpeas, salt, raw sugar, turmeric, raw rice, aubergine, bittergourd, tamarind, turmeric, etc (see the funeral account of appendix E for details).

A *puroohita* sits in front of a pot decorated with white thread placed on a mound of yellow rice. The pots, according to the *puroohita*, symbolize the deities and the deceased. The *puroohita* starts the Vinayaga *puja* with turmeric made into a small pyramid

³⁰ According to one *puroohita*, Brahmans observe mourning for 12 days, which is less than non-Brahmans. This is because they observe stricter disciplines than other castes, and are thus 'purer'. Non-Brahmans now have the longest mourning period, since they have not changed their custom. Other castes have a much shorter mourning period. Among the Maravars in Chettinadu area, for example, the mourning period lasts for only two and a half days.

shape (this is to symbolize Vinayaga). The mourner comes to the puroohita and is given the thread (*puunal*) around his shoulder. This is a sacred thread which symbolizes the status of the twice-born, who is entitled to receive the service of the Brahman *puroohitas*. The *puroohita* sprinkles yellow rice and then water with a mango leaf onto the Vinayaga, i.e. the yellow pyramidal mound of the turmeric. He chants the names of gods to invoke and request their presence and then he chants the deceased person's name, *gotra*, birth star, etc.. He then sprinkles rice and flowers onto the pot and the chief mourner.

Next, at the corner of the setting, the priest worships the goddess Laskhmi with a special lamp chanting her 8 names. He puts *kus* grass on the coconut placed on the pot. (*Kus* grass keeps evil away.)

Five Brahmans and the *puroohita* start chanting mantras together, and the *puroohita* sprinkles water from the pot onto the purificatory ritual as well. The chief mourner and his wife sip a few drops of *panchakaaram* (a mixture of five ingredients, i.e milk, curd, cow's urine, rice, and ghee) that has been given by the *puroohita* for purification. The female relatives receive the *panchakaaram*, after prostrating themselves, and then the males follow suit. The mourner goes with the *puroohita* to the corner where Lakshmi is worshipped, sits beside him and copies his chanting of the names of gods.

The chief mourner stands and places the *kus* grass in front of each of the six Brahmans sitting in a row facing North. After some water is sprinkled, a big banana leaf is placed in front of each of them on which water is sprinkled. Raw rice and vegetables are then

placed on each of the leaves³¹.

Five rupees, betel leaves, areca nuts, long vegetables, and pumpkin pieces are added to each *donnai*. Then two Brahmans put a white *veetti* up as a curtain and the *puroohita* sits behind the curtain facing the chief mourner who is sitting on the other side of the curtain. The chief mourner passes money and other gifts to the *puroohita* through the space between the curtain and the floor. He then takes a bath and wears a new thread given to him by the *puroohita*. A fire is lit for the *homam* (offering of *ghee* to the fire god). The change of the sacred thread symbolizes the termination of pollution, and the new start in the mourning house.

The *puroohita* makes balls of uncooked rice, *milahu*, honey and yellow rice coloured with turmeric. One ball is for the paternal grandfather, one is for the father, and another is for the deceased. These three balls are mixed together so that they make one big ball and later, the ball is thrown into a pond, tank, or river³².

One box which contains a few bones of the deceased is buried in one corner of the house, and after a few days, this is taken out and carried to a sacred river (e.g. Ganges, Yamuna) for immersion. At the ritual I attended, the box was taken to Rameshwaram, a famous pilgrimage centre by the sea in the south of Tamil Nadu.

Some Hindus take the bones as far as Benares, which is the

³¹ This is only a pseudo-feast, and all the food put on the leaf is 'raw', because Brahman priests refuse to dine with non-Brahmans in order to preserve their ritual purity. At the funeral of a Brahman, real cooked food would be given to the Brahman priests, since they are ritually equal.

³² According to Parry (1985: 628), the Funeral Priest (Mahabrahmans in Benares) are supposed to take up the place of the deceased (ghost) and eat the meal there, in order to absorb the sin of the deceased and send them to heaven.

most desirable final destination. The Nagarattars have rest houses for caste members in almost all famous pilgrimage centres in India, so that they can stay there at a reasonable rate (rs. 10 to 15 per day, for a family) as long as they want.

6-7 Discussion 3: auspicious and inauspiciousness at weddings and funerals

a) Ancestral house and life-cycle rituals

According to Srinivas (1952), patrilineally inherited joint ancestral houses (*okka*) among the Coorgs perform essential functions in the life cycle rituals, especially weddings and funerals. On both occasions, the members from the friendly *okka*, i.e. those who are called *aruvas*, come and help the members (1952: 124). The *aruvas* have frequent marriage alliances with another *okka*, so that the relationship between these *okkas* is tied with mutual help and gift-exchange relationships. Similarly, the Nayars also have mutual cooperative relationships with the friendly *taravads* called *enangans* who come and assist at both the funerals and weddings.

However, as far as the Nagarattars are concerned, there is a clear distinction between weddings and funerals, although both take place in their ancestral house (*walavu viidu*). While the weddings and auspicious rituals are attended by the affine, i.e. 'mother's people', they are not involved with funerals. Funerals are taken care of by the *pangaalis*: they come and assist the chief mourner and his family yet they refuse to receive gifts for that service.

At the funeral I attended, the son (who had been adopted) was away from home and did not manage to reach the house before his father's cremation. A festival for a village goddess in a shrine

situated very close to the house was about to be held, so the family was forced to perform the cremation immediately so that the auspicious festival was not polluted. Because the son could not get there in time, a nephew took the role of the chief mourner. In this way, some other *pangaali* can replace the chief mourner if they have to conduct a funeral without the son. The person who takes the position would accept the pollution, have his hair tonsured and cremate the body of the deceased as the chief mourner. This kind of ritual division of labour exists between the *pangaalis* and the affine. Affines are considered to be related to reproduction, and the *pangaalis* look after death.

Women do not accompany the body to the cremation ground, but 'purify' the house while the men are away. There is a clear sexual division of pollution: the women, who are associated with reproduction, suffer from the pollution of birth (for up to one month), while men undergo death pollution, as only the sons (i.e. not the daughters) can be the chief mourners. By birth of his child, a man gets polluted to a certain extent, but not as heavily as his wife. On the other hand, a woman gets polluted by the death of her close kin, yet not as strongly as the chief mourner.

No gift is given by the *taayaadigals*, and no role is assigned to any of the *taayaadigals* at the funerals. Similarly, women, once married, do not need to undergo the ritual pollution of their natal family, since they have already become ^{with respect to} affines, [^] their brothers. Although a woman who has lost her parents mourns and grieves, and does not wear brightly coloured sarees for a few days, she does not receive death pollution. When she dies, death pollution is shared by her husband, her children, and some close *pangaalis* of her husband, but not by her natal family members. If they wish,

they may go to the temples and visit other people's houses, although they may ^{be} too grief-stricken to do so.

The dissociation of the affine³ and married women from death pollution is consistent with the emphasis placed on their auspiciousness during the wedding rituals in which the maternal uncle appears as the gift giver and mediator to the bride and the groom. Auspicious people, the *taayaadigals*, stress the reciprocal gift exchange relationship, while the *pangaalis* refuse to accept any gift or money at the funerals.

"They would be infuriated if we offered them any money at the funeral !" one *aacchi* told me. And this leads to another acute contrast in gift exchange in terms of the wedding and the funeral. In the wedding, money is good, since the transaction is mutual and reciprocal, symbolizing the future exchange relationship. On the other hand, when a funeral takes place and the *pangaalis* help the mourning house, they do not receive money, since the transaction should not be mutual, as death is a pollution. Only those who work as ritual specialists, i.e. Brahman priests, Barbers, Washermen, Parayas, are to be paid; partly because of their service and partly because gift giving at the funeral is believed to be meritorious and to erase sin (Parry 1980).

The Nagarattar mourner treats the participants, feeding them throughout the mourning period. He even gives a small gift to them at the last day of the mourning.³³ He should not ask any financial

³³On the day of the final mourning, the participants are given small gifts, things like stainless-steel cups with poriyal (popped rice) in addition to betel leaves and areca nuts. Stainless steel cups, as I explained in the previous chapter, symbolize auspiciousness, because of their scratchless, unbreakable quality. Poriyal also signifies auspiciousness by its colour (whiteness) and puffy quality (good harvest).

help from his *pangaalis* or from his *taayaadigals*, and, according to a senior Nagarattar, there should be some money kept for this purpose³⁴, if he is a married man. It is a shame if a man has not prepared anything for a funeral. To a Nagarattar, ^{the family of} a man with social standing should be able to do a funeral for him and for his wife, and for his unmarried children³⁵. As for a woman, only after she is married and establishes her own family does she become a full social being. When she dies, it is not her natal family who look after her body. It is her husband's *pangaalis* and their wives who deal with her funeral. Her body will be cleaned and wrapped by the wives of the husband's *pangaalis*.

The *walavu viidu* becomes the mourning house where food is served and the body is kept until the cremation takes place. *Ul viidu* is not used as a ritual space, and all rituals take place in the *walavu waasal*. Along with the contrast between the *pangaalis* and the *taayaadigals*, there is also a contrast between the *walavu waasal* and the *ul viidu*, in the funeral.

Feeding the guests is extremely important at funerals for the Nagarattars, as I mentioned, and this is quite different from other castes' customs, as people normally do avoid feeding guests since people taking food in the mourning house fosters pollution. However, those who do not mind taking food to the house are

³⁴However, as is shown in the appendix E, in reality, there are some families who have to borrow money from the relatives if there is a sudden death.

³⁵If someone dies before getting married, he or she is not given a proper funeral, i.e. the guests are limited to the close kin, and no Brahman priest is required, or no grand meals are served to the guests. If it is a child, the funeral is far simpler. According to Good (1991: 144), the corpse of a child is not to be cremated and should be buried, and only adults are supposed to be cremated.

sharing the pollution with the mourners, so this is an expression of cooperation. In this context, it is quite important that most mourners who come are the Nagarattars: the Brahmans who work for them would not take food there. Therefore, the food preparation is meant for the Nagarattars who share the same life cycle rituals such as puberty ceremony, wedding, and *saandi*. Serving food and accepting food at the mourning house is an expression of their sharing the pollution. They can do so since they can marry each other, i.e. all the Nagarattars are equal in status, thus ritually pure to each other.

Another question is to be answered: if auspiciousness exists with the reciprocal gift-exchange, what would be the religious significance of the non-gift exchange? And how is it related to the their morality ? I shall discuss this in the next chapter.

- 6-1 Muhuurta Kaaran installs the auspicious pole (*muhuurta kaal*) in the *walavu waasal*.



- 6-2 The mother of the groom receives a *siir* from her brother for her eldest son's wedding.



- 6-3 Puuram Kalikkiradu (1): the grandmother officiates over the ritual to remove the symbolic protection of virginity from the bride.



- 6-4 Puuram Kalikkiradu (2): the bride receives a blessing from her maternal uncle who touches particular seven spots on her body in the morning ritual.



- 6-5 The grandfather of the bride hands over the *taali* to the groom's party on an auspicious carpet in the *walavu waasal*.



6-6 The bride receives *kaluttiru* at *muhuurtam*..



- 6-7 The bride receives a *kolavi* (an idol of a child) from her father-in-law who is also one of her maternal uncles.



- 6-8 The bride receives the mother-in-law's ritual as her maternal uncle stands beside her.



- 6-9 The bride stands on her platform which is higher than the groom's when receiving the *taali*. (The photograph is taken in mid 1960s.)



6-10 Signing the *isai padimaanam* (1) a photograph taken in 1991: the fathers sit on the auspicious carpet inside the *kaliyaana viidu* (*ul viidu*) and sign the marriage contract.



- 6-11 Signing the *isai padimaanam* (2) the photograph is taken in 1960s : the fathers used palm leaves until the 1960s.



6-12 The bride and her relative carry gifts from her maternal uncle into her husband's *ul viidu*.



- 6-13 Signing the joint account: the couple opens a joint account with the money the bride carried as part of her dowry.



6-14 The bride's party receives gifts as they take leave of the groom's ancestral house.



Appendix E

Funeral Accounts

Case Study 1) A funeral in 1987

Unlike other rituals such as weddings, *saandi*, and puberty ceremonies, it is difficult to obtain data for funerals because of their inauspiciousness. People keep accounts but normally destroy them after the funeral since it is considered to be inauspicious. The following is a detailed account of the funeral of Manickawaasagar's father who died in 1987. Luckily, his mother kept it in her house. When his father died in Madurai the cremation was conducted there.

Reading the account book and checking the expenses with me, Manickawaasagar expressed a deep regret; the expense was unreasonably high, according to his estimation. However, he said that he and his brothers could not argue with the funeral directors in Madurai. Being in the city, there was no relative to help them immediately, and, after all, the whole family was in mourning. There were three relatives who gave money to Manickawasagar in Madurai. Although the money gift is not common in the funerals, according to Manickawaasagar, the money givers were the *chettis*, who are borrowers from Manickawasagar's father.

Hiring drummers and other musicians in funerals is also unusual for traditional Nagarattars (see the expenses of 20/12/87, for example.). Yet living in Madurai, Manickawaasagar's family might have followed non-Nagarattar custom, since they needed to depend on non-*pangaalis* to conduct a funeral. (Incomes are underlined).

case study 1: Manickawaasagar's father:

ITEMs	EXPENSES (rs.)
=====	
9/12/87 :	
(withdrawal from the bank rs. <u>5900</u>)	

hospital bill	1500
taxi	350
given by the brother of the deceased	<u>3242</u>
20/12/87	
given by V. Ramasamy (paternal relative)	<u>5000</u>
4 litres milk	20
bus fare	1.2
2 kg. Bengal garam	17
1 kg. eggplant	3
5 kg. wooden sticks for cremation	60
13 kg. wood to spread for the funeral ground	155
300 ml milk	20
300 ml castor oil	20
0.5 kg <i>ravai</i>	0.25
0.5 kg <i>jagri</i>	3.3
20/12/87	
nettle	1.5
food for the drummers (musicians)	20
hire charge for a bicycle	0.6
for a van driver	5
soda	2.5
milk packet	12.5
bus fare to see Krishnamoorthy	2
hire charge for the chariot to carry the	
dead body & money for a drummer	1,100
cleaning charge for the floor of the cremation ground	65
wage for two cooks	50
soda	0.5
petrol	17
kerosene	34.25
hire charge of a van	50
postal charge for Govindan	10
printing charge for the post cards	20
for Bose(paternal relative)	2
21/12/87 at Nattasankottai (their ancestral village)	
milk	30
castor oil	5.5
salt	3.5

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cook and watchman	50
coffee powder	3.00
chilli powder	12
flour	7.5
8kg raw rice	36
charge of the cremation ground	66.75
postage	56
a telegram to Neivelli	7
bus fare to call a <i>puroohita</i> from Shivaganga	2
firewood	192
coffee powder	3
expense for a lamp offering to the temple	6
cotton wick	0.5

22/12/89

tooth powder	1.8
vegetables	1.5
20. paisa stamps (X 50)	10
aerogramme 5 sheets	15
toilet cleaner	23.35
<i>kesari</i> powder	1.0
money given by a relative	<u>77</u>

money given by a relative for rice purchase	<u>84</u>
rice purchase	80
charge for paddy grinding	2
for <i>puroohita</i>	5
for his bus fare	3
for the Barber	10
for the drummer	10
for the temple lamp	11
for the gift to the <i>puroohita</i>	53.5
sales of wood(income)	<u>150</u>
for the <i>pandal</i> installation; given to the Washerman	5
for the drummer	10
for the Parayan	10
meal of the <i>puroohita</i>	46.5
medicine	4.9
bread	1.5

23/12/87

chilli powder	2.4
wooden stick	228.75
purchase of provisions	631.5
for the funeral ritual on the 4th day	37.55
medicine	4.9
bread	2.4

23/12/87

chilli powder	2.4
for betel leaves and areca nuts	6.4

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for 1/2 kg chilli	7.5
for the meal and tiffin	26.75
to Tiruppuvanan for throwing the ashes (after cremation)	26.75

For the fourth day gift :

<i>veetti</i> (51x6), towel(28x5), pot(6x2) as a gift for the <i>puroohitas</i>	458
bus fare for 6 <i>puroohitas</i>	89.2
design towels	105.6

Expenses incurred at a Nagarattar rest house in Rameshwaram.
(They went there to dissolve the ash to the sea.)

telegram parcel	51
postal expenses	63.1
for <i>puja</i> at Vinayaga temple	50
coconut	4.5
0.5 kg tomato	5
green leaves	0.5
3 kg raw rice	83.2
coconut oil	10
0.25kg <i>kasakasa</i>	12.5
tablets	2.4

Shopping at Shivagangai : 638.15

five <i>sarees</i> given as presents to close relatives (5 x rs. 108)	542
bus fare	2
withdrawal for the following Friday expenses	<u>34</u>

24/12/87

greens	5.5
flowers, sandals	3.5
gifts for maternal relatives	704
money to the son's house	278.05
caster oil	5.5
for a Brahman cook	10
for a woman cook	8
for the man who blew the conch	10
for Sundram 4 days salary	80
bicycle hire	93.5
gas light (2)	80
hiring charge for one more gas light	15
for Parayan	2
soda	2.4
flower	1.2
expenses for tiffin	261.95
for 40 meals	700
to the people who carried the corpse	100
salt	1.4

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for Pandaaram	10
for Washerman	3
jagri (raw sugar)	1.75
from V.K. (close relative)	<u>2000</u>

26/12/87

shopping at the vegetable market	85.2
tobacco packet	1
to Ambarakkaran	2
shopping at Shivagangai	80.05
bus fare	3.3
milk	405
bus fare to Madagupatti	12
rice flour four measures	8.4
to the person who carried the corpse	8
for the meal of a dhobi+other expense	5
rice two measures	5
for a maid servant, two days' wage	24
betel leaves and areca nuts	8
salt ,seasoning powder, etc.	20
to a man who carried the corpse	4.5

28/12/87

wooden cutter	25
postage	5
vegetable	85.9
Kanna hospital bill	9.2
kerosene	26
coffee powder	17
tablets	0.9
income	<u>13</u>

29/12/87

meals	3.7
bus fare for Madagapatti	5
doctor's fee and tablets	28.85
bus fare for Madagapatti	13
for the cooks	150

30/12/87

groundnut oil	66
for the Washerman	3
areca nuts and betel leaves	2

31/12/87

for the temple priest	7.25
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1/1/88

flower	0.25
soap	1.25
tablets	0.8

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1/1/88

for the toilet cleaner	5.0
vegetables	38.6
servant maid	150.00
milk	139.5
servant maid	65
provisions, vegetables, hiring charge for a van	4,357.85

2/1/88

loan from V. K	<u>2,000</u>
loan from V.M.	<u>3,000</u>
gift to the daughter-in-law of the deceased	716
caster oil	10
hire charge of a van	240
a garland to Maariyamman temple	5
mutton	42.5
hospital fees	2,251
bus fare	4
to the tree cutter	35

4/1/88

draft sent to Murugapan	2,000
draft commission	10
milk	45

6/1/88

milk	5
vegetable	13
milk	25

11/1/88

cake and milk	16
eggs	6.6
palm oil	39.6
sugar	12.5

12/1/88

Saala's school fee	20
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13/1/88

milk	12
kerosene	25
mat	27
Savina powder	2.5

14/1/88

for milk Society	268.35
vegetable, fruits , turmeric, coconut	50

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sugarcane, keros ne, vegetable, fruits	12
butter milk	25
death certificate issued at the Taluk office	100
photocopy	5
bus	1.6
milk	7

15/1/88	
milk	7.5
cow's watchman	75
photo developing	100

16/1/88	
milk	12.5
sale of milk	<u>520</u>
interest given by the sales of milk	<u>420</u>

18/1/88	
milk	28.1
coconut and vegetables	28.1

19/1/88	
milk	6.8

20/1/88	
for Tuesday pongal	27.5
temple donation	5
<i>aachanai</i> (flower and fruits)	17.8
mutton	31.5
bus fare	3.2
bicycle hire	16

21/1/88	
offering to Sudakudi temple	25

22/1/88	
to the clerk at the collector's office	25
photo	15

24/1/88	
certificate VAO and R.S. (death certificate)	100
eggs	3.6
oil, <i>dhal</i> , biscuits, Blue soap,	84
fish	5
hiring a van	64
vegetables	15.5

total income: rs. 22,440.

total expense: rs. 22,404.85

Case study 2: A funeral in 1991

7/8/91

On this date, I attended the 4th day of a funeral at Kandanur. The family was middle-class, and 50 people attended it. Along with the cost for the first day and the second day, the total expense was around Rs. 40,000--50,000, according to the estimate of the attendants. I could not get the accounts for the fourth day since the whole function was not over and most of the accounts were not settled yet.

For the gift to the Brahmans, Rs. 3,500-4,000.

Details of the gift (amount in Rs.):

A)		
a new veetti and a towel for two Brahmans	Rs. 50 each	100
to 30 Brahmans	Rs. 50 each	1,500
30 stainless steel tumblers for the Brahmans	Rs. 27 each	810

B)
In addition to this, the following gifts of raw materials were given to the Brahmans in donnai cups;

coconut	flour
sandal paste	milk
banana leaves	raw rice
betel leaves and areca nuts	fruit
Bengal gram	green gram
eggplant	mango
bittergourd	banana
cucumber	dhal
salt	turmeric
wheat	ginger
sikaai	jagri
sugar	sesam ^e oil
ghee	curd
donnai cups	

cost: approximately s. 40x 31cups = Rs. 1,240

C)
For the washerman; (he washes clothes during the whole mourning period);

a shirt, food, 2kg rice and 2kg *milahu*. Rs.50

D)

For the guests who attended the funeral: one day's expenses (in Rs.):

morning;	15
lunch;	20
evening meal for 300 people	12,600

On the following day and on the fourth day as well, they spent about the same:

two meals Rs. 12,600	(x 2)	total = Rs. 25,200
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7

Conclusion

7-1 The morality of gift-giving and gift-exchange

When MAM Ramasamy's *saandi* took place on an unprecedented scale, people were especially shocked by the scale of his gift-giving: not only relatives and friends, but all the servants, employees, and guests who went to see him were given gifts of some sort. People talked about such an excessive indulgence in gift-giving as typical of the Nagarattars: he gave gifts to express his wealth and power, and to gain followers. In other words, what people said was that the Nagarattars would always consider what they would get in return.

As I have discussed in the previous chapter, the idea of reciprocity appears to be valid, especially in the ceremonial exchanges between relatives on auspicious occasions. However, is that the only motivation for such grand gift-giving? Obviously, as I have demonstrated, at a funeral the Nagarattars insist on non-reciprocity and the mourner simply gives but never receives. Is this non-reciprocal gift an expression of a different ideology from that of reciprocity? And if they are different, are these two ideologies present even in other gift giving occasions such as *saandi* ?

According to Mauss (1990: 46), any transaction is basically reciprocal. Among the Maoris of the Trobriand Islands for example, there are valuable items (*tonga*) which are believed to contain *hau* (spirit). This spirit is identified with the original owner of the valuable, so that if someone who is given a *tonga* fails to return another *tonga*, the spirit which is embedded in the valuable harms the

receiver. Therefore, Mauss stresses the principle of reciprocity, as this principle alone can make the valuables circulate among the restricted members.

According to Sahlins however, *hau* among the Maoris is not some kind of mysterious spirit which forces the receiver to give in return, but it is a spiritual quality uniquely associated with fecundity, i.e. fertility and productivity (1972: 167). Just as in the mundane context of exchange, *hau* is the return on a good, so as a spiritual quality *hau* is the principle of fertility (p. 168). Because of the principle of reciprocity which is embedded in the materials, *tonga* are valuables with a strong connection with fertility. To Sahlins, the gift is alliance, solidarity, communion--in brief, peace; the gift is the primitive way of achieving the peace that in civil society is secured by the State (p. 169). Therefore, special care is taken of *tongas* as the owner expects to be able to yield a profit on the next exchange. Sahlins interprets this as a desire to accrue interest on the item.

Sahlins' explanation seems to correspond with the Nagarattars' concept of gift-exchange, at least during auspicious ceremonial occasions. They regard gift-giving as reciprocal (which Sahlins might term a 'political' alliance), and the auspiciousness or *subam* that is intrinsic to the gift-exchange of the Nagarattars is closely connected to reproduction or fecundity, which can also lead to a political alliance. Exchanges which take place on auspicious occasions have marital union as their motivation and endpoint: kin and affines make gift-exchanges for future alliances and mutual prosperity at puberty ceremonies, weddings, and *saandi*. Women, as auspicious agents, are the central figures in the Nagarattars scheme of such a gift-exchange. They are producers of future progeny and as such are the most auspicious valuables exchanged between two

lineages. Without marriage, the lineage can no longer maintain an exchange relationship with the rest of the Nagarattars. As with the Trobriander's exchange of valuables, the Nagarattars marital exchanges only take place within a delimited circle, and women, along with other valuables and commodities, are carefully exchanged only within those boundaries.

However, in contrast to this kind of reciprocal exchange, gift-giving at funerals is inauspicious, and should never be reciprocated. Neither the maternal relatives nor the affines have any role in funeral rituals - only the *pangaalis* help the mourner and participate in the rituals, but they receive nothing in exchange. However, the mourner does serve food, and gives gifts to the Brahman priest, to some of the lower caste servants, and to some of the participants at the funeral. This payment functions to expiate the deceased's sin.

Among non-Brahman castes however, the funeral is an occasion for giving gifts not from the mourner to the participants but from the participants to the mourner (cf. Good 1991: 149-152, Dumont 1983:93-102) as part of the chain of gift-exchange relationship among the kin and between the kin and the affine. The Brahman mourner, on the other hand, receives nothing from the participants (cf. Gough 1959), but neither is he expected to provide anything for them, particularly not food, because death is regarded as impure. The Brahman priest, however, receives religious gifts in order to accumulate religious merit for the deceased. Thus, the Nagarattars' funeral appears to be similar to the Brahmans' although the former are still peculiar in their offer of food and gifts to the participants as an expression of goodwill. What is the moral reasoning behind the insistence of giving without reciprocation in funeral rituals?

Discussing the ideology behind the gift, Parry (1985) differentiates between two kinds. The first is reciprocal and thus of a reproductive nature and the other is non-reciprocal. Parry argues that both Trobriand and Maori exchange reveal a preoccupation with reciprocity as the norm of social conduct in contrast to its prohibition in Hindu law (p. 466). Underlying most of the major world religions is the notion of non-reciprocated gifts or the giving of alms, which are ideally donated in private without any expectation of worldly return (p. 467). Since the very notion of salvation devalues the profane world which is based on reproduction and reciprocal exchange, an individual's relationship between this world and any idea of a world after death is reflected in their gift-exchange, i.e., reciprocal gifts versus non-reciprocal gifts (p. 468). Therefore, salvation from bondage for the deceased is attainable by non-reciprocated gifts at the funeral.

Parry's hypothesis concerning the two kinds of gifts is persuasive, especially since he maintains that the ideology of the 'pure gift' is accorded such prominence among groups - such as the Jews and Jains - which have a particularly close historical association with market trade. Parry concludes by pointing out the plausibility of the Maussian argument that the combination of interest and disinterest in exchange is preferable to their separation: it is not a coincidence that the ideological stress on the autonomy of the market goes hand-in-hand with pleas for philanthropic activity to assume the responsibilities which the market economy denies.

The acute economic rationalisation of the everyday lives of the Nagarattars is maintained through excellent organisation and thus they are able to accumulate religious merit through frequent charitable activities. They need the temple for two reasons: as a

centre for mercantile activity and as a step in attaining the religious salvation promised for meritorious individuals. By setting up their own caste *madams* in several different areas and encouraging caste members to be religious, the Nagarattars have tried to integrate the ideas of individual salvation and economic prosperity with the help of the wealth pooled in their caste community. Therefore, to the Nagarattars, the religious gift should be non-reciprocal; since this alone exists outside their world, this alone can take them to the heaven.

However, this poses another question regarding the gift in Indian culture. What is the significance of the gifts given by the Nagarattars on auspicious and inauspicious occasions? As both Mauss and Parry argue, the 'Indian gift' is held to embody the sins of the donor (Mauss 1990: 62-3, Parry 1989: 459). The donor is rid of evil by transferring the dangerous and demeaning burden of death and impurity to the recipient.

The Mahabrahmans (funeral priests in Benares) feel that they are endlessly accumulating sin by accepting the gifts of pilgrims and mourners (Parry, 1980). Brahman priests are supposed to divest themselves of these sins through religious discipline or by giving the gift, with something of their own added, to another religious Brahman. According to Parry, most Mahabrahmans do not know how to follow the proper ritual for purification after receiving a gift, and passing on an augmented gift to another Brahman is difficult for them because they live on alms. Thus, gifts received without religious merit are believed to be poisonous, which leads to moral destruction. Similarly, Raheja (1985) maintains that in North Indian rural areas, gifts are believed to transfer any inauspiciousness from the donor to the recipient, who may be a

Brahman, a sweeper, or a wife-taking affine. It is believed that the gifts bring misfortune unless the correct ritual procedures are followed.

Parry thus argues that this idea of *dana*, i.e. a gift which contains poison for the receiver, exists not only in the North but is a pan-Indian concept (Parry 1989: 460). In relation to the Nagarattars, Parry is partially correct, since they clearly distinguish between two major kinds of ritual, i.e. ceremonies in which reciprocal exchange takes place, and funerals, in which giving only occurs from the mourner to the Brahmans. The Nagarattars insist on giving *dana* to Brahman priests because they believe that this will help the deceased reach heaven. This demonstrates that *dana* is a religious gift clearly intended to aid salvation.

However, apart from the Nagarattars who are highly Sanskritized and initiated as Shaivas, most of the non-Brahman South Indian castes seem to be less preoccupied with this concept. South Indian ethnographic data establishes that gift-giving does take place even at funerals (Dumont 1983: 93-102, Good 1991:149-152). Unlike the Nagarattars, however, the mourner does not give presents to close relatives, nor are they fed, but he does at least give *daanam* (*dana*) to the Brahman priest at the end of the mourning period in exchange for his ritual services.

Thus, at least in Southern India, there are two kinds of gift-exchange; reciprocal and non-reciprocal, the former being far more common than the latter. The former is auspicious and is to be reciprocated. It belongs to the reproduction of the world and takes place on ceremonial occasions such as weddings, puberty ceremonies, and *saandi*. The second is the Brahmanic concept of a religious gift, which is non-reciprocal and is intended to expiate sin, as propagated

by Brahmanic religious ideology.

The latter notion is confined to funerals and only relates to the religious gift given to the Brahman priest. The other concept is more predominant in most exchange relationships, at least in Southern India. As Kolanda (1984) argues, isogamy and preferential cross-cousin marriage amongst South Indians maintain equality of status between the wife-givers and wife-takers. This means that the wife as an in-marrying affine is treated as the representative of her natal family, i.e. one with equal status, while in the North the hierarchical difference between the wife-givers and wife-takers makes the in-marrying woman the representative of a lower family than her husband's. Therefore, South Indian patterns of alliance maintain the bride as the symbol of auspiciousness and procreation placed in the cycle of exchange of women, while the North Indian bride, severed from her natal family, is more or less a 'stranger' to her conjugal family, and is not so auspicious a figure as her counterpart in South India. Among the Nagarattars, the auspiciousness of the bride is sharply contrasted with inauspiciousness, which is symbolically represented in the disappearance of the Brahman priest at the moment of *muhhurtam* in the wedding.

Therefore, in the ritual context of the Nagarattars, there are two kinds of religious activities: reciprocal (auspicious) gift-exchange and non-reciprocal (inauspicious) gift-giving. A wedding is highly religious, the purest and most auspicious ceremony, and contrasts with the funeral in which gift-giving is inauspicious and non-reciprocal. The funeral is different since it implies a different level of the religious ideology of the Nagarattars: non-reproduction, and relief from *karma*. As Parry maintains, creating the other world

outside the chain of reproduction and reciprocity in theodicy itself is the very creation of the economic rationality among highly mercantilized castes, and the Nagarattars are one of those.

7-2 Gift-giving and marriage alliances

For wealthy Nagarattar merchants, the extravagant spending at the wedding of a daughter is necessary to maintain their public prestige. In one way, that may be similar to modern capitalist expenditure on advertising and commercials. Pompous wedding ceremonies are effective ways of propagating the wealth of a family and increasing the credibility of the merchant. The house can demonstrate its wealth through a large function and generous gift-giving. As Bayly points out in the case of North Indian mercantile families (1983:376), a large proportion of the family capital is kept for the daughter's wedding, and this is one of the essential ways of advertising to outsiders which eventually benefits the business. In addition, a wedding connects two houses in a business alliance, thus extending the network and pooling the assets of two families even if neither interferes directly with the other's business concerns.

Thus, although the dowry may be substantial, the assets are not really 'given away'. In addition, marrying off a daughter with a sumptuous dowry and grand ceremony is again a demonstration of wealth, and enhances the status of the bride's family. Moreover, because of the Nagarattars' preference for cross cousin marriage and total caste endogamy, the wife-giving side is more or less guaranteed that it will have the wealth (and a woman) returned in the future with the accrued interest. (If not for a son, it may be for a grandson .) In this way, the exchange is auspicious, and political in Sahlins' sense.

The Nagarattars well-planned political and economic strategy may not tally well with Weber's position that Hinduism does not conform to the capitalistic mode of production or ascetic work ethic. Before discussing this point, I shall turn to the connection Weber makes between economic motivation and religious discipline, which is more useful.

7-3 Temples and the Nagarattars

So far, I have discussed how the economic power of the Nagarattars is based on a firm kinship structure which leads to the maintenance of their caste identity. In a caste orientated society, people's identity, i.e. who they are and what they perceive themselves to be, is given by the caste to which they belong. The enhancement or maintenance of the status of individuals is a simpler task if it is handled collectively by a caste. For example, particular customs and traditions are deeply embedded in each caste. I was told: "If I married someone from another caste, as soon as I got up in the morning I would worry what to cook and how to cook it. I would worry all day about every little thing. It would be much easier to marry someone of my own caste."

Traditionally, religious discipline has played a large part in maintaining the caste's status. In the past, only those who are referred to as the higher castes had their own caste *madams* where members would receive religious teaching. They are major supporters of the temples to which they frequently give donations. Through this they have acquired a reputation for trustworthiness which is very good for their businesses. The Nagarattars worship deities to try to invoke their protection and support because they fear

the collapse of their businesses through natural calamities, disease or accidents.

The temple institutions were the centre of political and economic activities in medieval India, and it was crucial for the Nagarattars, as merchants, to associate with such major economic centres. Therefore, they used to spend a certain percentage of their income on temple donations. Appadurai (1981), focusing on the dynamic intercaste activities surrounding the temples in South India, argues that the socio-economic role of the temple is essential as a centre for the redistribution of wealth and honour, which focuses on the triangular relationship between the temple, the king, and the sectarian leaders:

This set of transactions links political rulers, sectarian leaders, and temples in a complex triangular set of exchanges. Although honours and material endowments in the South Indian temple represent two aspects of a single redistributive process, it is analytically possible to separate them. So separated, it is possible to see two parallel, but distinct, levels of transaction that link kings, sectarian leaders, and temples, one involving transfers of honour, the other involving transfers of endowed material resources....Political rulers transfer material resources (most often shares in the agrarian produce of specified villagers) to temples; political rulers also transfer such material resources to sectarian leaders; and sectarian leaders, in their own capacity, also endow temples. If these two transactional levels are visually juxtaposed, the complexity of the relationships between these three loci becomes obvious. (1981: 72)

The Nagarattars, by tradition, are frequent temple-goers, and are even admired by temple Gurukkals for their 'religiosity', as I mentioned in the introductory part of this thesis. When they are in Chettinadu, they do not fail to visit the temples in the evening, and they continue to patronise the local temples by pooling funds with the local Nagarattar associations. When they are in town, they also visit the local shrines and temples on auspicious occasions, feed the poor

and conduct a large *abisheka* (water pouring ritual). The Nagarattars are one of the major contributors to a large number of temples in Tamil Nadu and elsewhere in Southern and Northern India.

Rudner (1985), discussing the relationship between the temples and the Nagarattars until the early 20th century, identifies merchants as playing a crucial role in temple institutions. In the 17th century temple inscriptions, the Nagarattars' names appear ^{among} the major donors (pp. 50-59).

The temples provided important business opportunities for the Nagarattars. They functioned similarly to markets in a social sense: often playing the part of the centre of a community, whether of a state, town or village, and were where people tended to congregate. If a caste occupied a permanent place as part of the temple management, it proved their trustworthiness and was an advantage to their business in the area. Rudner describes the progress of a successful Nagarattar salt merchant named Kumarappan (pp. 60-68) who visited Palani (a famous pilgrimage centre associated with Murugan) in the 17th century. He eventually succeeded in entering the market of Palani by donating a percentage of his profits to the deity. He then enlisted five other Nagarattar salt traders to make endowments. Consequently, through his association with temple activities he managed to increase the number of people in his community who invested in him.

One of the male Nagarattars' religious leaders, Isaniya Sivacharia, later started to collaborate with Kumarappan by establishing an annual collective festival in Tai (the Tamil month which corresponds with part of January and February) to celebrate the wedding of the deity at Palani. Kumarappan eventually

succeeded in organising pilgrimages for a large number of Nagarattars so that they could participate in the festival. As a result, the entire Nagarattar caste become involved in endowment activities by appointing Kumarappan as their representative and entrusting him with their money.

The Nagarattars are well aware of the advantages of sharing the 'prestige' of being patrons of the temple with members of other castes as ^{such a} credit is more long standing. Through the relationship with the temple, business opportunities with the townspeople at Palani became available for the Nagarattars, and this led them to associate with other pilgrimage centres.

In this way, 'prestige' or what Bourdieu refers to as 'symbolic capital'(1990), can be converted into a reputation for trustworthiness. This is an important asset for merchants who intend to engage in long distant trade, especially because they have to start business without a local caste group to back them.

In his discussion of the mercantile families in North India in the late 18th to 19th centuries, Bayly argues that social reputation was not only important for merchants but also for clients who wished to be involved in commercial transactions. Social credibility was dependent on caste: higher castes were believed to be more reliable than lower castes, as were large, reputable merchants rather than bazaar merchants. Bayly also maintains that even the interest charged by the Jains and other Hindu mercantile castes differed according to the caste of their client. For example:

Benares moneylenders charged 30 to 50 per cent monthly interest on small unsecured loans to the people of the bazaar because they were not 'respectable', and the risk of default was very high. Shopkeepers who had a fixed place of residence and members of the 'moral community' of the creditable merchants were generally also of the higher castes. (Bayly 1983: 407)

He also contends that it was essential for merchants to be associated with temples and charitable organisations in order to build up a credible reputation which was a barometer of reliability and credit. While prestigious families were able to lend money on an interest-free basis, the poorer and unruly members of one's caste group were prohibited from ^tintermarriage or even interdining. Temple building or religious charity was an essential part of the improvement of status because 'feeding the gods improves embodied rank' (Bayly 1983: 408). Thus, Kumarappan and his fellow merchants cooperated in order to acquire the asset of credibility for their caste. Improvement in status is much easier for a collective than an individual and the results are longer lasting.

The traditional model of the caste hierarchy is in fact quite a reliable indicator of the suitability of a particular party's business acumen, according to Bayly. Members of high castes are more reliable clients because of their lifestyles: they tend not to consume alcohol, and have regular routines. In addition, they do not usually earn their living from hard manual labour, and they take care of their health. If these criteria are taken into account then it is reasonable to assume that they would be less likely to default on payments because of the debtor's death or illness. Also, a member of a high caste would be very reluctant to default on payments because it would discredit his caste as well as his own name. Thus, caste is a criterion for merchants when they decide the rate of interest for their clients. Bayly writes that a respectable merchant would rent a house to a Brahman at a much lower rate than a man of a lower caste who would be charged up to three times as much.

This seems to apply to the Nagarattars' money-lending business strategy. I was told by a Vellalar villager that they tend to be choosy

in their selecting of clients: "Their interest rate is moderate in comparison with other merchants and loan sharks, but they wouldn't lend you money if you were not socially respectable."

Although religious 'purity' and 'pollution' are not barometers of social credibility, higher castes are believed to be more reliable as clients because they have fewer 'risk factors', as I mentioned above. Yet 'religiosity' is crucial in assessing an individual's social credibility. When a child is born, its parents are expected to start saving immediately for a sumptuous wedding. Careful planning is necessary in organising the financial life of a family throughout the year. There are always a few unexpected expenditures, and the family may sometimes have to survive without any income for a few months before harvest. Because of this, and despite their excellent organisation, if their daughter is to be married they may have to borrow from the money-lenders. The rate of interest charged then depends on the credibility of the client. Detailed calculations and a clear grasp of daily expenditure, shown by the Nagarattar women, demonstrate good financial sense and so their credibility is high. A lifestyle based on ethics and morality derives from the religious tradition of the caste and family, as pointed out by Weber.

According to him, a religious ethic organizes the world from a religious perspective into a systematic, rational order and a cosmos, eg. the religious ethic simply appropriates the general virtues such as relationships within the family, truthfulness, reliability, and respect for another person's life and property, including his wife (1963: 210).

7-4 The Economic morality of the Nagarattars

Religious asceticism, when practised in the world, resulted in a contradictory situation to its origin, as it led to the accumulation of wealth. The cheap labour of ascetic bachelors, for example, was primarily responsible for the expansion of middle-class business in the late Middle Ages, according to Weber (1985: 218).

Although Hinduism has an aspect of other-worldliness, which according to Weber, was rather a hindrance to developing a work ethic of its own, the morality and ethics on which the Nagarattars base their lives is this-worldly, exactly in the sense Weber means when he mentions the work ethic of Protestantism. Indeed, the Nagarattars do not seem to find it contradictory to become a good merchant and a religiously meritorious person, and the *gurus* of their *madams* teach the Nagarattars to be religious by working hard and donating money to religious institutions.

By getting up early, conducting *puja*, adhering to a modest lifestyle, and by hardwork and honesty, they can make their families prosper. The Nagarattars encourage not only men but also women to be 'religious' and become true Shaivas (initiated people as devotees of Shiva). As a unique phenomenon, they even maintain a *madam* exclusively for women, which is quite unusual in the Hindu tradition. Religious teachings of morality are the same in both the men's and the women's *madams*. So are the procedures for initiation and their pattern of daily worship.

One leaflet (Anonymous 1987) which I acquired from the women's *madam* maintained that the more money the devotee donates to the *madam* and the more he or she shows respect to the Guru, the more religious merit is accumulated: it would almost be like depositing money in heaven! As this leaflet demonstrates, economic success and religious morality go hand-in-hand in the

mercantile community, and the asceticism taught in their religious training actually results in economic prosperity, as Weber points out (Weber 1985: 218).

The Nagarattars have ensured the protection of their name by donating money to temple charities and through association with public religious activities. These tactics have given them a reputation ^{for} trustworth^{iness} and they are particularly valued as good temple trustees: "They wouldn't cheat the *hundi* (donation box) of the temple out of a single *paisa*." Their reputation as trustworthy merchants has been cultivated by a long-term relationship with temples, and is deeply intertwined with their caste morality. A part of their morality, which is stressed by both young and older Nagarattars, is the necessity of bringing their children up to be 'god-fearing.'

When they talk of 'god-fearing', they are referring to a law-abiding character who conforms to their caste morality, which corresponds with the point I have already made that trustworthiness is an essential asset for the maintenance of good business. The making of good marriage alliances, piety, and credibility are central to the basic operations of a family firm (Bayly 1983: 370). Their accounting books begin with salutations to various deities, lists of temple accoutrements and accounts of offerings to religious preceptors. The daily expense accounts of one business recorded constant expenditure on worship, bathing in the Ganges and gifts to Brahmans (Bayly 1983: 377). Therefore, the caste rules that Naacchiammai said her daughter should obey (particularly the caste endogamy and the worshipping of the gods), are deeply related to their business practice. They save money for their daughters' marriage which they see as a business investment, and they also make

donations to the temples as this is also important to maintain a good reputation. This, in combination with the frugality of their everyday lives, gives them the reputation of being trustworthy, whilst not inciting other castes' resentment unnecessarily. When they hold grand weddings or *saandi*, the ceremonies are public and they entertain and feed their guests irrespective of their caste, which gives them prestige and enhances their status. Their daily thriftiness balances such excessive expenditure and so they do not get a reputation for prodigality.

7-5 Mercantile ethics and the Nagarattars

The desire for wealth can be expressed in various ways: violently (war), by stealing, or by earning money through hard labour. According to Weber (1963), capitalism involves a highly systematised effort to profit from economic exchange. Capitalism has existed in various forms in China, India and medieval Europe, but it is relatively recently, and only in the West, that it has become associated with the rational organisation of labour. Weber argues that the rational organisation of labour (i.e., the calculated administration of continuously functioning enterprises, a disciplined labour force and regularised investment of capital [Giddens 1963: xi]) is the essence of capitalism.

According to Giddens's summary, Weber's discussion on the rise of capitalism in the West locates six points where fundamental socio-economic factors distinguish the European experience from that of India and China.

- 1) The productive enterprise was separated from the household prior to the development of industrial capitalism.
- 2) The development of the Western city in post-medieval Europe,

meant that urban communities reached a high level of political autonomy, thus separating bourgeois society from agrarian feudalism.

3) The inherited tradition of Roman law by the West produced a more integrated and developed rationalisation of juridical practice than elsewhere.

4) The nation-state, administered by full-time bureaucratic officials, developed beyond anything achieved in the Eastern civilizations. The rational legal system of the Western states was in some degree adapted within business organizations themselves.

5) The development of double-entry book keeping in Europe, eventually led to the regularising of capitalistic enterprise.

6) This series of changes prepared the way for the formation of a class of wage labourers, whose livelihood depends upon the sale of labour-power in the market. (Giddens 1985: xvii-xviii)

These factors, in conjunction with the moral energy of the Puritans, brought about the rise of modern Western capitalism, while India, where capitalistic modes of rational organisation have not taken a hold, failed to develop capitalistic mode of production.

Guilt and merit within this world are unfailingly compensated by fate in the successive lives of the soul, which may be reincarnated innumerable times in animal, human, or even divine forms. Ethical merits in this life can make possible rebirth into life in heaven, but that life can last only until one's credit balance of merits has been completely used up. (Weber 1963: 145)

This ethical teaching, which is combined with the hierarchical stratification of caste system, effectively inhibited any economic development comparable to modern European capitalism.

However, aspects of Puritan attitudes are reminiscent of the Nagarattars' utilitarianism. Weber, in his *Protestant Ethic*, describes pragmatic Puritan thinkers as follows:

Honesty is useful because it assures credit; so are punctuality, industry, frugality, and that is the reason they are virtues... honesty serves the same purpose...and an unnecessary surplus of this virtue would evidently appear to Franklin's eyes as unproductive waste (Weber 1985: 52).

The ability of mental concentration, as well as the absolutely essential feeling of obligation to one's job, are here most often combined with a strict economy which calculates the possibility of high earnings, and a cool self-control and frugality which enormously increase performance. (p. 63)

Systematic work in a worldly calling, as the highest means to asceticism, and at the same time the surest and most evident proof of rebirth and genuine faith, must have been the most powerful conceivable lever for the expansion of that attitude towards life which we have here called the spirit of capitalism.... accumulation of capital through ascetic compulsion to save. The restraints which were imposed upon the consumption of wealth naturally served to increase it by making possible the productive investment of capital. (p. 172)

As I have pointed above, the Nagarattars are renowned Shaivites and the *gurus* of their *madams* teach that the more they work and donate money to the temples the better, as it is the equivalent of accumulating wealth in heaven. Earning money is not at all contradictory to their religiosity, and similarly to the stern Puritanical capitalists, the 'spiritual training' that the Nagarattars acquired through their long affiliation to the Hindu religion has given them their organized way of life. Proper marriage alliances, 'correct' behaviour, planning ahead, etc. all go hand-in-hand with the 'God-fearing character' and the religious training which has been given to high castes for centuries.

A Brahman housewife said to me: "How can a Scheduled Caste man become a priest? He does not have the habit of getting up at 4:30am and taking a cold bath. A priest is not allowed to eat anything until he finishes *puja*, and he should always refrain from non-vegetarian food and alcohol. It would be very difficult for a Scheduled Caste man to force himself to live as a priest, as such a habit is not in his blood and flesh at all. It is embedded in a

Brahman's nature. He can do this without even thinking about it, without much effort."

Her comments focus on the pattern of the lifestyle created by caste culture, i.e. *habitus*, which exactly fits into Weber's idea of relating religious discipline with an organised lifestyle. Being a well disciplined high caste, she can also justify the difference between high and low castes without resentment.

However, according to Weber, the spirit of Western capitalism now has lost the religious ground and the pursuit of wealth tends to become associated with purely mundane passions (Weber 1983: 182). According to the Weberian argument, the productive enterprise separated from the household (see Giddens' summary (1) listed above) maintains western capitalism's more individualistic nature, while Indian merchants are still tied to the other-worldly theology of Hinduism and joint family, and thus not 'capitalistic' in their mode of production.

However, as I have already discussed, the Hindu 'work ethic' has quite similar aspects to Puritan teaching and has effectively motivated Indian merchants to work hard. In addition, ^{the} joint family among the Indian merchants appears to be as strong and as effective as western individualism. Among the Nagarattars, the ideology of 'family', including both kin and affines, especially the unity between the parents, their children, and the grandchildren, tie the members to the caste, but this does not appear to be a hindrance to their economic activity.

Discussing prominent industrialist families in Madras city, Singer (1968) describes the adaptive aspect of Indian joint ^{families} to the entrepreneurial enterprise.

In spite of striking changes within three generations in residential, occupational, educational and social mobility, as well as in patterns of

ritual observances, these changes have not transformed the traditional joint family structure into isolated nuclear families. On the contrary, the urban and industrial members of a family maintain numerous ties and obligations with the members of the family who have remained in the ancestral village or town or have moved elsewhere.(1968: 444)

The joint family provides a nucleus of capital which can be used for the technical and specialized education of its members, for starting new ventures. And, as Singer maintains, the joint family provides a well-structured pattern of authority, succession, and inheritance based on the relationships of father and sons, brother and brother, uncle and nephew(p. 445).

However, Singer neglects women's crucial role as in-marrying affines in such a structure, and merely focuses on the nuclear family as the compartmentalization of the joint family. However, the profit seeking motivation is more based on this nuclear segment, as I have demonstrated in the previous chapters. Although I do not deny that the concept of 'joint family' still gives the individual Nagarattar a social identity, both the husband's and the wife's natal families are the supportive structures of the nuclear family, rather than the framework of the structure of authority and cooperative system, at least among the Nagarattars.

The Nagarattars' motivations to work are to increase their families' prosperity, and to pass enriched property to the next generation, both men and women. Property is handed down but still remains in the caste pool maintained by strict endogamy, which creates capital for larger investment. 'Correct marriages' are essential for such rational economics as the profit seeking motivation derives from the caste ethic.

In contrast to Western capitalists, the Nagarattars (and most Indian merchants, according to Singer) still maintain their religious

orientation with its ascetic tradition. The bond between the family and the caste as a whole is still tied to their mercantile activities, ethically and religiously.

To conclude my thesis, I would like to introduce Uma, who can be seen as the Nagarattar woman's ideal *aacchi*. She is a modern woman, with her own ideas, yet her mode of living is still in accordance with the morality and ethic of her caste.

The life-style of the Nagarattars has changed since the 1950s: the men are no longer sent as personnel abroad, nor do they live in the *walavu viidu* anymore. Nagarattar women no longer confine themselves to the house but prefer to have jobs and to earn their own living, and it is for this reason that they prefer to go into higher education. White collar jobs such as bank clerks, teachers, etc. are a means of acquiring both social status and job security. However, marriage is still the crucial part of 'achievement' for a woman, since social recognition for both men and women is dependent on marriage, and for a woman, her house and family remain at the centre of her life, whether she is rich or poor.

Nagarattar women in general have traditionally had some means of earning even after marriage, and it is because of this custom that they try to save money by organizing their life and managing economically. Nowadays, they participate in higher education both to gain a better alliance and also to educate their children so that their status will be higher. They also take jobs so that they can save independently. They aim to manage their houses and educate their children while maintaining their economic autonomy through private income however small it may be. In this sense, their ideal life is still closely related to house management, like other Hindu women.

I have come across several *aacchis* who are in an enviable position as women. They are financially sound, economically autonomous to a certain extent, and work while managing their houses. Most upper-class *aacchis* marry young, and yet continue to engage in social activities after marriage. Uma, who is now in her early forties, married at 16 and then went to college. She had a daughter before she turned 20. After having a son in her early twenties, she started to run a business of her own as a retailer for a foreign company which sells baby goods. She also teaches small children at a nursery school, and engages in charity activities run by the teachers there.

She says the car her family use is registered in her name as it was bought out of her income. The fridge, which is used at home, is also hers, and was bought out of the profits from her business. "But they are all common properties. Even though they were bought by me, how can I insist that they are all mine? We share everything among the family members."

The coffee estate, which was part of her dowry, is now registered in her daughter's name, as she got married recently. However, it is still run by Uma's husband and her father-in-law, because, according to Uma, her daughter is still 'a child' and does not know how to manage property. "When she is old enough to manage it by herself with her husband, she shall take it on. Until then, she should learn how to manage her own house and learn how to survive."

Uma is deft at making decisions and is determined to organise her life according to what she wants. "When I started to teach part-time at a nursery school, my in-laws were unhappy as they thought women should not work outside the home which is why they did not

object to me having a business at home. It took me quite a long time to persuade them." Uma told me that her work at the nursery was not motivated by money. Her charitable activities such as the cooking and selling of chutney are not motivated by money either. "I do what I can do to help others."

She managed to persuade her in-laws to accept her work at the nursery with the help of her mother. Her mother, even after marriage, visited Uma's to train her in house management. Both Uma and her mother encourage Uma's daughter to run a business if she wants to, but Uma is also careful that her daughter should gain experience before starting, which is why she insists that her daughter is supervised by the members of her family until she can manage on her own.

As Uma's case shows, a woman earning money is not frowned upon by the Nagarattars, as this has been traditional in their caste. However, her economic independence does not necessarily mean that she is individualistic. She is encouraged in her desire to make a profit, but the money is merged into the the family economy, and then pooled into the caste capital through endogamous alliances.

Whether they are rich or poor, the Nagarattar women live by the morality of their caste. If they have children, they save for them and if they are widows or unmarried, they try to manage by themselves within the means they are given. Almost all Nagarattars I met said that they believe in God and their religiosity is closely interrelated with their mode of economic rationality. Heaven is promised to the Nagarattars because they have managed to balance out the two major modes of their existence, i.e. their profit seeking activities and their charitable activities. As an ideal *aacchi*, Uma manages to save money, run her own business and organise and

contribute to her household economy. On the other hand, she works at a nursery school and makes and sells chutney as part of her charitable activities. To me, Uma's lifestyle and belief in God seem to differ very little from that of Puritan capitalists like Franklin.

Glossary

<i>aacchi</i>	elder sister; married Nagarattar woman
<i>abisheekam</i>	bathing ritual performed during puja; anointment
<i>ammaa viidu</i>	mother's house
<i>aarati</i>	lamp waving ritual
<i>adai</i>	pancake
Chettiyar	mercantile castes
Chettinadu	land of the Chettiyars
Deepaavali	autumnal celebration of new harvest
<i>danam</i>	wedding gift (e.g. <i>siir danam</i>)
<i>daanam</i>	religious gift given to a Brahman
Gurukkal	temple priest, usually a Brahman
<i>kula deivam</i>	lineage god
<i>kaliyaanam</i>	marriage
<i>kaliyaana viidu</i>	marriage house, (=ul viidu).
Kottahai kaaran	a man who comes to install the lucky pole before wedding ceremony
<i>kolambu</i>	soup
Kaaraikkudi	a town in Chettinadu
Maariyamman	a village goddess
<i>madam</i>	Hindu religious institution
<i>mandahappadi</i>	a festival day in which the expense is met by a particular group(caste)
<i>maamiyaar siirdanam</i>	cash paid for mother-in-law from the bride's family before marriage
<i>maappillai</i>	bridegroom; son-in-law.
<i>muhuurtam</i>	auspicious time, especially at a wedding

<i>muraichittai</i>	contract paper which is exchanged at the wedding between the bride and the groom's families
<i>nagaram</i>	town
Nagarattar	a mercantile caste; Naatukottai Chettiyar
Pandaaram	a non-Brahman village temple priest
<i>pen</i>	a young woman; a bride.
<i>periyaacchi</i>	senior <i>aacchi</i> (<i>periya</i> = big)
<i>padaippu</i>	ancestral worship
<i>pattu saree</i>	silk <i>saree</i> , normally Kancheepuram <i>saree</i>
<i>pangaali</i>	patrilineally related relative
<i>pulli</i>	a dot, a nuclear household which consists of a husband and wife (plus their children)
<i>puroohita</i>	family priest, usually a Brahman.
Pongal	celebration of a New Year
<i>rudraksham</i>	a rosary made of special seeds grown in Himalaya
<i>saandi</i>	celebration of the 60th year birthday of a married man
<i>siir</i>	gift to a married woman from her natal family
<i>siir danam</i>	woman's property given by her natal family on marriage
<i>saamaan</i>	goods; bridal goods
<i>sumangali</i>	a married woman whose husband is alive
<i>taali</i>	a wedding pendant worn by a married woman
<i>taayaadigal</i>	mother's people; affine
<i>ul viidu</i>	interior house, a room allotted to a couple
<i>veetti</i>	loin cloth worn by men
<i>wattal kulambu</i>	vegetable soup made of dried vegetables
<i>walavu viidu</i>	ancestral house
<i>walavu waasal</i>	interior courtyard of an ancestral house

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