by name. In the extreme, this mixture of yours and mine into ours became reversed again—mine were called yours, and yours mine. So when I wrote to Ayya's sister Porutcelvi that my second child had been born, she wrote back, "I can't wait to see my new son."

This kind of total mixing, the sharing and trading of homes, of children, of selves, was necessary for the existence of love. So Ayya offered an explanation of the Kaṇṇappan story, a story he returned to again and again, of a devotee so loving he tore out his eye to use as medicine on an image of Siva when he saw that the eye of the image was bleeding. Then the second eye of the image started to bleed and Kaṇṇappan reached for this own second eye, to tear it out like the first, when Siva stopped him. Ayya said, "This story proves that God has no love. Otherwise he would have recognized Kaṇṇappan's love from the first, and saved both his eyes, not only one. It was only after Kaṇṇappan placed one of his eyes on the image that God, seeing through Kaṇṇappan's eye, understood Kaṇṇappan's pain.

"In order for you to understand my heart, you must see through my eyes. In order for me to understand your heart, I must see through yours."

CHAPTER FOUR

Desire In Kinship

A NOTE TO THE READER

Getting through this chapter will take patience. Please have faith. Kinship jargon and diagrams can look forbidding from certain angles, and perhaps some readers, finding them here, may say, "Why is she doing this to us? What does this have to do with anything real?" I will try to explain.

Tamils and neighboring peoples have a very elegant set of ways of organizing their families and larger kin groups into patterned systems. Any person trying to understand South Indian culture must eventually come round to examining and trying to comprehend these elegant patterns of kinship organization. They connect with many things that are happening in the South Indian world.

The kinship patterns to be sketched in the following pages are, moreover, important to us just because an enormous amount has been written about them by Western scholars. These patterns are *attractive* to these scholars for some reason. One reason I would suggest, a sad one, is that we may, if we wish, study these abstract patterns just as such, as patterns, without ever having to deal with real people, their demands, their suffering, their embarrassing similarity to our less-than-perfect personal selves, the selves we try to conceal and transcend by means of our scholarly and artistic productions.

The second reason—a happier version, actually, of the first, sad one—is that these patterns have a kind of real beauty. I would argue that South Indian people create such patterns not only because they "work," not only because they perform some necessary social "function," but also because, in their beauty, they give their creators pleasure. And we, if we try, may find pleasure in them, too. Kinship patterns can be understood as objects of artistic appreciation, in the same way that mathematical proofs or car

engines are, for some people, such objects. Opening the hood of a fancy sports car, some of us will see nothing but a confusing jumble of ugly machinery. Others, who understand such things, will be perfused with bliss. It is the same with kinship patterns.

In this chapter and the ones that come after, I try to show that kinship organization is as much a matter of feeling as it is of thinking, or, to use more scholarly words, that kinship is as much a matter of "affect" and free form "aesthetics" as it is a matter of "cognition" and social "regulation." I also try to show that there is a continuity between abstract patterns of kinship organization and the lived reality of actual people on the ground. To do this, I start with a discussion of the abstract aspects of Tamil kinship and move gradually back down to the concrete. This note is here mainly to cushion the shock some people may feel at the sudden ascent from the cozy heat of the last chapter to the lonely cold of this one. But be patient. Eventually we will come back to earth again.

SYSTEMS AND ANTISYSTEMS

". . . two forms there in the endless sea danced . . ."

Tirukkōvaiyār, 307.

The common denominator of most South Indian (and Sri Lankan) kinship systems is the presence of preferred or prescribed cross-cousin marriage: a man marries a woman in the category of his father's sister's daughter, his mother's brother's daughter, or in a few cases, his own sister's daughter. Some groups allow all of these possibilities. Most reported groups are said to practice marriage in one direction only: generally, a man may marry his mother's brother's daughter (this is called "matrilateral cross-cousin marriage"), but marriage with the father's sister's daughter is disapproved. Much less frequently, the reverse type of marriage, in which a man weds his father's sister's daughter ("patrilateral") is preferred.

Dravidian kinship terminology reflects and to a large measure helps to constitute what is called "Dravidian kinship" by defining categories of kin and by clearly displaying, through its own formal symmetries, the symmetries among these categories (figures 4, 5, 6, 7). The term "Dravidian" refers to a family of languages spoken mainly in South India. The Dravidian language family is entirely distinct both in structure and in presumed origin from the family of Indo-Aryan languages spoken in North India. The Dravidian kinship terminology varies somewhat from region to region in South India, but within a given region the terminology is the same regardless of what variant of the marriage system is preferred by a given

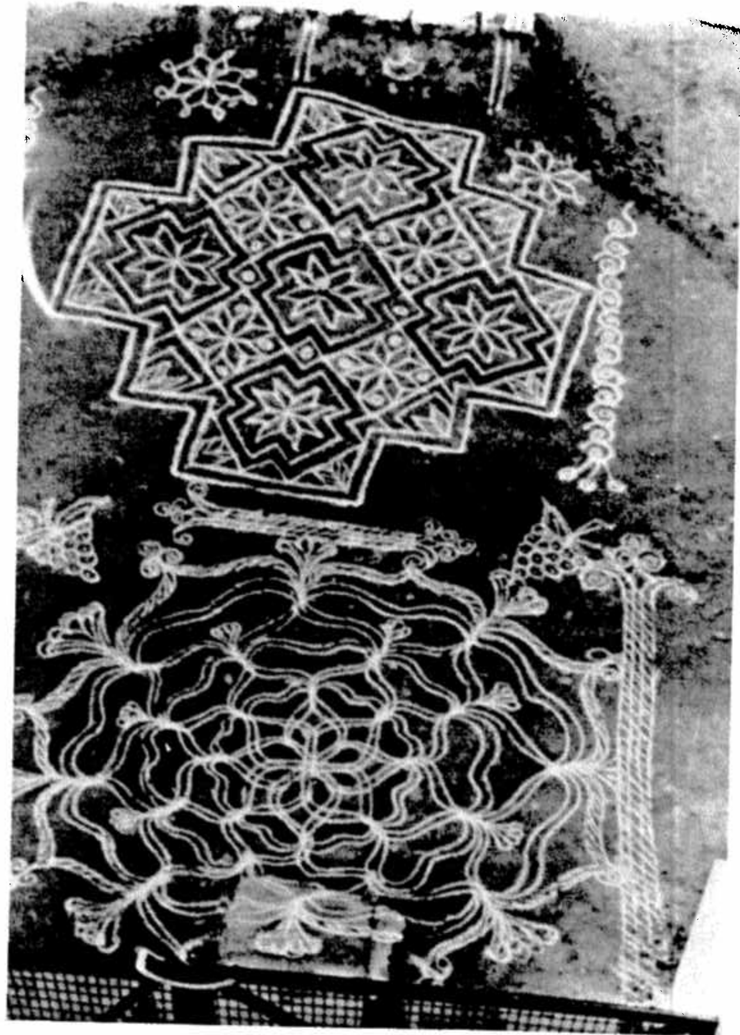

Plate 16. Kolams.

group.[1] Moreover, though kin *terms* vary from language to language, the overall semantic *structure* of Dravidian kinship terminologies remains essentially the same throughout South India. Hence, for instance, in most of the Dravidian terminological systems, a single term (e.g., in Tamil, *māman*) denotes mother's brother, father's sister's husband, and father-in-law; likewise, a single term (in Tamil, *attai*) denotes father's sister,

Figure 4. Tamil kin terms.

pāḍḍi	Grandmother, spouse's grandmother, kinswoman of one's grandparents' generation.
tātā	Grandfather, spouse's grandfather, kinsman of one's grandparents' generation.
ammā	Mother, mother's sister, mother of any parallel cousin.
appā	Father, father's brother, father of any parallel cousin.
attai	Mother-in-law, father's sister, mother of any cross-cousin.
māman	Father-in-law, mother's brother, father of any cross-cousin.
akkā	Elder sister, female parallel cousin older than self.
taṅkai	Younger sister, female parallel cousin younger than self.
aṇṇan	Older brother, male parallel cousin older than self.
tampi	Younger brother, male parallel cousin younger than self.
purucan	Husband.
manaivi	Wife.
nān	"I." (Used in the diagrams here to designate self or ego).
maccān	Father's sister's son, mother's brother's son, male cross-cousin.
macci	Father's sister's daughter, mother's brother's daughter, female cross-cousin.
makan	Own son, son of same-sex sibling, own child's male parallel cousin.
makaḷ	Own daughter, daughter of same-sex sibling, own child's female parallel cousin.
marumakan	Son-in-law, son of opposite-sex sibling, own child's male cross-cousin.
marumakaḷ	Daughter-in-law, daughter of opposite-sex sibling, own child's female cross-cousin.
pēran	Grandson, kinsman of one's grandchildren's generation.
pētti	Granddaughter, kinswoman of one's grandchildren's generation.

Parallel-cousins and Cross-cousins

Relatives of one's own generation are all classed either as parallel-cousins or as cross-cousins, and are called by the appropriate kin terms. Cross-cousins are considered potential spouses. Parallel cousins are considered siblings, therefore not potential spouses. Whether a cousin is cross or parallel may be determined by looking at the linking relatives, that is, the line of people through whom one traces one's relationship line (mother's brothers, father's sisters, man's sister's children, woman's brother's children) and the number of spousal links (husbands, wives). If the number is odd, the cousin is cross. If the number is even or zero, the cousin is parallel. My sister's husband's sister is my cross-cousin. My mother's brother's daughter's husband is my parallel cousin. My father's father's sister's daughter's son is my cross-cousin. My mother's father's sister's husband's sister's daughter's child is my parallel cousin. And so forth.

Another way of looking at this is to say that a cross is like a minus and a parallel is like a plus. Parallel times parallel equals parallel. Cross times cross equals parallel. Cross times cross times cross equals cross again. Spouses are cross and the children of opposite sex siblings are cross. Siblings are parallel and the children of same sex siblings are parallel.

maccān) denotes father's sister's son, mother's brother's son, and wife's brother; and a single term (in Tamil, *macci*) denotes father's sister's daughter, mother's brother's daughter, and wife's sister (the latter two categories are also often bifurcated into elder-than-ego versus younger-than-ego.) This shared semantic structure strongly suggests a system of bilateral cross-cousin marriage: in the ideal, two men exchange sisters in marriage, and their sons also exchange sisters, and so on down through the generations, so that the mother's brother's daughter and the father's sister's daughter are the same person. Real life, of course, seldom if ever matches this ideal. Indeed in Dravidian kinship it is necessary to speak not of two but of three levels of ideal versus reality: level A is the bilateral marriage ideal indicated by the terminology itself; level B is the preferred marriage pattern of a given group, which is usually unilateral and which therefore only partially fulfills the conditions set by level A; level C is the set of actual marriages which take place. For this third level, what statistical information is available indicates that among groups who use a Dravidian kinship terminology, actual cross-cousin marriage takes place less than 50 percent of the time, so that events taking place on level C only partially fulfill conditions set by level B.[2] The same statistical information shows, significantly, that when actual cross-cousin marriages do take place, they take place between very near cross-cousins much more frequently than among distant ones: that is, it seems that a man in South India is more likely either to marry his "real" mother's brother's daughter or to marry a stranger than he is to marry someone in the category of mother's brother's daughter who is nevertheless not close kin to him.[3] The statistical information is, however, quite incomplete, so that we may only take hints from it, not draw firm conclusions.

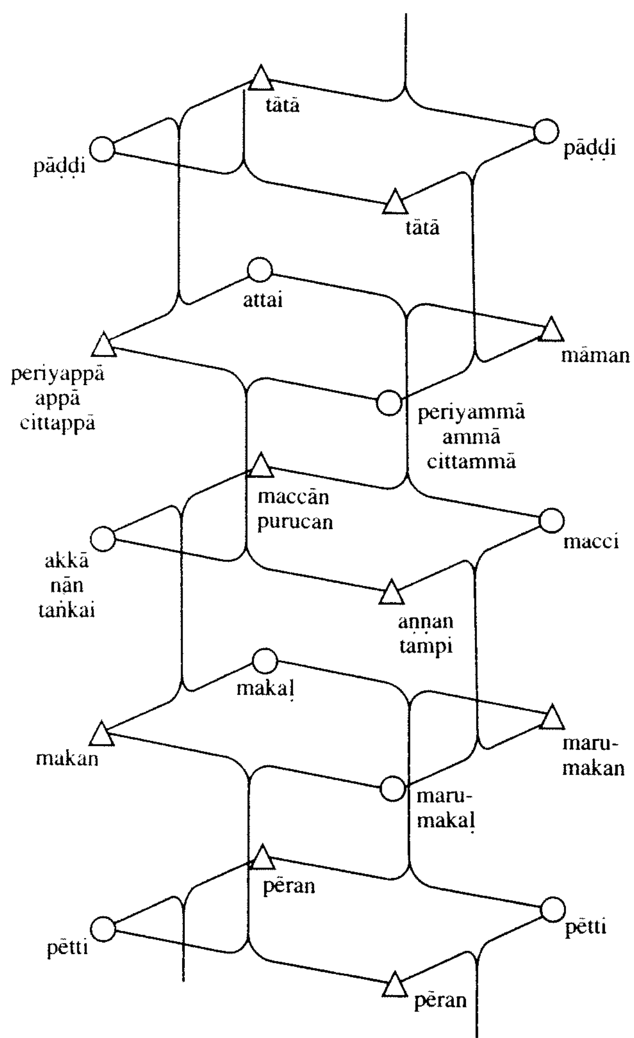

Figure 5. One image of the structure of Tamil kin terms: A closed circular pattern with radial symmetry (self as female).

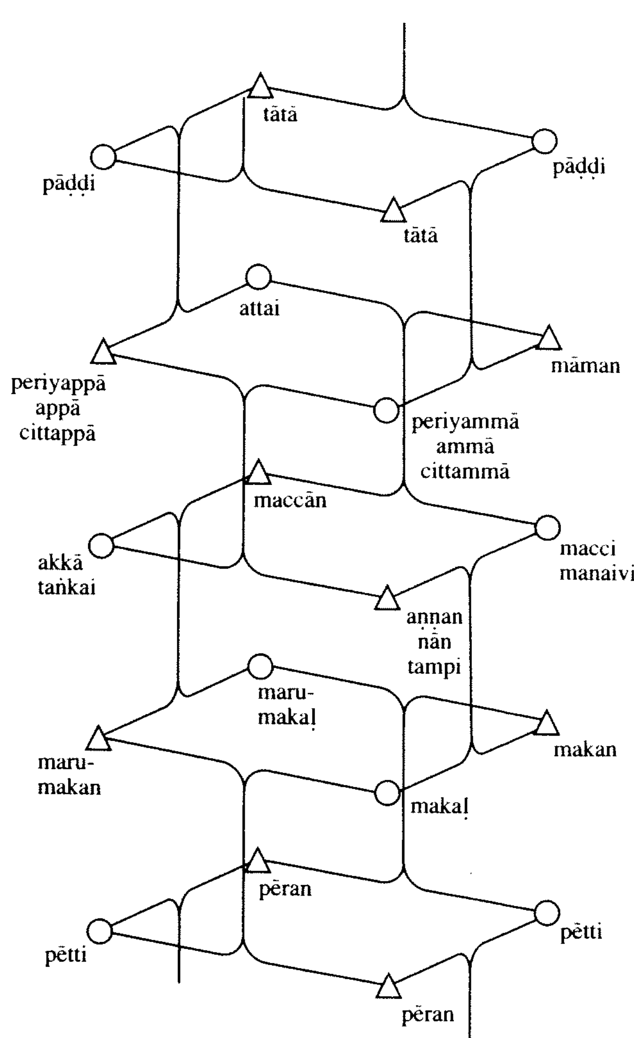

Figure 6. Same pattern with self as male.

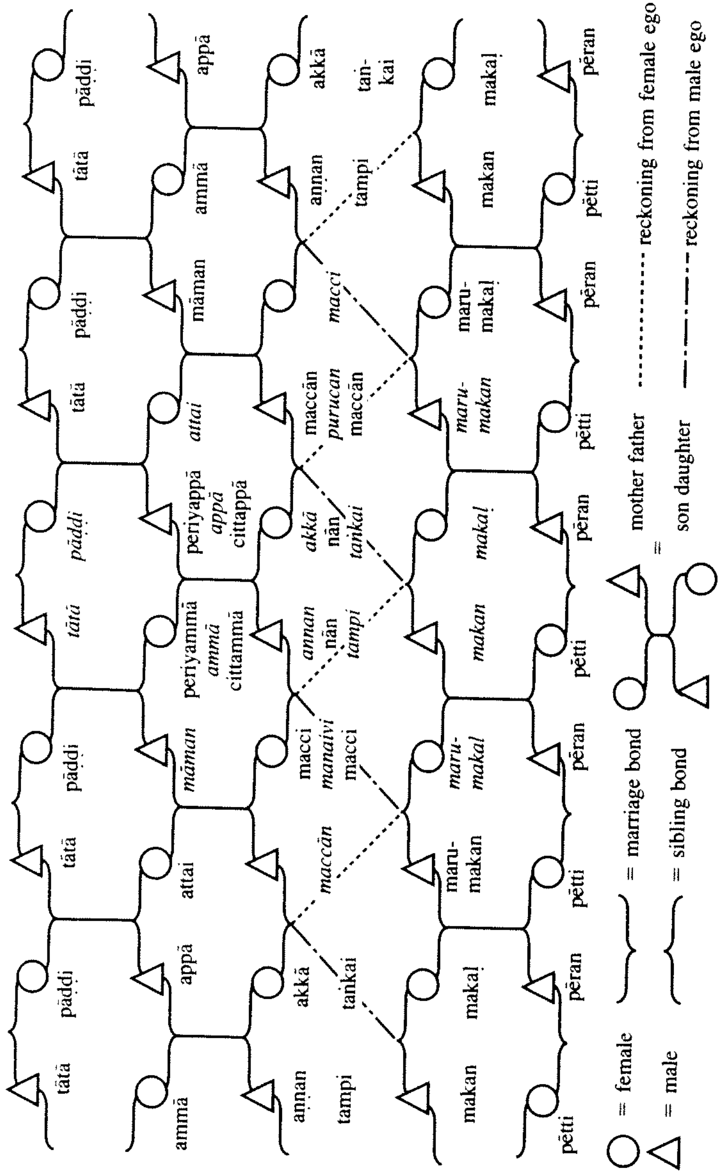

Figure 7. Another image of the structure of Tamil kin terms: An open repeating pattern with bilateral symmetry.

marriage system. Some South Indian groups are matrilineal and matrilocal. Most are patrilineal and patrilocal, but many of these are associated with "secondary," named matrilines. Even where there are no formally recognized matrilines, there often exist informal matrilineal groupings of women of up to five generations in depth who are divided by alternate generations between two households and maintain frequent and active contact with each other. The female side of a patriline, consisting of father's sisters and brother's daughters, may be equally solidary internally, and may also be solidary with the interwoven matriline.

Without departing from the fundamental pattern of cross-cousin marriage, a particular kindred group (in Tamil, *vakaiyarā*) may change over the years, or swing back and forth, or experience disputes among its members over choices between matrilateral or patrilateral marriage, patrilocal or matrilocal residence. Matrilateral and patrilocal marriages contribute to the solidarity of male and female patrilines by allowing all the members of a patriline to remain together within a single household, but through such marriages members of matrilines become dispersed over separate households (figure 8*a*). Matrilateral and matrilocal marriages allow for the continuity within a single household of male and female matrilines, but patrilines are spatially dispersed (figure 8*b*). Patrilateral marriages bring about similar conflicts between lines of men and lines of women (figures 9*a*, *b*, and *c*). These conflicts, involving families of three to five generations in depth, have powerful repercussions in the lives of individuals.

Over the years, European and American anthropologists have spent considerable energy in attempting to explain the persistence of the institution of cross-cousin marriage in places such as South India where it is practiced. Most of the explanations that have been developed are functionalist in that they see the practice of cross-cousin marriage as fulfilling some social function or human desire, thus contributing to individual or societal wholeness. Many are functionalist also in the sense that they regard the marriage system as bound up with other social and cultural institutions, such that a disruption in the marriage system would result in a disruption of other aspects of life as well, and vice versa. Holism—the idea that any given culture/society is an internally integrated system, complete in itself and self-maintaining—is a necessary presupposition of functionalist approaches in either sense of the word.

Anthropological analyses of Dravidian kinship, aiming, as they generally do, for elegant and precise causal explanations of social phenomena, are also characteristically essentialist and idealist in spirit. By calling them essentialist, I mean that each published analysis posits one essential

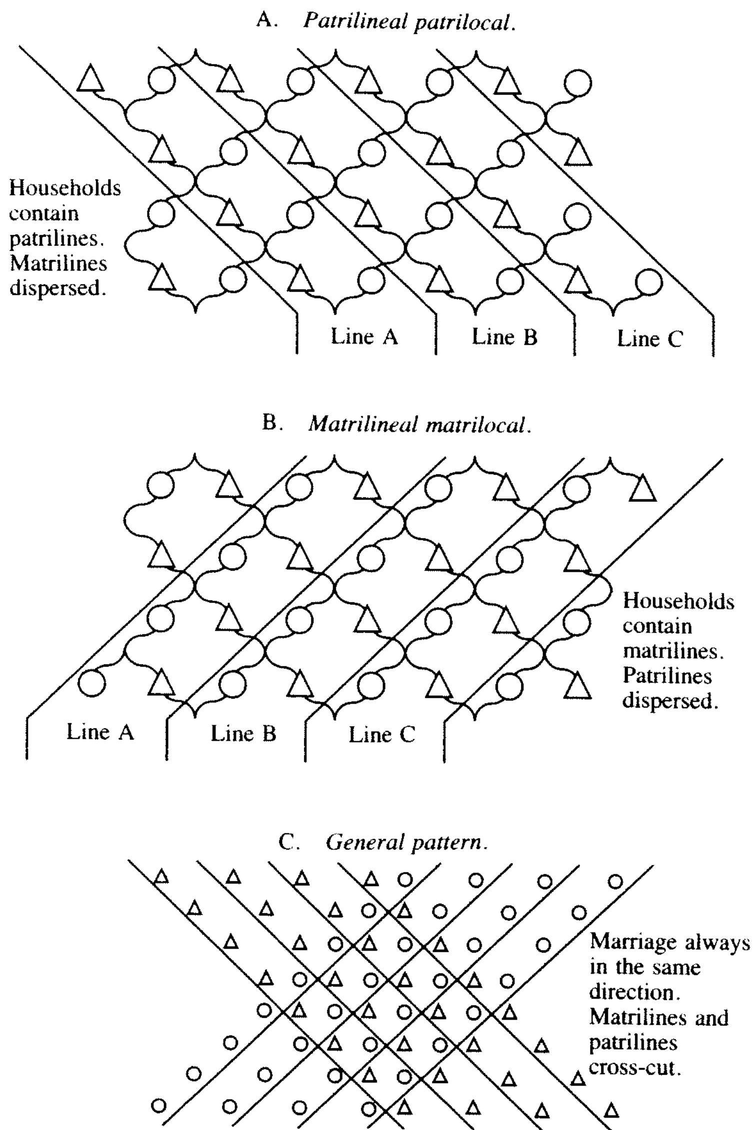

Figure 8. Ideal patterns of matrilateral cross-cousin marriage.

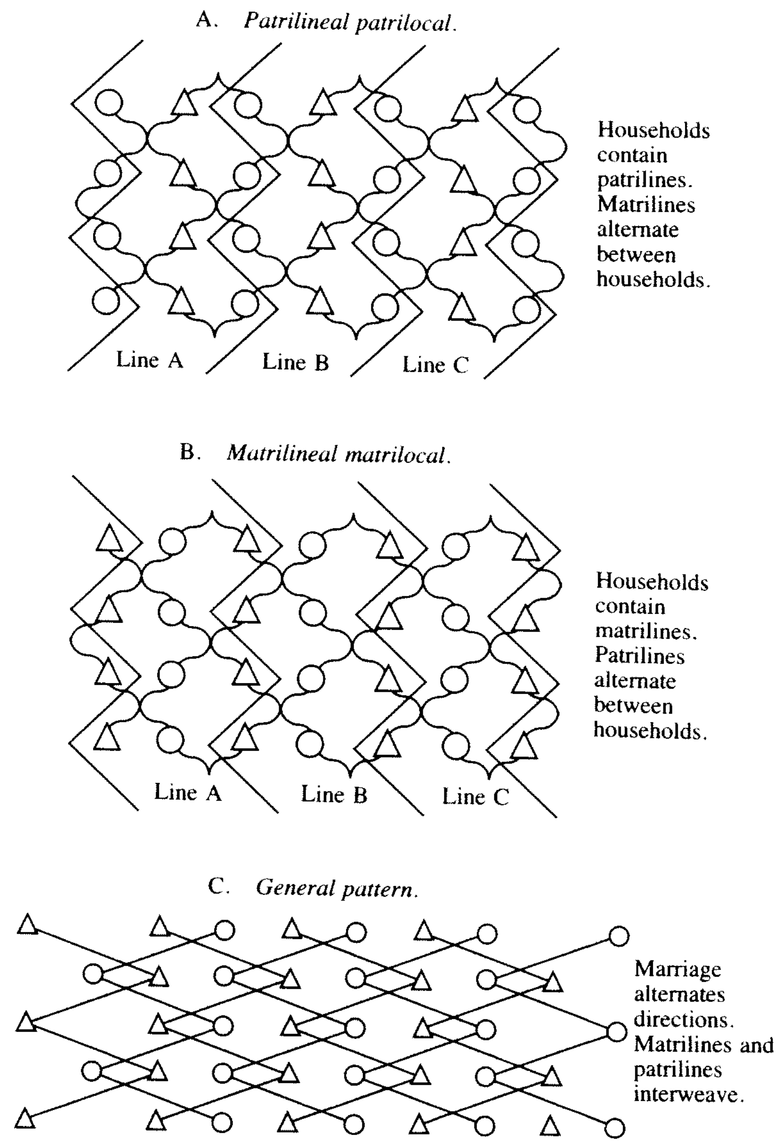

Figure 9. Ideal patterns of patrilateral cross-cousin marriage.

explanation for the kinship system as it stands, one cause for the one effect, one reason for maintaining the institution which is equally valid for all participants in that institution, rather than allowing for the possibility that different actors in different social situations may engage in the same marriage game for a multiplicity of separate and perhaps even conflicting reasons.

By calling these same anthropological analyses idealist, I mean that for them, the behavior that is observed is considered to be an imperfect manifestation of a perfect pattern maintained in the minds of actors, replicated identically in the unconscious of each, or copied faithfully in the accepted ideology of each.[4] Just as functionalism and holism are mutually supportive forms of thought, so idealism and essentialism are mutually implicatory: all are monistic; all negate the plurality of wills and desires that make up actual human life.

Five approaches to the study of kinship in South India will be briefly considered here. Three of these are paths already taken: I choose to discuss them because they are the most well-trodden paths. The remaining two are paths we have yet to take: I choose to discuss them because my own approach, insofar as it accords with any general theory, is most in accord with them, and I think they may lead us in more fruitful directions than those that we have been following up until now. The five approaches may be labeled structuralist, culturalist, poststructuralist, Freudian, and post-Freudian.

Structuralist Approaches

The most famous modern analyst of South Indian kinship systems is Louis Dumont, whose approach to an understanding of these systems has evolved over several decades of fieldwork, writing, and heated debate with other Western scholars specializing in Indian kinship. In a recently updated version of some of his earlier theories,[5] Dumont argues that the Dravidian kinship system is at base an abstract organization of affinal relations between categories of kin. The central assertion of this theory is that not only relations of consanguinity ("blood" relations), but relations of affinity (marital relations), are considered by Tamil people to be passed on hereditarily from parent to child. These relations of affinity become realized, as it were, in ego's own generation, as relations of "alliance" between same-sex individuals. From his father a man inherits relations of alliance with the father's male cross-kin. Ego's father is in a relation of alliance with ego's mother's brother. Ego, as the son of his father, inherits its alliance with the son of the man to whom the father is allied, that is, with the son of the mother's brother. Ego marries his mother's brother's

institution of cross-cousin marriage, Dumont concludes, exists in order to reaffirm, generation by generation, this hereditary relation of alliance between categories of same-sex people.

Theoretically, as Dumont says, either categories of women or categories of men may be linked by alliance in this manner, but the examples given in Dumont's ethnography indicate that the maintenance of an ongoing relationship between lines of males is really what is at stake. Dumont stresses heavily that inherited alliance is a relationship between same-sex people only: a child of either sex inherits relations of "consanguinity" (i.e., relations with parallel kin) from its mother as well as from its father, but it inherits relations of affinity (i.e., relations with cross-kin) only from its same-sex parent. A man who inherits affinity with the men of lineage B may marry the sisters of those men, but the relationship that he inherits is a relationship with the men, not with the women. Heterosexual relations are thus completely bypassed as an element of the marriage system.

Also stressed in Dumont's schema is the principle that affinity in South Indian kinship is a relation between abstract, conceptual "categories" of people, not "groups" of actual people and certainly not pairs of individuals, such as "real" mother's brother (*māman*) and "real" sister's son (*marumakan*). In opposition to Radcliffe-Brown,[6] Dumont argues that the cultural relationship linking this pair of individuals is a matter of the categories they belong to and has nothing to do with the relationship of each to the woman who is mother to one and sister to the other. Indeed, Dumont asserts, in South Indian thinking a man is related to his mother's brother's daughter not through his mother at all, but through his father. It is thus a mistake to consider, he says, that the relation one has with someone in the category of māman is somehow an extension of the relation one has with one's "own" mother's "own" brother. Even though there is in Tamil a terminological distinction between the "real" mother's brother—(*tāy māman*)—and a "classificatory" mother's brother—(plain *māman*)—still for Dumont this is not enough to gainsay the view that kinship is primarily a relation of categories rather than of persons.

The essence of South Indian kinship, in Dumont's account, is the *idea* of affinity. This idea is an essence in that it is considered to be the single most important principle upholding the marriage system, allowing no rivals, and it is an essence also in that it is abstract. For affinity, as Dumont describes it, is not a matter of experienced personal relations between people. It is a general, invariant relation between, as he insists, categories. Actual experienced bodily relations, interpersonal relations, and especially sexual relations, are dismissed by him as trivial or nonexistent as far as the structure of the marriage system is concerned. Hence

Plate 17. Male cross-cousins cleaning their teeth together.

generate kinship systems is ridiculed by Dumont. Affinity is for him the fundamental, the only considerable, value.

Dumont's thought on kinship, original though it is, is not without roots. In particular, Dumont owes much to Levi-Strauss's *Structures élémentaires de la parenté*, in which Levi-Strauss argues that rules of exogamy (or, rules prohibiting intrafamilial "incest") exist for the sake of creating social solidarity among groups larger in size than the single family. Women are exchanged among families, rather than kept within the same family, so that the various kindred groups among whom such exchange takes place may be bound to each other by ties of affinity and so integrated into a larger unit. Hence, as regards their role in marriage institutions, women are much like words—they are tokens of communication and symbols of exchange. In a further elaboration of this theory, Levi-Strauss adopts an evolutionist approach to marriage systems, arguing that one institution can be expected to prevail over another if it contributes to greater overall social solidarity than does the other. Marriage

less tightly or loosely. The wider the group that is integrated, and the more tightly it is integrated, the more prevalent the system of integration will be. Matrilateral cross-cousin marriage is more prevalent than bilateral or patrilateral because matrilateral can encompass all available lineages in a single circular or hierarchical system. Bilateral marriage is conducive to intermarrying semi-isolates: two lineages trade sisters during each generation. Hence matrilateral marriage is a form of what Levi-Strauss calls "generalized exchanges"; bilateral marriage is a form of "restricted exchange." Patrilateral marriage is mediate between the other two systems: lineage A gives wives to lineage B in one generation and receives wives back from the same lineage in the next generation, thus the two lineages form a partial connubium, though each requires also to be affinally joined with at least one other lineage.

In *Structures élémentaires*, the topic of most concern to Levi-Strauss is the system of marriage rules, considered as an ideal, unconscious, collective mental representation. Underlying the account of social organization as the artifact of a set of collective representations is the conviction, stated explicitly by Levi-Strauss and inherited by him from both Durkheim and Boas, that the so-called "native point of view," that is, any particular individual's account of what is really going on in his own society, is a secondary rationalization—not a true explanation, but rather, something that itself needs to be explained by someone with a broader perspective on societies in general, namely, the ethnographer.[7] To a certain extent, Dumont appears to accept this premise concerning the falsehood, or at least insufficiency, of native explications of native life, inasmuch as his account of South Indian marriage systems posits a key collective representation, the notion of inherited affinity itself, which receives no formal or conventional expression in the Tamil language. Dumont does, however, credit conversations with Kallar elders (Kallars were the caste that he worked with) with enabling him to develop the theory that he does. If these elders, rather than Dumont himself, are the source of the notion of kinship as based on inherited affinity, several new questions arise. To what extent does the knowledge of these elders control Kallar social organization? To what extent is this knowledge shared by others? And in what ways?

Culturalist Approaches

Some recent theorists, notably Kenneth David and Stephen Barnett,[8] influenced by studies carried out in other parts of South Asia and the world,[9] have attempted to understand South Indian kinship systems in terms of native theories of how the essence of a person, or the "coded

of such studies is the finding that in Tamil Nadu, rules regarding whom one may or may not marry are consciously legitimated by some informants on the basis of statements regarding how coded substance, or "blood," is transmitted, how it mixes with other coded substance, and how it affects people's ways of being and acting. Rules governing whom one may or may not marry, it is argued, derive from biological ideas concerning which substances are inherited from which parents, and how these substances are transformed during life.

In comparison with Dumont, so-called culturalists are more inclined, at least in their surface representations of themselves, to be respectful of "the native point of view" and to take "native" statements at face value, as direct expressions of the symbol system that motivates human action within the society in question. The trouble comes when there is a discrepancy among "native points of view," as of course there always is in India. Then culturalist ethnographers, inheriting from their predecessors the notion that any given "culture" is essentially unitary and univocal, tend to escape the muddle that a plurality of perspectives poses by being highly selective as to *which* "native points of view" they listen to.

Thus, Barnett and David's key informants provided them with wonderfully consistent, well-thought-out biological theories that accounted perfectly for the institution of cross-cousin marriage in South India. One such theory was that a person's "bodily essence" (*uḍampu* in Barnett's account), or "blood" (*rattam* in David's account), was passed on to a child from its father, and the spiritual essence, the "soul" (*uyir*), from the mother, so that you could marry someone who was not related to you only through males, or only through females, because then you would have neither blood nor soul in common with them—in effect, an ethnobiological theory of double unilineal exogamy.[10] Another theory postulated that, as in Bengal, a woman's bodily essence was considered to become transsubstantiated to that of her husband at the time of her marriage, so that she would not pass on to her child membership in her natal patriline. (Trautmann[11] finds that this theory was originally propounded a thousand years ago by the South Indian Sanskrit philosopher Madhava, in an explicit attempt to make South Indian marriage systems fit with the social codes enshrined in *dharmaśāstra*—a set of Brahman-authored texts written in Sanskrit in North India and dating from around 200 B.C. to 500 A.D. Dharmaśāstra outlines the principles of social order as understood by the texts' authors. Trautmann's finding suggests that the notion of transsubstantiation is, for South Indians, an after-the-fact justification of their marriage system rather than the reason for it.)

Textual origins or no, these theories are no doubt valid for the informants who offered them to the ethnographers questioning them. They also mesh with other aspects of South Indian ideology. At the same time, it must be pointed out that there are many South Indians who would vehemently disagree with the theories of conception and heredity described above, and would offer their own counter-theories, just as seriously held, which might account for cross-cousin marriage in a different way, or might fail to account for it, or might even contradict it.[12] What are we to do with these? And what are we to do with the many Tamil people who have no theories at all, and know of none, concerning the biological foundations of their marriage systems? Shall we write off these nontheoreticians as blind followers of traditions whose reasons are understood only by others?[13]

It is true that South Indian ideas concerning life processes are rich and do relate at many points to South Indian ideas concerning social processes. And there are many reasons to believe that for speakers of Dravidian languages, substance, action, and feeling are not such radically separate modes of reality as Westerners seem to find them.[14] But, given these vague generalities, particular points of view, particular expressions concerning the nature of life in South India are extremely diverse, and are not at all simple. Often, as they are presented to the ethnographer, they are fragmentary. Connections between system A and system B (e.g., marriage conventions and ethnophysiology) may certainly be found, but direct causal connections neatly pointed out by philosophically inclined informants for the ethnographers' sake are far from all there is. This does not mean that ethnographers should abandon interest in South Indian conceptualizations of life processes. Rather, it is suggested here that they should pay *more* attention to these conceptualizations in all their detail and variety, and *then* should begin to consider what they explain.

To return to the question of essences, many statements made among Tamil speakers about the nature of human beings suggest that it is wrong to assume that for Tamils in general, or for South Indians, the person has an "essence" at all.[15] It might be more productive for us to imagine, therefore, that Tamils, inasmuch as they have shared "beliefs" (another problematic category), tend to think of each person as internally variegated and distinctive because of the patterns of variegation that that person uniquely contains or displays. Moreover, the statements and actions of many Tamil people suggest that they think of these patterns as changing gradually over time, and from relationship to relationship, in complex and unpredictable ways—and that they think of them as having many sources. There are some traits that are gotten from the mother, some that are gotten from the father, some that are gotten from the envi-

ronment—food, air, earth, water, stars—and some that are brought in from a distant time and place by the soul, *uyir*. If there is a most important component, it is surely this uyir, but of all the parts of the person, this is the part that is least bound to the laws of substances such as earth and blood. Uyir is breath, it is feeling, it is what makes a living thing move and grow, it is what makes *any* live thing be alive. When a man and woman make love, their very souls (uyir) mix in the places where they have most feeling; thus one may lose one's life in the act of making love. But the soul of a child is another altogether from those of its parents. The uyir comes from God, most people say, or from some past life, or from the air.[16] When the body dies, all the other components of the person remain. Only uyir is gone, cleanly and completely, to who knows where, having come in the first place from who knows where. Thus, the most common and honest answer that unschooled villagers give to the anthropologist's how and why questions about the way people are is simply, "*Ennattai kaṇḍōm?* [What do we know?]." People are as they are. Idle speculation about causes is arrogant and pointless.

Intellectual informants are often useful in such situations. Such individuals are able to elaborate fascinating theories for us on virtually any topic, just as there are Tamil poets who for a fee will write poems on any topic you choose to assign. We must respect these thinkers, for as natives, they are more qualified to explicate the native system of thought than we are. But they are a small, elite, and often (like us) an intentionally idiosyncratic bunch. They may make representations of the common man; but they do not represent him. The common man is not in the business of making representations; he is in the business of living. If we are trying to understand the way the common man lives on the basis of what the intellectual knows, we must try to find the common man within the intellectual and see how what the intellectual says relates to the actual living person that he is, rather than attending only to the content of his words. Precisely because the theories of Indian literati are so abundant and diverse, it is a big mistake to take any one theory emerging from the mouth or pen of an Indian thinker, or even many of them, and regard this theory as reflecting the true shape of Indian reality, or even part of it. Each theory is unique, and must be regarded as continuous with the unique personality that gave it birth.[17]

In advocating that we pay close attention to the details of what people say, I do not mean to imply that structuralism, which seeks the truth *behind* what people say, is invalid. To take statements at simple face value, without seeking their place in larger and less easily visible patterns, is not only not wise, it is not possible. Hence, the account I give below is at base structuralist, inasmuch as it is about patterns, relations between relations, and does not take isolated statements to be, in themselves, explanatory of whole institutions.

At the same time, in advocating a search for patterns that go beyond individual statements and actions and perhaps are given no overt form or symbol by those who maintain them, I do not mean to imply that the "cultural basis" (read ideational motivation) for marriage institutions is invalid. To claim this would in effect be to deny agency to people who live by such institutions. Rather, the suggestions I make above are offered as a warning that the meanings of kinship relations to people in a kin-based society are likely to be themselves complex, variegated, and not internally consistent. They are likely to be more like what we call feelings than like what we call thoughts. Their reasons are likely to be reasons of the heart.

Dumont's account of South Indian kinship discusses "affinity as a value." Culturalist accounts discuss the importance attached to the mingling of bodily substances. Both come close to, but skirt completely around, the issue of feeling or sentiment (*uṇarcci*) as a crucial one in Tamil thought and action about kinship. This is strange, for uṇarcci is a central concept in Tamil thought about life processes and is also far from marginal in any possible meaning of affinity to South Indians.

Both accounts also greatly downplay the significance of actual face-to-face personal relations, especially relations between male and female, in the operation of the kinship system. The nature of the *connection* between body and soul, vital to Tamils, to their understanding of their feelings and to their understanding of human relations, is similarly left untouched.[18] But kinship is not only, or even primarily, a matter of relations between categories of persons. Nor is it primarily a matter of relations between physical components of persons. It is, I would argue, primarily a matter of relations between persons, whole and actual persons. In their day-to-day associations with each other, they give the system being.

Poststructuralist (or Marxist-structuralist) Approaches

One helpful antidote to the idealism and naive holism of both the structuralist and the culturalist works discussed above is the poststructuralist approach to the study of social organization put forward by Pierre Bourdieu in his *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. His book cannot solve all our problems, but it does offer arguments that are very germane to the debate over South Indian kinship.

Bourdieu, like Dumont, has much in common with Levi-Strauss. He builds on structuralism and accepts many of its premises, but then he goes

beyond it and tries to reveal and seek a remedy for its flaws. Bourdieu's most serious criticism of Levi-Strauss concerns the latter's reification of cultural "rules." Levi-Strauss, as is well known, created structural anthropology overtly on analogy with Saussure's structural linguistics and Chomsky's transformational grammar. Both Chomsky and Saussure sought to find the invariant mental structures or grammatical rules underlying and generating actual speech. For both of them, all the vagaries and unpredictabilities in the actual use of speech were epiphenomenal. Laws and rules governing the structure of a sentence or of a language at any given point in time, as well as historical change and "transformations" taking place between deep or universal forms and surface or particular ones, were all, for Chomsky and Saussure, quite beyond control and manipulation by the individual human actor.[19] The fate of human will and agency and the particulars of context they treated as beyond the confines of their discipline. Following their lead and bringing it to the study of culture, Levi-Strauss early claimed that "the demands of the rule as rule" are part of the basic structure (unconscious) of the human mind, which structure it is the aim of the ethnologist to uncover.[20] The rules of social structure and cultural order which Levi-Strauss sought to uncover were beyond time, even opposed to it.[21] The beauty of "traditional society" or of "pensée sauvage," in the view of Levi-Strauss and many others, is precisely that it is unconscious, wild, and natural like a pansy. It presents an exquisite order, but no named individual or group of people planned it: like Harriet Beecher Stowe's Topsy (whose persona reflects this Rousseauvian vision), it "jes' growed."

In response to this philosophy, Bourdieu now asserts that we are misled to consider social organization to be governed by unconscious and unauthored rules of which existing forms are imperfect realizations. Rather we must consider any particular human world to be a process of mutual creation of praxis and habitus. Habitus consists not of rules intrinsic to the human mind, but of patterns and tendencies which enter the fabric of bodily hexis (the body's invisible nets and snares) from childhood. Praxis is not the mechanical enactment, or failed enactment, of rules but consists of choices and strategies which are open-ended and indefinite in number, and which depend for their meaning and effectiveness upon the elements of uncertainty and surprise. In Bourdieu's view, rules of social organization do not "underlie" social praxis. Rather the establishment of social "rules" is itself a practical act, a political strategy carried out by particular agents and designed to legitimate a particular social order. In effect, Bourdieu's work is a Marxist rethinking of Levi-Strauss's dialectical but deliberately anti-Marxist structuralism.

The scenarios and strategies that Bourdieu describes as intrinsic to the real process of kinship (in Kabylia, Algeria, the place where he did field work) are agonistic, pluralistic, individualistic. His approach is opposed to what he calls the totalizing approach of structural-functionalism, in which kinship is represented as a total system, self-enclosed, predictable, with actors' uncertainty of other actors' responses to their actions treated as inessential to the operation of the system. A totalizing view, as Bourdieu describes it, is a disinvolved, bird's-eye view of a society, the view of an omniscient observer who already knows what is to happen as though all were predetermined, a view taken off the ground and out of the time in which actors live and make their choices. A totalizing view considers kinship as the working out of an overall plan which benefits only society-as-a-whole, which precedes and is the basis of praxis, and which has nothing to do with individual agency. Bourdieu suggests—and this is crucial for our argument—that the very notion of "society-as-a-whole" and of rules supporting the whole which have no specific origin other than that of the collectivity or of God may often be nothing more than the fabrication of particular interested parties who legitimize their hegemony by representing themselves as embodying the whole.

Bourdieu's approach to kinship leads us to ask vis-a-vis Levi-Strauss, whether the apparently integrative property of kinship practice such as mother's brother's daughter (MBD) marriage is really what causes this practice to endure longer and to be more prevalent than father's sister's daughter (FZD) marriage. Trautmann[22] points out that of the various possible forms of cross-cousin marriage, MBD marriage alone is in accord with the North Indian ideal of *kanyādāna* as outlined in the dharmaśāstra. The principle of kanyādāna ("gift of a virgin") specifies that one should give one's daughter in marriage as one performs a sacrifice to the gods, with no expectation of worldly return. Any kind of "exchange" of women between lineages would therefore be a less sacred, and so less prestigious, form of marriage. In modern Indo-Aryan communities, affines who are "wife-givers" are thus sharply distinguished from those who are "wife-receivers"; one should not give a wife to a lineage from which one's own lineage has received a wife, and vice versa. A family to whom one's family has given a wife is treated as superior to one's own family; a family from whom one's own family has accepted a wife is treated as inferior. Marriage is supposed to be consistently hypergamous.

Sanskritic North Indian culture in general has long stood as a prestige model for high-caste South Indians, for principally political reasons. The center of power on the South Asian subcontinent has long been the northern plains; the lingua franca for many centuries throughout the subconti-

nent was Sanskrit. It would therefore not be unreasonable to assume that the values of Indo-Aryan kinship have influenced the particular forms taken by Dravidian kinship in the south, conducing to a preference for MBD marriage, in which "the traffic in women" always flows in only one direction.

For South Indians, the principle of kanyādāna is much like the notion of transsubstantiation of a woman's bodily substance to that of her husband at marriage. Both principles align southern praxis with northern ideology but at the same time skew southern praxis in a certain direction. Both principles justify a complete severance of ties between a woman and her natal family at the time of the woman's marriage; both principles also justify the complete subordination of a married woman to her husband and his family.

As Leach and others have shown, MBD marriage supports relations of permanent, irreversible inequality among lineages; it conduces to a hierarchical organization of lineages and so adds weight to the principles authorizing caste hierarchy.[23] Such a practice—consistent with the production of large social units integrated by means of hierarchy, rather than with the production of small social units integrated by means of reciprocity—may be conducive to solidarity (therefore good for human beings) in Levi-Strauss's terms, but in Bourdieu's terms it is totalizing and the "solidarity" it engenders may be no more than an oppressive illusion. Why, we might then ask, should such a practice *naturally*, that is of its own accord, endure longer than one that is conducive to looser, less centralized forms of social organization? On the contrary, the latter might more reasonably be expected to have a natural survivability, the survivability of any acephalous or decentralized life form, in which if one portion of the system falls, the rest need not fall with it. If the more encompassing (and arguably for this very reason the more fragile) system is more prevalent, perhaps this is because, as a system which fosters hierarchy, it is very often in the interests of powerful parties to promote it. Perhaps when such powerful parties become less powerful, the most durable institution becomes the one that is most flexible, the one that allows for the largest number of alternative strategies of action—like a well-designed board game in which the rules are few and simple but the possible combinations of moves are many and complex.

Dumont's wide-ranging notion of "encompassment" takes on a different meaning when seen through Bourdieuvian eyes. To encompass, in Dumont's terms, is to include, as the whole includes the part. It is also to supercede in importance, as the interests of the society supercede those of the individual. Dumont argues that encompassment in both senses is a fundamental principle in South Asian society. Hence Brahmanical authority encompasses kingly authority because the Brahman represents the sacred whole of which the king's realm is only a part;[24] higher castes encompass lower castes because the higher are more pure and whole, the lower more impure and fragmentary;[25] in Bengal the wife encompasses the husband (bodily during intercourse) but the husband's patriline encompasses the wife (as a social being, for her whole married life), so the wife becomes part of the husband's patriline and its interests must supercede her own;[26] similarly in Bengal, the hierarchical love binding the joint family encompasses the egalitarian love binding the nuclear couple because the former is more inclusive, so love between husband and wife must be kept strictly circumscribed.[27] In South India it might be argued, following the same lines of thought, that the hierarchy of matrilateral marriage encompasses the reciprocity of patrilateral.[28] In short, for India overall, hierarchy encompasses equality, and the larger social unit encompasses the smaller, *unless*, as in the case of Brahmans within the caste system or patriarchs within a lineage, the smaller social unit is considered to represent the whole. But assuming a cynical stance we might ask, does all this encompassment happen because Indians as a collectivity value encompassment, or is it simply a matter of the more powerful making the rules? Do women and untouchables value encompassment in the way that patriarchs and Brahmans do? Why don't we ask them?[29]

Bourdieu's approach is useful to us because of its particularism and its action-orientation: it discourages us from reducing a culture to some set of presumably invariant and unanimously maintained collective representations, and therefore it encourages us to look more closely at the diversity of lifeways that actual people within a given society follow; it enjoins us not to dismiss this diversity as epiphenomenal.

Where Bourdieu fails us is in his inability to see the diversity within the human actor. For Bourdieu it seems that all action relevant to social structure (hence to kinship organization) is motivated by selfish calculation of political advantage.[30] It is for this reason, one presumes, that he is so skeptical of the notion of solidarity, for he sees only the one side of it—the hypocritical, oppressive side. It is good that we should be reminded that what we see as "diffuse, enduring solidarity"[31] is sometimes only tyranny in disguise. But we need also a way to understand the roots of this solidarity when it is real, when it consists of affective bonds between people, when it consists of actual feelings of love.

Freudian Approaches

If one searches for discussions of the affective elements of cross-cousin marriage, and especially if one looks for discussions of what this institution means in terms of the feelings that particular individuals in particular

kinship relations have for one another, much of what one finds is partly or wholly Freudian in orientation. Freud himself, in *Totem and Taboo*, was the first to suggest that rules of kinship organization were a consequence of men's need to deal constructively with Oedipal feelings. Since then, Freud's thesis has been repudiated countless times by anthropologists, and yet Oedipus keeps reemerging in ethnographic studies of family and kinship, especially in South Asian studies, in increasingly sophisticated forms.[32]

It would not be useful to recapitulate in detail here the debates within anthropology over the relation of Oedipus to kinship. These debates center around questions of whether the Oedipus complex is real; if so, is it universal; are the feelings of individuals really at the heart of kinship organization; if so, do the unconscious and unacknowledged Oedipal feelings of individuals form part of public institutions such as those organizing marital alliances; are affective ties between individuals able to account for institutionalized relations between categories of kin; and so forth.

Regardless of the stand that one takes on these issues one must still confront the feminist objection to orthodox Freudian theory, which is that it regards women as fundamentally wounded (castrated) and diseased (hysterical). The application of Oedipal theory to kinship studies is likewise troublesome to feminists, in that it denies all agency to women. Men and their feelings are given all the credit (or blame, as the case may be) for construction of the kinship system. Are we not allowed to suppose that women and their feelings also had a hand in this construction?

Of course, from the point of view of feminism, structuralist and culturalist accounts of kinship systems fare little better. Levi-Strauss has been severely criticized for his characterization of women in marital exchange systems as essentially just pawns in the game. Dumont appears to be responding to actual or potential feminist criticism when he writes that relations of alliance are handed down from women to women as well as from men to men, but his exclusive reliance on male informants and his assumption of the primacy of male interests in the organization of kinship relations render the balance he posits superficial and ad hoc. Culturalists are still more sensitized to feminist interests, yet the kinship ideology they describe is on several key points problematic for women while suited to the convenience of men, and this bias appears to be accepted as natural by the ethnographers in question.[33] Bourdieu is to be credited for his detailed descriptions of female behind-the-scenes manipulations in Kabylia wedding negotiations, but his evident assumption that the desire for power is the one motivation behind all human activity may be criticized as fundamentally masculinist in tone. The failure of all of these writers to deal with the affective aspect of kinship relations has already been noted.

Exegeses of MBD marriage in terms of affect often take what might be called a quasi-Freudian approach. In this view, it is assumed that a man has a relation of affection with his mother and a relation of antagonism with an older-generation male in authority over the mother and/or over the younger male himself. Usually this authoritative and forbidding older male is the father, but sometimes it is the mother's brother. So Levi-Strauss predicted that in any society practicing cross-cousin marriage, a man would have either an antagonistic relation with his father and an affectionate relation with his mother's brother, or the reverse. The particular combination of lineality and locality (e.g., patrilineal and matrilocal) prevalent in the given society would determine which set of relationships would occur, and so would determine, in a society characterized by cross-cousin marriage, whether marriage was normatively matrilateral (marriage to MBD) or bilateral (marriage to either FZD or MBD).[34] Dumont applied this rule to Tamil marriage systems, only substituting patrilateral for bilateral marriage.[35] Similarly, Homans and Schneider posited a universal rule of kinship which stated that MBD marriage would be preferred in societies in which fathers had jural authority over their unmarried sons, and FZD marriage would be preferred in societies in which mother's brothers had jural authority over their nephews.[36] Much earlier than any of these writers, Radcliffe-Brown, in attempting to determine the value to the individual of MBD marriage in South Africa, suggested that it is natural for a man, when he forms a marriage alliance, to want to form it with someone who is like his mother—someone with whom he has a warm and friendly relationship. This person is the mother's brother. One extends one's affection for one's mother onto all of one's mother's kindred, in particular the mother's brother, and thence to this man's daughter, and so marries her.[37] Building upon this argument, Homans and Schneider suggest,

> As he visits his mother's brother often, ego will see a great deal of the daughter: contact will be established. As he is fond of his mother's brother, and as mother's brother and his daughter in the patrilineal complex, the Oedipus Complex if you will, are themselves particularly close to one another, he will tend to get fond of the daughter. Their marriage will be sentimentally appropriate.[38]

Radcliffe-Brown's "extensionist hypothesis," which posited that if one had an affective tie with an individual kinsman, that tie could be

extended to all individuals in the same *category* of kin, follows from his fundamental premise that the basic building blocks of all social structures are *dyadic* relations, that is, one-to-one relations between individuals. This extensionist hypothesis is now generally rejected (perhaps wrongly so, in the Indian case at least, as I shall suggest below), but the same Freudian assumptions about relations between older and younger generation males and about relations between mothers and sons still remain in the more recent and sophisticated studies.

In all of these formulations, the affective relation between mother and child (whether son or daughter) is assumed to be invariant, and therefore not a factor in kinship organization. Likewise in all of these formulations, as in Freud's own opus, affect is not regarded as culturally constituted. The person to whom one directs one's positive or negative feelings may be seen to vary from society to society, but the quality of those feelings, the nature of their expression, the possibility that affect is no more the same throughout the world than is language—none of these matters is given much consideration by these analysts.

Post-Freudian (or Semiotic-Freudian) Approaches

A major anthropological criticism of Freud, as I have just said, is that he failed to consider affect or sexuality, even symbols of sexuality, as integrated into culturally organized symbol-systems. Yet this failure carries over into anthropological applications of Freud, even the remote applications considered above. This, added to the antifeminine bias, the antihistoricity, the determinism, the monotony, the intolerance of ambiguity and polyphony, the downright humorlessness that naive Freudianism shares with the other approaches considered so far, might lead us to despair of ever finding any theory that might assist us in developing a truly person-centered account of kinship (which, in case I failed to mention it, is what this chapter aims to do).

But let us not give up yet. There is one more approach to our problem that I wish to consider here. This is an approach which, to the best of my knowledge, has never been used by anthropologists at all; it is the work of the French psychoanalytic semiotician, Jacques Lacan. Like all other fancy theories, Lacan's work has its problems, not least of which is that it is almost impossible for the uninitiated to follow what he says—he deliberately made it that way, ludic old fellow that he was. Fortunately, a number of Lacan's feminist students have published lucid explications of his basic ideas.[39] With their help, through the stylish postmodern absurdities that riddle Lacan's work, I think we may find some real insights that may help us to better understand the dynamics of culture, kinship,

I call Lacan post-Freudian because his ideas about human psychology are so different from what most people take to have been Freud's own. However Lacan himself saw himself not as rejecting or transcending Freud but as merely giving the most appropriate reading of him. In Lacan's view, the topic of Freud's analysis was not the psyche (whatever that is) but discourse, people talking. Hence Freudian theory properly belongs, for Lacan, not in the realm of psychology but in the realm of linguistics.

Lacan's work is already engaged with our own because it is informed by post-Freudian French ethnography, most especially by the work of Mauss, of Mauss's students Leenhardt and Griaule, and of Levi-Strauss. He is also familiar with many Indian texts, and makes reference to them in his writing. In some ways, he "thinks like an Indian," and he behaves like many an Indian guru, mingling the sublime with the absurd in ways that cause some people to laugh, drive others crazy, and enlighten only a few.

I must, therefore, insert a second warning to the reader here. Many serious people say they hate Lacan, because he invents strange-sounding words that make no apparent reference to anything in the universe that we are familiar with, and because often he is so deliberately maddening. He pulls the rug out from under us all the time. He is an academic trickster—the most unsavory kind of trickster there is—and worst of all (for some Americans) he is French.

Why then do I give him so much attention here? There are two reasons. First, because his vision of the incompleteness of the self has a number of interesting things in common with something we might call a Tamil world view, especially as this world view is expressed in Tamil kinship patterns. In other words, Lacan has hit upon some truths that Tamils have also discovered. People of different civilizations sometimes do this, cultural relativity notwithstanding. They harmonize with each other in interesting ways. Why should we not hear the music?

Second, the angel voices that Lacan conjures up may seem like hocus-pocus, but they are really no more so than any other academic theory. The hocus-pocusness of all academic discourse is in fact one of the main things that Lacan, during his life, was trying to communicate. Not that there is anything wrong with hocus-pocus: it can be fun, and even illuminating, but when we take it too seriously, it blinds us and it shackles us. Functionalism, structuralism, materialism, Freudianism, and all the rest of our theoretical viewpoints are all very useful but they are not ultimate Truth. In our "studies" of other people we must get beyond all these theories, we must get beyond Theory itself, if we are ever *really* going to

seems; it is no more easy than getting beyond Religion, getting beyond Language. We need someone to push us off of it, push hard. Well, a trying and crazy (but brilliant!) old man like Lacan might for some of us be just the ticket, if he can force us to deal with the difficult and the strange. For the worlds of people beyond our shores *are* difficult, they *are* strange, they *do* defy the categories that shape our comprehension. And yet they are not separate from our own world. We cannot ignore them; we have to learn to live not only with them, but in them.

Here I will end my sermon and return to my text. I try in the next few pages to give a clear and concise but faithful rendering of some of Lacan's ideas that bear upon the present enterprise—an account of Dravidian kinship. Despite my best efforts, I know that many readers will still find this section abstruse. So, if you really can't stand it, move on to the next section. Otherwise, bear with me. It will all soon be over.

Lacan does not see in the material of psychoanalysis universal pre- or transcultural symbols. For him, the self, like all other objects of experience, is linguistically constituted. Instead of calling it the ego or self, therefore, he calls this core of each person's identity the "subject," to emphasize its implication in grammar, its necessary opposition to some "object," and its "subjection" to the larger whole which is, among other things, language.

Being inherently a "part" of this larger hegemonic "whole," the subject/self is formed, in Lacan's view, not through processes of integration, but through a moment of fragmentation. The Oedipus complex consists, for Lacan, in the rupture of a primordial, static, imagistic, different kind of wholeness, the wholeness of a being looking into a mirror, the wholeness—in Peircean terms—of Firstness and iconicity, the original mother-child dyad. The rupture is effected by something from outside of this First wholeness; it is effected by an Other that is distant (as opposed to intimate), abstract (as opposed to tangible), arbitrary (as opposed to being its own meaning), and unattainable. This powerful and alien Other is called by various names: Logos, the Phallus, the Father, the Name of the Father, Language, Culture. At the moment of rupture by this Other, desire enters the self. The self now becomes Subject, for it now belongs to the father's world: the world of Saussure's Arbitrary; the world of Peirce's Law. The Subject gets a name and becomes a symbol, defined relationally and negatively. It feels itself to be a fragment, to be incomplete, to contain an absence. Language, the seeming whole to which the Subject belongs, in turn belongs to another, to *the* Other, the divine will of collective social authority. The Subject would like to appropriate this Other, and so redeem its wholeness, but this is not possible, for the Other both precedes

in terms of it, even before one is born (and the more so after one dies). Even the unconscious, the foundation of the Subject, is nothing but "the discourse of the Other." The mother was an object in the sense of being something one could touch. The Other is an Object in the sense of being something alien, feelingless, objective. The closeness and ownness of the mother is replaced by the distance and untouchability of the Father.

The presymbolic vision of the self in the mother, or in general, in the self's earliest objects, is what Lacan calls *le stade de miroire*, "the mirror stage." The self imagines itself to be an image of an image (the baby sees the mother and himself in her). This vision is static and closed, an eternal, mutual reflection between two images. It is a mirage.

But, we are warned, the *quelque chose d'un*, the "something of oneness," the promise of oneness, that the phallus (or logos, or symbolic order) holds out is also a phantom and a fraud. "Meaning," the seeming goal and source of language, has no stability. It, too, is a matter of relations, arbitrary and contingent, always shifting. Thus meaning, that which is behind appearances, the "other of the other," which would be the self again, the true and whole self which knows and owns itself, can never be captured or appropriated.

The phallus, the distant, omnipotent paternal weapon that divides us from the image of ourselves in our mother is, then, nothing but language, the symbolic code or law. This code, like the Derridean "trace," perpetuates desire, sets up the illusion that there is something on the other side of what we perceive that will complete us.

Spurred by desire for wholeness, the Subject acts. It seeks to possess the Other (culture-as-a-whole, culture-as-given, culture-in-the-ideal), but it never can, because this Other is only an illusion. Still, the self keeps reaching for this illusory ideal. As long as it has this desire, it will keep reaching. Through its reaching for the wholeness of the phallus/code, it builds the human world. If its desire were fulfilled, if there actually were closure—a perfect culture—and if the self felt itself to become whole, then human life would end, everything would stop.

The phallic division of the self from the mother is "necessary" and "functional" says Lacan, because in a sense it gets us moving, it puts us into the semiotic order where the meaning that we are looking for is always somewhere else. However, we must watch out for this "necessary" and this "functional," because they serve the myth of oneness, and so they like it are frauds. In the final analysis, for Lacan as for Bourdieu, the appearance of oneness, the very ideas of "culture," of "function," of "whole," are authoritarian artifices, whose nonverity we must come to terms with.

ner, for one, approached in his notion of carnival. For Lacan what is real and not illusory is what he calls *jouissance*, a term that can be translated into English variously as "playfulness," "polymorphous sexuality," "bliss," or "female orgasm." This jouissance is neither an underlying code nor a transcendent principle, nor is it meaningful, nor is it unitary. It is not necessary in any sense; it is not a tool of communion or communication or the maintenance of any system. It is not even capable of being spoken about. It is just there, "constantly coursing over the surface of the body," not a complement or a completion, but a "surplus," a "supplement" and a "suppletion."[40] Most importantly, jouissance has nothing at all to do with "exchange" or "relations." Hence: "There is no such thing as sexual intercourse," declares Lacan.[41] Jouissance is a strictly private matter.

Most of Lacan's biological terminology, it should be stressed, is completely allegorical. In his interpretation of the Oedipus complex, Lacan is not concerned with the "real" father or the "real" mother or the "real" penis, but with a set of forces considerably more general, intractable, and abstract than these, for which forces such terms as "father," "mother," and "phallus" are only aides-memoire.

We can see in Lacan's ideas a rethinking of Freud's *Civilization and its Discontents* and *Totem and Taboo*. We can also see in these ideas the distant magnetism of Indian thought. The notion that the rupture of a transcendent male consciousness into the primeval maternal equilibrium causes the world to be created echoes Saṁkhya cosmology.[42] The Greek notion of logos, the unchanging, abstract, disembodied, divine law, is much like (indeed historically related to) the Indian *brahman*, the Word upon which the universe is founded, owned and controlled by a male elite.[43] Many Indian texts, from the Rg-Veda to tongue-in-cheek comments of present-day villagers, describe desire as a painful but creative activating presence in the world, just as Lacan does.

Lacan's rejection of the notion of exchange as a plus-value in the world of human relations is of course a direct response to Levi-Strauss's opus on kinship, as well as to Mauss's *The Gift*. Many feminist psychoanalysts have been attracted to Lacan's work because of his stress on female jouissance and on the goodness of its nonfunctionality; his criticism of ideas of "value" and "exchange" (including the exchange of women) as central to the meaning of kinship; his view that biological differences between male and female do not determine psychological differences between those labeled as masculine and feminine, but rather that biological features on the human landscape are merely arbitrarily chosen *symbols* marking the initial division between self and (m)other. For all these rea-

In a sense, Lacan's view does not contradict that of either Mauss or Levi-Strauss. The central principle of exchange, the principle that the transaction can never be complete, that culture consists in people denying their own completeness, men renouncing their possession of their own female half, their own mothers and sisters, so as to become eternally committed to an endless quest for wholeness through others—these principles are not negated by Lacan so much as they are described from an alternative point of view. Lacan's vision might be considered to represent the personal side of the social ideal that Levi-Strauss describes. The principle of exchange—which states that you must find the completion of yourself outside of what you already own, and that this process is never finished—integrates society (if it does do this) at the *cost* of a sense of perpetual *incompleteness* at any level lower than that of the whole society, including, and especially, that of the individual.

Lacan has in common with Bourdieu, beside his skepticism regarding the whole, an intensely agonistic world view. For both thinkers, there is a breach between a fictional totality called culture, rules, the symbolic, the system, and an actual, willful, sentient creature called the subject or self. For both thinkers this breach, and the uncertainty and incompleteness arising from it are what life is all about. Both thinkers are particularistic, antiuniversalistic, antiauthoritarian. For Bourdieu private strategies, for Lacan private sentiments, are at least as important as anything public or shared.

Also like Bourdieu, Lacan falls into the very trap he takes such pains to reveal. Bourdieu, as we have noted, never departs from his assumption that power relations are all that enter significantly into the construction of human societies. In this and other ways, his vision is as totalizing as some of those that he criticizes, for in attributing sole reality to power as a human motivation, he legitimizes those who pursue it, while rendering invisible all the rest. Similarly, Lacan, for all his critique of ideals, myths, and abstractions, never gets down to cases. He is himself a myth-maker, a formalizer and formulizer, a deliberately elusive and mysterious father-figure, founder of what has been called a "cult." He has become an exclusionist and an authority. He has become institutionalized. Ultimately then we must part ways with him as well—but not without having learned from him.

There will be many readers, I know, for whom the psychoanalytic-cum-semiotic view of the human condition outlined above will appear totally useless and spurious. For instance, if one believes that what drives human beings to act and to create is not some "spiritual" trouble but rather the material conditions of existence, namely, the need to subsist and

psychologies as irrelevant to the social sciences. However, *if* one feels that Freud did touch upon some fundamental human truths that may illuminate some of the regions explored by cultural anthropology, *then* I would suggest that one should give consideration to the Lacanian reading of Freud, bizarre though it may appear. After all, Freud's ideas themselves would seem just as bizarre were we not accustomed to them. Especially if we are willing to admit that human creative energy greatly surpasses what is required for the purposes of subsistence and reproduction, that our creative energy is spent only partly in the service of strictly material ends and much more in the pursuance of other kinds of needs, and if we have observed that less material needs seem often to be pursued even at the cost of survival itself, then we may be able to accept as a working hypothesis that even something as seemingly utilitarian as a mode of kinship organization may be created and maintained by human beings largely if not entirely for artistic or existential reasons.

Synthesis of Theories

Building upon these considerations, we might describe Dravidian kinship as, first of all, a set of variant cultural creations all oriented around a single, unifying ideal, which ideal is never actually realized in practice. Yalman calls this array of related kinship systems "variations on a theme."[44] The notion that there *is* some basic theme from which the different Dravidian kinship organizations all spring seems strong. So Trautmann argues that there must have been in the past a single Dravidian kinship system, which one might call proto-Dravidian kinship, from which all present-day Dravidian kinship systems may be seen to derive.[45] This common ancestor may be reconstructed on the basis of properties shared by its presumed present-day descendants, in exactly the same way that a protolanguage is reconstructed from the modern members of a language family, though none of the modern descendents replicates all the properties of the protosystem. Trautmann posits that the unified proto-Dravidian kinship system he reconstructs was a historical reality. But of course he would not claim that we could ever know this for sure. In a sense, the unified protokinship system, like a unified protolanguage, is a fiction or myth. It may be that Dravidian, for as long as "it" has "existed," has *always* been a *family* of languages with certain attributes in common, and was *never* one single language.[46] In the same way, Dravidian kinship may never have been one single system, but always, as it is today, a set of variant systems, no one of which matches the "protosystem" of bilateral cross-cousin marriage which the semantic structure of all of them seems to presuppose. Perhaps it would be better, then, to speak of "meta-

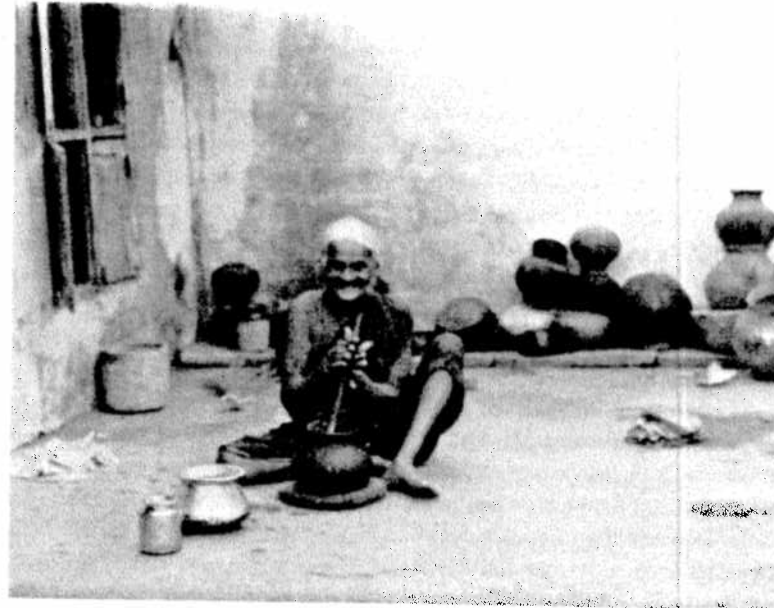

Plate 18. Paddi churning buttermilk: a form of jouissance.

we could think of Dravidian kinship in terms of Wittgenstein's famous notion of family resemblances, except that here the various related systems, rather than drawing upon a common pool or collection of features, instead draw upon a common *structure*, so that the illusion of an overarching, or underlying, or ancestral unity is great.

Secondly, the Dravidian kinship ideal is a *linguistic* construct: it is a set of words organized in a tight, symmetrical pattern, and defined in relation to one another. This pattern is in some respects like a poem; its symmetry gives it a certain aesthetic appeal. Ego or self is an intrinsic part of this pattern, occupies a particular place in it, and is defined in relation to the other terms.

A key, though hidden, feature in the pattern of Dravidian kinship terms is marriage. The organization of kinship terms makes no sense unless a certain kind of marriage is assumed. Ego takes his or her proper place in this pattern, then, by marrying. (Marriage is by far the most important ritual in Tamil Nadu, by far the most important event in the life of the individual there.) By marrying, ego upholds and seeks to appropriate the tradition created by his or her ancestors; by marrying, ego becomes part of convention; in Tamil Nadu, when ego marries he or she

mils, of their entire cultural heritage). At the same time, when ego marries, he or she (especially she) is broken away from the world of the mother, the primal world of shared bodies, which comes before words. That marriage is indeed perceived by many Tamils as just such a break from just such a world will be documented amply below.

It might be imagined that in Dravidian kinship organization, one leaves, at marriage, one kind of unity (the world of the mother, knit together by physical acts of love) to enter into another (the world of the social whole, knit together by the language of kinship). But the harmonious, symmetrical ideal unity held forth by Dravidian kinship terminology is manifestly an illusion. It is not just that the marriage-system mapped by the terminology is only sometimes realized, so that we have the usual gap between words and praxis, between cultural norm and statistical fact. Instead, for any particular Dravidian kinship community, there stands a third factor *between* the perfectly ordered semantic ideal built into the language and the partly chaotic empirical world of actor's choices. This third factor is that community's particular set of marriage *rules*, which legislate that marriage shall be enacted within the community so as to maximize the temporal power and religious prestige (the two are often interconvertible) held by the community's senior males. The rule of *kanyādāna* plays a key role here.

Under the rule of kanyādāna, marriage becomes defined as a father's sacrifice of his daughter to the invisible (*adṛṣta*) world.[47] The fruit of such a marriage must not be the kind that can be enjoyed in this world that we live in now. In principle what is being upheld through kanyādāna is dharma—the invisible moral order of the universe (similar to Lacan's idea of the-name-of-the-father). In fact what is being upheld is the prestige of the father who gives away his daughter in such a marriage—in exchange for the wealth he expends in dowry and elaborate marriage festivities, he receives (in Bourdieu's terms) a large pile of "symbolic capital."

Under the rule of kanyādāna, marriage for the sake of bodily and emotional *pleasure* (*kāma*) is renounced. This renunciation, unlike the other, is quite real, but here it is not so much the father, as the daughter and her bridegroom, who (unwittingly) make the sacrifice. To the extent that marriage follows the rule of kanyādāna, *and* to the extent that it is enacted as part of a system of exchange, to that extent pleasure (jouissance) is factored out of it.

But here is the third and final point that must be made about Dravidian kinship: regardless of whether they get it or not, South Indian people, both male and female, *expect* pleasure to be a fruit of marriage. They also

expect personal and emotional completion and fulfillment to be provided to them *through* the marriage system. People may rebel against a particular marriage, but they do not rebel against the principle of cross-cousin marriage as they do, for instance, sometimes rebel against the principle of caste hierarchy. Cross-cousin marriage is an *option*, a matter of choice, in a way that caste hierarchy is not. If you marry a stranger that stranger *becomes* your cross-cousin. The kinship system, unlike caste, bends to accommodate the heart's desire, or seems so to bend, promises the hope of joy, or seems so to promise.

The statistical evidence that South Indians prefer in real life to marry either a nonrelative or a close cross-cousin (that is, someone whom they know personally and with whom they may have a longtime bond), making little of the option they have of marrying a distant cross-cousin, hints at the way in which the institution of cross-cousin marriage is taken as an affirmation of personal ties, more than just a reproduction of categorial affinities. For modern South Indians, cross-cousin marriage is, among other things, a *romantic* ideal. They reach for this ideal, and yet they rarely if ever achieve it, in part because it is always mediated for them through the rules of temporal power, the rules of interested exchange.

The Approach Taken Here

My aim in the remainder of this chapter and in the chapters following is to work toward an understanding of some of the meanings and causes of Tamil kinship institutions as they are revealed through expressions of sentiment taking place between actual people. For instance, we will consider what one particular woman says to and about one of her sisters-in-law on the topic of how this sister-in-law is considered to feel and how she makes others feel. Certain "myths" about kinship will also be discussed. These myths are not treated here as abstract codes, for they are in all their realizations, that is, in all their tellings, very particular expressions of particular sentiments held by particular people. The meanings of a given story—what is important in it, why it is told, what moral imperatives may be derived from it—vary greatly from person to person, from telling to telling.

In this approach, then, I attend as much to the private as to the shared, as much to the particular as to the universal. In stressing the private and the particular, one runs the risk of being accused of anecdotalism, and of one's informants being accused of atypicality. But it is necessary to deal with the apparently atypical in order to recognize that there are infinite strategies, infinite ways of playing the game, and to see that it is not the code but the praxis, not the iron rule of the ideal but all the failed attempts

at its embrace, all the imperfect embodiments of its illusory phantom nature, that keep the game going.

The main point I will try to make in this chapter, then, is that the continuation of a particular institution such as cross-cousin marriage may be posited, not upon its fulfillment of some function or set of functions, but upon the fact that it creates longings that can *never* be fulfilled. It is possible to see kinship not as a static form upheld by regnant or shared principles, but as a web maintained by unrelieved tensions, an architecture of conflicting desires, its symmetry a symmetry of imbalance, its cyclicity that of a hunter following his own tracks.

A secondary point I wish to make concerns the question of "extension" of sentiments from one kinsperson to others—for example, the idea that one might feel for all the men classified as brother the same sentiments one feels for one's "real" brother, "by extension." This idea has rightly been rejected as a total explanation of marriage institutions. It obviously leaves too much unaccounted for to say that cross-cousin marriage is practiced because an individual may fulfill his desire for his mother by marrying his mother's brother's daughter, or someone in that category. However, in considering kinship as simultaneously a linguistic system and an organization of affect, I think that we would be equally in error to reject out-of-hand the possibility that sentiments, like ideas, may be channeled by means of words. It is important not to overlook the fact that in many parts of India, including Tamil Nadu, the selective use of kin terms is a powerful way of conveying, igniting, or engendering certain sentiments. One may apply a particular kin term to someone who is not in the genealogically "correct" relationship to one as a way of expressing a kin-based feeling toward them. Conversely, when a certain term is applied to a person, convention dictates that appropriate sentiments be expressed, inappropriate ones suppressed. A dramatic example of the affective impact of kin terms occurred recently during the Sikh-Hindu riots in Delhi, in which a group of Sikh men was prevented from murdering a group of Hindu women by being told that these women were their "sisters."[48] Less newsworthy, but still moving, instances of the affective use of kin terms occur often in everyday life. A woman in her fifties weeps because a neighborhood girl addresses her as *akkā*, "older sister," a term she has not been called by since her marriage. A man drunkenly making his way home encounters a woman he knows on a lone street; the woman backs away fearfully; the man replies, "How can you be afraid of me? I am your little brother [*tampi*]"; the woman loses her fear and continues on her way. In a film, a man risks his life to save that of a woman he has just met, crying out with great emotion, "If you are the sister of so-and-so, then you are my *macci* [MBD]." In a folksong, a man repeatedly asks a woman for something to drink. First she responds by calling him "older brother"; he says, "I don't mean that." Then she calls him "younger brother"; again he says, "I don't mean that." At last she calls him *māmā* ("mother's brother," a term of address for a potential marriage partner or a lover); then he says, "That is the water I want."

Examples such as these could be multiplied indefinitely. Some detailed cases of the affective uses of kin terms will be given in the text below.

The notion that face-to-face relations between individuals are in some way the foundation of social structure also deserves reconsideration, especially if we are allowed to reintroduce the diachronic dimension into the study of social systems and to think in terms of how each person as he or she grows from infancy to adulthood learns to conceptualize and to act within the social structure. We can easily imagine a child learning the meaning of the term "older sister" first in relation to a particular individual, and then learning to apply this term, with the feelings that go with it, to other individuals, and finally to whole categories of people. But the association of this term with a particular dyadic relation will always be, in both a temporal and a semantic sense, primary. Whenever I use the word "sister," somewhere in the back of my mind there will always be evoked an image of the first person I ever called by that name.

Individuals in what we might call a potential kin relationship with each other—say, very distant "sisters"—might choose to realize and enact this relationship, or they might choose not to. If they choose to enact it, they may do so in many different ways. If they never see or hear of each other, their sisterhood may not exist for them. But people who are engaged with each other in some way, people who must face each other daily or who require things of each other, *must* have some emotional stance toward each other. When individuals are so engaged, their ability to act in their mutual interest, or alternatively to defend themselves against each other's incursions, hinges upon the sentiments they have for each other. These sentiments in turn are given shape by what they call each other. Complex feelings may be evoked by a familiar word, as much as they are by a familiar face.

We Americans like to think of true feelings as free and spontaneous. The idea of "conventional sentiments" seems almost oxymoronic to us. It rankles us, seems phony.[49] Could a man *feel* that a woman is his sister just because her position in the social structure causes her to be classified as a sister with respect to him? Tamils, like us, often chafe against the artifice and hypocrisy of relationships established by the force of convention instead of by choice.[50] And emotional dissimulation certainly exists

among them just as it does among us. In spite of all this I would still suggest that Tamil people can and in many circumstances do "really feel" such structurally enjoined sentiments. Emotional patterns developed in childhood among close kin are brought into play repeatedly throughout an adult's lifetime. People replay their first loves and hatreds again and again through countless successive relationships. The patterns are not the same worldwide, but for each person, there are such patterns. I would suggest that in Tamil Nadu it is just this set of patterns which are conventionalized (i.e., overtly recognized and deliberately shaped in certain ways) and given the names of kindred. As soon as a Tamil child can understand words, it is taught, together with the names of body parts, the appropriate terms for its kin.[51] It is also taught in a multitude of crude and subtle ways how to feel toward those kin. (The terms a small child is taught to apply to people are chosen to suit the emotions the child is taught to feel toward these people. The child learns genealogy much later.) How, then, can childrearing practices fail to have a strong effect upon the deployment of kinship strategies among adults? For it is just in childhood that the material for strategies, what we are accustomed to call "culture" and what Bourdieu renames "habitus," enters the body.

In sum, this chapter makes two arguments. First, the continuity of a kinship strategy such as cross-cousin marriage may be attributed to a dynamic of unresolved tensions and unfulfilled desires as much as to the fulfillment of some function or the resolution of some conflict. Second, we can see kinship strategies as played out from the emotional habitus acquired in early childhood within the domestic family. The tensions and desires about which I shall speak all have their origins in the household and in childhood.

The approach may be regarded as a feminist approach because it stresses the importance of the particular, the private, the affective, and the domestic, and because it considers the relations between males and females, and children's experience of these relations, to be largely constitutive of the social order. We have seen that the Dravidian kinship system is generally treated by cultural theorists as a cognitive structure, and by social theorists as a political one. At issue, on the one hand, are conceptual relations among categories, and on the other, relations of wealth and power among adult men. When the same system is considered in terms of its emotional consequences, and in terms of its effect upon the lives of women and children, then we may see what should be obvious in any case, that marriage patterns strongly interact with childrearing patterns, and that these patterns just as strongly influence, and are influenced by, the affective and political bonds that join the two sexes in battle or in love.

Tensions between groups

1. Matrilateral—tension between matriline and patriline as interest groups.
2. Patrilateral—tension between males and females as interest groups.

Tensions between individuals

1. Father's desire for continuity versus son's desire for independence.
2. Daughter's desire for continuity versus mother's desire for independence.
3. Love between opposite-sex siblings versus compulsory bond uniting spouses.
4. Informal adoption negating the boundary between kin and affine versus formal marriage reasserting this boundary.

Figure 10. List of cross-cutting desires in a Tamil household.

TENSIONS AND HARMONIES

The Exchange of Children Is as Important as Marital Exchange

People are shared among families, and the sharing renewed, through marriage. When people are shared, they share their physical lives—they see each other constantly, they work together, they listen to each other's talk, they share food, they touch often, they make love. But the physical sharing is important mainly because of the feelings that go with it, especially love, whose growth such physical sharing engenders. Marriage is a ritualized, public, and formal sharing of persons and the materials of life among families, in which men of the kinship group are expected to make the final decisions regarding who is to marry whom, what materials will be exchanged, when, where, and in what manner the wedding will take place. There is another kind of sharing of persons, private and informal, which is yet perhaps just as important as marriage, and perhaps more so, in establishing bonds of love. This is the sharing of children among women.

That the sharing of children among women is an ancient custom in Tamil Nadu is indicated by the presence in Tamil Sangam love poetry of the figure called *cevili tāy*, the foster mother of the heroine. In this body of poetry, only seven characters normally speak, so it is safe to say that even two millennia ago, when this poetry was written, at least the ideal of foster motherhood was of great cultural significance. The foster mother is represented as having as much affection for the young heroine as the girl's own mother, who also speaks from time to time in these poems. Modern

pundits state emphatically that the foster mother was not a hired wet nurse. Also important is the *tōṛi*, the girlfriend of the heroine, not her sister, but so close to her that sometimes they seem to be the same character, speaking in the same voice. Modern pundits consider the tōṛi to be the daughter of the foster mother.

In modern Tamil Nadu, it is common for a woman to take into her house the child or children of one of her kinswomen and raise them as her own for a time. There are no rules regarding how, or why, or for how long, or with whom, this should be done. Sometimes the children are orphaned or sometimes the adopting woman is childless, but this is by no means always or even usually the case. Economic considerations are not cited by adopting women as reasons for adoption. Inheritance rules do not change by dint of informal adoption, and the child's own mother is not necessarily any poorer or richer than the adopting one (the children of poor relatives are sometimes taken into the house as servants, but this is a different matter).

Why, then, do modern women adopt each other's children? Altruistic considerations seem to be foremost. A Paraiyar woman with seven children of her own adopts the four children of a distant kinswoman who has been killed by her (the kinswoman's) husband. The children are too young to work and add to the family income. The adopting woman takes them in at the risk of her own life, and becomes ill, possessed by the spirit of the children's dead mother, when the father forcibly takes them back. The wife of a rickshaw driver who has borne seven children and lost them all in infancy adopts a girl baby found abandoned in a temple. She shares the little girl with two of her husband's sisters, the child spending several months a year in each woman's home. The wife of a college professor takes into her home the children of her brother and daughter, so that the children can attend better schools. A Brahman widow and her young daughter live in the home of the widow's married sister. Also in this home live the children of the deceased daughter of the adopting woman. And in our family, the widowed Attai adopts two of the daughters of her brother and the orphaned daughter of her sister, because her own son is grown and she wants children in the house. The three girls had been adopted by other aunts prior to their adoption by this one. All of the adopting women I have mentoned here belong to castes that reckon descent patrilineally and are virilocal. Most interestingly, in many cases, the adopting woman is the child's *attai*, father's sister, so that a girl may be raised as a daughter by the woman who later becomes her mother-in-law.

Thus many children in Tamil Nadu grow up with more than one "mother" and experience more than one household as home. The transitions can be jolting. Children may cry pitifully when their own mothers leave them behind. But they may also develop a deep fondness for their foster caretakers, which they carry with them into adulthood. For female children, the system of child-sharing combined with the system of cross-cousin marriage has as its most obvious consequence the likelihood that a girl will not experience such a radical break in the continuity of her life at the time of her marriage as will her North Indian counterpart. Instead, there will perhaps be a series of small breaks occurring earlier in life, which may nevertheless be strongly felt by children less than seven or eight years of age. In a Tamil family, as I have observed above, the first words a child is taught are kin terms, together with names of body parts. It is important to get them right, to know from the start who is in what relation to oneself. Oscillation between households might contribute to the sense of contextuality inherent in kinship relations. A child felt as a sibling early in life might later be known as a spouse, or potential spouse.[52] Under good conditions, membership in several households, including the households of affines, might make a child feel more at ease in the world. But for many small children, there is manifest anxiety associated with the boundary between kin and affine, a boundary that often coincides with the boundary between households. Such psychological boundaries may have to be crossed more than once as part of the general process of growing up.

Four Important Bonds

The bond between generations, the bond between siblings, and the bond between spouses, are likely to come in conflict with each other in any kin-based society. At certain times in his or her life, these different kinds of bonds are likely to pull an individual in different directions. As one bond grows closer, another may stretch and break, and someone may be left out in the cold. The trick is to have as many bonds as possible and keep them all in harmony with each other, not let any of them break. In Tamil society, for those who do not value conflict, the absence of any bonds at all is one ideal. Positive bonds on all sides is another.

Within the nuclear family, four relationships seemed to be especially important to the Tamil people whom I knew. These were the mother–daughter, father–son, husband–wife, and brother–sister relationships. When I say that these relationships were important, I mean that individuals often expressed feelings of strong love for their opposite member in any of these pairs, and that they also often expressed strong anxiety about the actual or potential breaking of their bond with this person. Conversely, the same bond might be perceived as a powerful shackle and its

rupture longed for. In Tamil, the term *pācam* denotes both affection and forcible confinement, as of an animal for sacrifice. Among kin so bonded, longings for freedom and longings for continuity cross-cut each other. In all four of the relations considered here, there were good reasons for both kinds of longing. In all four cases, both the love and the fear, the attractions and the repulsions, invested in the bond received stereotyped cultural expression. Here I will describe some of the feelings associated with each of these bonds in turn, then I will go on to suggest how the institution of cross-cousin marriage, with the particular meanings that South Indians ascribe to it, builds upon the tensions among these bonds, the anxieties and the unfulfilled or dashed desires that each of them gives rise to. The tensions and anxieties, it will be seen, spring from problems that are by no means confined to South India. The pattern of their harnessing, however, is perhaps uniquely South Indian, inasmuch as it is linked to South Indian kinship organizations. I do not mean to suggest that the emotional tensions sustaining these four bonds constitute *the* foundation of cross-cousin marriage in South India, only that they together form one reason for the continuance of the kinship process, one set of forces propelling the cycles through which it moves.

A Man Sees His Son as a Continuation of Himself
(The father longs for continuity, but the son longs for independence.)

The purpose of getting married, according to village men with whom I spoke, was to have offspring, heirs (*vāricu*). These were people who would carry on the lineage, take care of one in one's old age, work the land that one passed on to them, and see that one was properly buried and remembered in yearly rites after one died. Daughters, however much one cared for them, could not contribute to one's continuity in this way. "They stay with you for ten years and then they're gone," said a number of fathers. Ironically, the consensus among both male and female parents was that daughters were more loving than sons, if there was any difference at all among them along this dimension. Daughters would welcome their father into the house. They would ask, "Have you eaten?" Sons would just say, "Oh, it's you."

But sons, and the love of sons, were crucial, because sons were proprietors of the two substances in which the selfhood of a village man was most invested—his land and his seed. It would be difficult to overestimate the emotional significance of owned land to men who worked it and whose fathers had worked it. From this land came their food and in it their bodies and their ancestors' bodies might be buried.[53] There could be no greater symbol of the substantiality and continuity of one's own body than the paddy field with its precise but easily broken boundaries and the precious supply of water running through it, easily stolen, easily lost. To sell one's land was not only to lose one's livelihood, but to lose the foundation of family pride for generations past and future.

As for seed, that is to say, human seed, semen, cultural constraints prevented me from interviewing men whom I didn't know very well on this topic. Fortunately, male anthropologists have done this job for me, and there is also no dearth of textual references to this topic.[54] Though ideas vary, there seems to be almost universal agreement among Indian men that semen not only makes babies but also is or contains a fluid more vital than any other substance in the body, so that to "lose" an excessive quantity of semen is a life-threatening event. Semen as a substance is very closely associated with the idea of the soul that survives after death (*uyir, ānmā, jīvan*) and in many contexts is identified with it. Though it is often said that females too possess semen, the identity and activity of this female seed is mysterious. It is sometimes said to be menstrual blood, which is a substance of a very different nature from male semen. In general, when people talk about semen (*vittu, intiriyam, jīva sakti*), they are talking specifically about the male ejaculate. The people who express concern or anxiety over what happens to their semen are males.[55] Thus sons receive and carry on the seed and soul-stuff of their fathers in a way that daughters cannot.

Beyond the land and beyond the seed, the spiritual fate of the father is in the hands of the son. In lower caste priestly and shamanic families (Ampalakkarars, Paraiyars, Velars) around Madurai, the family deity is passed on through possession or dreams or the choice of the father to the most worthy or eldest son or grandson. In some households, the family deity is all but forgotten, but in others, this deity is a vital presence with whom the head of the family strongly identifies and whose will is sought whenever there is a family crisis. When it comes in dreams, it might come in the form of the deceased father or grandfather.[56]

The son not only continues the father's spirit, he has the capacity to be both its liberator and its protector. It is interesting in this regard that the most popular male gods in Tamil Nadu—Kannan, Murugan, Ayyappan, Pillaiyar—are all children, sons, the majority of whose worshippers are men. A main function of these deities is the removal and forgiveness of sin and similar burdens. Hair, that fertile pollutant, is offered to Murugan. Some men grow beards and heads of long hair to shave off and offer to him. Then, some say, it is as though all the unhappiness they have experienced during the time the hair was growing is lifted from them. On

Plate 19. Annan and Jnana Oli supervise transplanting.

pilgrimages to the mountain temples of Murugan, devotees may carry large decorated structures called *kāvaḍis* attached to their bodies with fish hooks. The structure is intended to make the devotee similar to Murugan's vehicle, the peacock. The devotee removes this heavy burden and offers it to Murugan when he reaches the mountaintop shrine. Similarly, there is an annual, men-only pilgrimage to the mountaintop shrine of the boy-god Ayyappan. The devotees must endure much hardship before reaching their goal. They are said to be following in the footsteps of an evil elder man who tried to take the young god's life and subsequently repented. As they travel up the mountain, the devotees chant "*Caraṇam caraṇam Ayyappā* [Refuge, refuge, Ayyappa]." A song incorporating this chant is expremely popular in modern Tamil Nadu.[57]

Pillaiyar, too, may be a forgiver or remover of sin. Pillaiyar is the elephant-headed god. His name means "son" or "child." For reasons I do not know, worshippers commonly greet Pillaiyar by means of a conventionalized gesture of apology—they cross their arms, tug their ears, and slightly bend their knees up and down several times. Pillaiyar will forgive them for whatever wrong they have done. He will also remove the obstacles to their happiness, whatever these may be. Whenever an enterprise is begun, Pillaiyar must be worshipped first.

One of the most important deities in the village near Madurai where I worked was called Vinai Tīrkkum Vināyakar ("Vināyakar who ends karma"; Vināyakar is another name of Pillaiyar). He was supposed to have lifted a curse from the village which was causing all the children there to die. The man who told me this god's story, and who was a great devotee of Vinai Tīrkkum Vināyakar, was one whose only son had killed himself because the father had not consented to let him marry the woman that he loved. This father also confessed to all that he had beaten his wife during her pregnancy with this son and so considered himself to be the cause of her subsequent deafness. I believe that the father was seeking his son's and wife's forgiveness, and removal of the burden of his sorrow, through his worship of Pillaiyar. This would be an apt penance, for Pillaiyar himself in the story of his origin was murdered by his father.

Pillaiyar is the prime example of an Indian mythic type that A. K. Ramanujan calls the Indian Oedipus.[58] In Indian Oedipus stories, rather than the son murdering the father, the father murders the son—and then repents. In the origin story of Pillaiyar, Siva's wife Parvati decides she wants a child of her very own, who will be answerable only to her. She creates Pillaiyar out of her own bodily substance. The little boy then does as she says and prevents Siva from interrupting her during her bath. In another version of this myth, he sleeps with her. Siva jealously beheads him. Parvati is so enraged that she threatens to destroy the whole universe. Contrite and terrified, Siva seeks a new head for his wife's murdered son. All he can find is an elephant, so he takes its head and installs it upon the son's body, so reviving him. The wife and son forgive the father, and all is well again. Pillaiyar is made chief of Siva's armies, but he remains celibate throughout his life. One of his tusks is broken off. Some interpreters say this broken tusk represents the sacrifice Pillaiyar made to his father.

Was the old man in the village who worshipped the sin-removing Pillaiyar hoping both for forgiveness and for some kind of restoration of the son whose marriage he obstructed and whose death he caused? I can say only that the story of Vinai Tīrkkum Vināyakar together with the story

of his son's death and his wife's deafness were the three he chose to convey to me, in a single narrative, as the key events in his life.

Another man told me the story of his own near-death experience with the god Ayyappan. His father had been forced to sell his land during a famine and had meagerly supported the family laboring for the same landlord to whom he had sold out. This father, who the son said had been more loving towards his sons than their own mother was, had died suddenly of snakebite. The eldest son, the narrator of the story, was left with several very small younger brothers to take care of. He felt that he could not afford to marry and have children of his own until he had raised all of these brothers.

After some time, he became ill with a stomach disease. Over the months it became worse. After unsuccessful attempts at treatment by village herbalists and local doctors, his caste elders ordered him to go to the government hospital in Madurai for treatment. He put his faith in one of his younger brothers, who had studied through the fifth standard, "to do the correct things" at the hospital. This younger brother had him admitted, and the doctors there ordered that he be operated on immediately. He was certain that he was going to die and worried what would happen to his body. But he told his younger brothers not to take his corpse back to the village but to have it buried somewhere near the hospital, for too much money had already been spent on him, he felt. "Then," he said, "not wanting to go out for nothing, I called upon Ayyappan, to put my sins upon him." To his great surprise, however, he woke up and recovered from the operation. He credited Ayyappan with saving his life.

As this man told his story, all the events of his life seemed to center around threats to the continuity of the patriline: the forced sale of the family lands, the sudden, devastating loss of his father, his anxiety lest he be unable to marry and have sons of his own, his concern for and dependence on his younger brothers, his belief that his body would not be returned to the ancestral land, and finally, his sense that the burden of single-handedly taking on the responsibility of the family before he himself was fully grown was more than he could bear. I feel, though I cannot prove, that his turning to Ayyappan in the hour of his expected death, asking Ayyappan to shoulder his burden, symbolized his hope that the patriline not be dropped.

People in Tamil Nadu take gods very personally. That is why they worship them. In the cases described above, the feelings of fathers about sons are opened up to us. Sons can free the souls of their fathers, by forgiving them, or by taking away the burden of their sins (here is another example of karma being passed on from ancestors to descendants). But

the son has to exist, to have been born and not to have died, in order to take on the burden. Moreover, it is a matter of the son's own choice, whether to accept the burden or not.

Men have good reason to be anxious, first, lest they have no sons, and second, lest their sons abandon them, unshoulder the burden of their land, their lineage, their sins. The land, at least, is likely to be broken up, the integrity of it lost, if a man has more than one son. Hence the continuity of the father is in double jeopardy. For fathers always want their sons to remain together, to keep the land undivided, but sons, more often than not, end up dividing it. Quarrels between sons are harmful to the family spirit. This fact was very graphically illustrated in the village one day when Naccan, a young Ampalakkarar priest, angrily shattered the clay image of his family deity, because after the death of his father he had not received as large a share of land as he had expected. Right after this, he separated from his brothers, establishing a separate household. In shattering the deity he shattered the memory of his father, completing, in this act, the destruction of the patrimony.

A Woman Sees Herself as a Continuation of Her Mother
(The daughter longs for continuity, but the mother longs for independence.)

Parallel to the father–son bond is the mother–daughter bond. This bond, too, is felt to be both vital and vulnerable to breakage, but whereas in the relation between father and son it is the father who most fears loss of continuity, in the relation between mother and daughter it is the daughter who fears this loss.

In Tamil poetic discourse, both oral and literary, a common image for a young woman is the vine (*koḍi*). It is said that her body is as slender and graceful as a flowered vine. But the vine also is an image of continuity between generations, especially generations of women, recalling as it does the umbilical cord, and the processes of flowering and fruiting, important metaphors in Tamil culture for female sexual maturation (which is called "blossoming," *pūttal*) and birth-giving. So a female agricultural laborer sings in a lament to her lost mother, "We blossomed on your vine," and the phrase, "O mother who bore me" is a constant refrain in these laments, which were the most commonly sung songs among lower caste women in the two widely separated villages where I heard and recorded folksongs.[59]

Marriage, when the daughter leaves the household of her mother, is a cutting of the vine. Hence the famous opening words of the song of Nallatankāl, "*Enraikki kalvānam eṅkal ilankodikki* [When will be the

Plate 20. A boy ploughing.

wedding of our tender vine?]"—recited to me by Anni—are powerfully ominous. Her wedding coincides with the death of her parents. When she is told she must leave for her husband's house, she angrily tears off her ornaments. Consequent upon her wedding, she starves with her children and is refused reentry into her mother's home. When her oldest son tries to prevent her from killing herself and her children, she answers him, "They will laugh at us motherless children."[60] To have one's ornaments torn away, to be cut off from sources of nurturance, to be excluded from

Plate 21. Women transplanting rice seedlings.

mother. In some versions of the Nallataṅkāḷ story, she is literally dismembered. To be cut off from the mother is equivalent to being oneself cut to pieces. Many women in Tamil Nadu identify with Nallataṅkāḷ. All know her story.

A girl finds her place of origin in the loins of her mother, which may be described as a garden, and she identifies her own womb and genitals with this place. So in one lament, the singer complains to her brother, "Have you forgotten my pomegranate garden, the place of your birth?" The two great landmarks in the sexual growth of a girl, her first menstruation and her first parturition (and often subsequent parturitions also) take place in the house of the mother (*tāy vīḍu*). It is important to note that a girl's natal home is always called her "mother's home," even though in actual fact the house usually belongs to the father. Similarly, the place of origin of both males and females is the *yōni* of the mother (this contrasts with the Greek formulaic metaphor of a person "springing from [a man's or god's] loins"). For Tamils, the belly of the mother (*tāyinuḍaiya vayiṟu*) is the place from which one came, and the place to which one goes for comfort is her lap (*maḍi*, "fold"). A grown woman with children of her own may lie with her head in her mother's lap with no sense of shame. Adults do not lie with their heads in their fathers' laps in this way.

A child can become separated from the mother through the death of the mother, or, if the child is a girl, through the child's marriage. In some

Plate 22. Padmini and Anuradha decorate the altar of the goddess Lakshmi for the Varalakshmi ceremony.

treated as equivalent severances. Then "seeking mother" (*ammāvai tēḍi*) becomes a natural activity, no matter what degree of maturity the child has supposedly reached, no matter how distant the world where the mother dwells. In laments, the dead mother is "hiding" or "gone to a foreign land," and the daughters are left seeking (compare this to the Greek myth of Demeter, where the mother seeks the daughter).

The term *ammāvai tēḍi* is a formula, a cliché, in Tamil Nadu. In the mid-seventies a magazine story with that title appeared. There it was written that all human souls on departure from their bodies seek their mother, and all good souls find her, appearing to them in whatever form she took on earth. The boy-god Murugan is a helper in this story, settling in the lap of his own mother, the great goddess, and appealing to her on behalf of all the mother-seeking souls. Males as well as females seek the mother after death.

In life it is the girl who is most likely to be separated from her mother, especially while still a child, because marriage is normally virilocal, and girls are younger than boys when they marry. Not only when she is still a child, but when she is a mother, or even a grandmother herself, a woman may still make visits to her natal home, "seeking her mother." Thus it happened that one young woman, married to her mother's bro-

their paths had crossed on the way. The mother had gone to the daughter's house to see *her* mother (the daughter's mother-in-law). The young woman said with a smile, "I came seeking my mother and she's gone seeking her mother." This young woman was more fortunate than many, in that her mother-in-law was her own mother's mother. This family, though it was patrilineal, also sheltered a strong and active matriline; all the daughters continued throughout their lives to seek the advice and comfort of their mothers in times of crisis.

Patrilocal marriage contributes to the continuity of the patriline, but it causes a break in the continuity of the matriline, and this break is felt especially keenly by the daughter who is cut off (albeit only partially and temporarily) not only from the mother but from the entire natal home and family. The mother stays in the place she was, and she may have other children to console her, but the daughter has no other mothers. So a daughter may feel herself to be shattered by her marriage. Conversely, a return to the mother's home may be felt by the daughter as a reuniting of herself, with herself. Surely, the break in continuity with the mother is one meaning of the several major myths about females shattered or dismembered as a consequence of marriage of the allied action of males (Māriamman beheaded, Kaṇṇaki and Mīnākshi debreasted, Nallataṅkāḷ and Siṅkammāḷ cut up into parts). In the village near Madurai where I worked, the clay image of the goddess Mantaiyammāḷ is broken to pieces on her festival day, which is also her wedding day. A similar idea may lie behind the representation of many village goddesses, for example, the "seven sisters," as physically plural, though one in spirit, and sometimes also in name. Kanniyammaḷ in Themozhiyar's village is such a goddess. In her shrine are seven small identical stones, which are her. On the other hand, her festival day celebrates not her wedding but her return to the house of her mother. And her myth tells not of her shattering, but of the merger of the sisters into one figure who is their own mother. The mother saves the world by destroying a demon who wants to marry her. And the sisters defeat their husbands by proving, in this united action, that the female force in the universe is superior to the male. Thus in this myth, continuity among females triumphs over the hetero-erotic forces threatening it. Usually, though, it is the other way round.

I have suggested here that daughters are more anxious about the break in mother–daughter continuity than are mothers. This is because the daughter has more to lose. Whereas a father seeks his own continuance through his sons, a mother does not, I would argue, seek such continuance through her daughters, at least not to such an extent. The reasons are several. In the first place, a mother does not ordinarily pass land on to her

Plate 23. The village priest anoints the lion of the goddess Kanniyamma.

place, though a woman may achieve spiritual immortality, she is not dependent upon the existence of daughters, or any offspring of her own, in order to reach this state. Patrilineal households may have female house deities. These are, minimally, those who have died unwidowed, "still with flowers" (*puvōḍakkāri*); even if they die unmarried, they will be honored among this collectivity of saints. When they die, they become again like children, I was told. Children's garments are offered to them to wear, for they are again as free and as pure as children. Living women in laments express envy for the dead mother's freedom—but one does not have to have been a mother in order to become free. Women who have died in childbirth, women who have died heroically, satis, all of these may be specially honored and deified. The great South Indian goddess Kaṇṇaki was a woman who died childless, in agony after her husband's murder. Similarly the Madurai woman Siṅkammāḷ, murdered by her brothers, and likewise the Coimbatore woman Taṅkāḷ, who dies in suicide with her brothers, both become goddesses after their death and live forever in heaven as well as in the hearts of their many worshippers.

Daughters are not needed for the immortality conferred by martyrdom.

Men desire offspring for the purpose of future continuance. Women desire offspring more for the rewards of the present. If a couple has no offspring, or only female offspring, the woman will be blamed by her neighbors. If a couple has many children, especially many sons, the status of the woman will be enhanced. Sons will be expected to support both parents in their old age. If a couple have only daughters, they are more likely to spend their old age alone.

Large numbers of children bring status and increase the chances of future well-being, but the bearing and raising of them is a hardship for women. Thus women are much more likely to want to limit the size of their families than are men. Voluntary tubal ligations are much more common in Tamil Nadu than voluntary vasectomies. Women may fight with their husbands over their right to be sterilized. But a woman will rarely allow herself to be sterilized unless she has had at least one son. And if a woman must choose which child to feed, she will feed her son and let her daughter go hungry; hence, even in Tamil Nadu, more boys live to adulthood than girls.[61]

We may tentatively conclude that mothers do not value daughters as highly as daughters value mothers, or as highly as fathers *and* mothers value sons. However daughters value mothers very highly. Hence, while men (and some women) worship young, childless male deities and seek refuge in them, women (and some men) are more likely to worship the goddess as mother and seek refuge in her in that form. More than anything else, the mother is a protector. So the refrain of a popular song to Māriamman pleads, "Except for you, there exists no one to protect me, Māri-mother [*unnai vīḍa yārum illai ennai kākka Māriattai*]." Women gather and sing this song.[62]

It is clear that Tamils perceive each of these two vertical bonds, mother–daughter and father–son, as problematic. On one end of each bond, there is an intense desire for continuity. The other end of each is lukewarm, and there are strong forces threatening continuity on both sides. The maintenance of either bond is possible within a South Indian family; to keep it strong is something one might realistically long for; one will have observed that it remains strong in some other families. But unbroken continuity of *both* lines simultaneously, a matriline and a patriline within the same household, cannot be easily maintained. In the most prevalent form of marriage, marriage of a man with his mother's brother's daughter, maintenance of continuity within both lines is essentially impossible.

The mother–daughter bond and the father–son bond may be imagined as two parallel threads, woven across by two other threads perpendicular to the first two but parallel to each other: the brother–sister bond and the husband–wife bond. These two bonds also pull against each other. Here we will consider first the nature of the brother–sister bond.

The Bond Between Brother and Sister is Strong but Must Be Denied

Childhood erotic adventures between siblings probably occur among people everywhere. The feelings associated with these adventures get variously transformed, rechanneled, or repressed by different cultures in different ways. For instance, in the United States and Europe, the so-called latency period, during which girls hate boys and boys hate girls, discourages contact between opposite sex children, though secret erotic exploration during this period also is not entirely eliminated. Separation of siblings from each other and exposure to many unrelated children in school contexts is another of many Western customs which discourage sexual contact among siblings, without incest taboos ever having to be explicitly taught. In other societies, children may be taught about incest prohibitions and shamed out of incestuous contacts at an early age, and/or girls may be married in early puberty and physically separated from their brothers, so that sibling puppy love never has a chance to blossom into full-fledged adult eroticism. Whatever the shape of its repression, however, the fact is that for many human beings, the first erotic partnership is formed with a sibling.

This is not to say that the first erotic *feelings* are directed toward a sibling. In all cases where the mother is the primary caretaker, the mother can only be the first object of a child's desire, and even among scholars who reject much of Freudian theory, there remains little doubt that infant sexuality is a reality. One has only to watch any baby nursing to be aware of the intensity of feeling involved in this act. Erotic feelings on the part of mothers while nursing are described with horrified fascination in Indian folktales while they are discussed as "natural" in American parenting magazines.[63] Evidence continues to mount that repressed erotic love for the mother occurs in many places throughout the world, including in particular South Asia, even if such repressed love is not "universal" in some absolute sense.[64]

In searching for psychoanalytic understandings of South Asian familial eroticism, I have found Karen Horney's reformulation of Freud to be more useful than Freud himself.[65] Horney agrees with Freud's idea that the mother is the first object of erotic desire for both male and female children; she departs from Freud by suggesting that it is not necessary for a female to repudiate her identification with the mother and her desire for her in order to attain normal psychosexual development. Horney goes on to suggest that womb envy on the part of men may be the source of the myth that females are castrated and envy the physical penis. Lacan's reworking of Freud will also be useful to us here, especially his emphasis upon the feelings of longing and incompleteness of the subject/self that ensue upon the wedding of the subject to the System.

In India, erotic feelings for the mother on the part of both males and females are perhaps stronger than they are elsewhere. The reasons why this might be so are a matter of debate,[66] but the manifestations of these feelings in Indian superstructure and behavior are too massive to ignore.[67]

In Tamil culture, love for the mother is strongly encouraged. Erotic love for the mother is, of course, strongly repressed. However, an interesting bit of Tamil ideology (perhaps borrowed from the Victorian British?) claims that children before puberty have no sexual feelings. Hence close physical relations with the mother are allowed up until that time. Many adults, especially men, remember having been nursed for years, even to the age of five or beyond.

What does all this mean for sibling relations? If desire to possess the mother is especially strong in India, we might expect sibling rivalry to be especially intense. But there is no evidence that this is the case. Indian children are often reported by Western observers to be more cooperative among themselves than their Western counterparts.[68] Part of the reason may be that children's rivalry for the mother abates when they discover each other as potential, secret sexual partners.

In the case of older brother and younger sister, such a discovery and transferrence would be especially likely to occur. For the boy, a younger sister, being female offspring to his mother, could be seen as a duplicate of the mother, only, being smaller, she would be less threatening, more accessible, and more amenable to control by him. For the girl, an elder brother, being a protector, could also be seen as a form of the mother, only, being male and other, he would possess added fascination.

In support of these latter transferences, Tamil mythology creates a stunning isomorphism between the brother–sister relation, the sister–brother relation, the mother–child relation, and the husband–wife relation. There are many local shrines containing one large rock and seven small rocks. In different shrines these are interpreted variously as (1) a

mother (Nallataṅkāḷ) and her children, (2) a brother and his younger sisters (Pattiniyamman), (3) a sister and her older brothers (Siṅkammāḷ in Mēlur near Madurai; the siblings in the Auvaiyār story told below), (4) a husband and his wives, and (5) a wife (Tirōpati) and her husbands.[69]

I am suggesting here that intense erotic love for the mother might under some circumstances be converted to intense attachment between brother and sister. A belief in the reality of the blood bond, in the powerful emotional significance of having emerged from the same womb (*cahōtarar*) would contribute to this attachment. Never being fulfilled, the brother and sister's desire for each other will never be spent. It will remain chaste and eternal, but pervaded by pain. Each will feel sacrificed—the one a martyred protector, the other a martyred innocent. In quest of a cultural ideal, through a vision of wholeness embodied in the kinship code, each will seek to recover the other. But only in death, out of time and beyond the code, will they find this recovery possible.

The bond of deep longing joining brother and sister, and the idealization of this bond, are attested in many places throughout Tamil Nadu. In the next chapter, an example from life of this bond of longing will be narrated. Similar examples of a culturally sanctioned powerful emotional tie between brother and sister are reported from North India[70] and Nepal.[71] Certainly it is not a uniquely Tamil invention. The historical taproot of this feeling (for it is deeply rooted) might even be traced to Proto-Indo-European kinship and poetics.[72] But in Tamil Nadu, where dramatic intensity of feeling vivifies all art as well as many household dramas, the tragedy of the brother–sister bond receives a wide range of remarkable expressions.

In a recent essay, Indira Peterson has brought together and analyzed a number of accounts of the diverse formal enactments and representations of brother–sister love in South Asia.[73] Peterson's material includes myths, folktales, proverbs, rites, movies, and novels. This material is drawn from throughout South Asia, but Peterson focuses on Tamil Nadu. A theme Peterson finds running throughout both North and South Indian material is the sister's possession of "magical" or "sacred" protective power over her brother. This balances the protective power that the brother exercises over his sister in the social realm, so that the relationship between brother and sister is overall one of reciprocity. In several myths, the sister's protective power takes the form of clairvoyance: she is able to perceive hidden dangers threatening her brother and so protect him from them. The power of the sister is hidden or covert in a second sense as well, Peterson finds, in that it often gets downplayed, or interpreted out of existence, in villager's exegeses of the stories in which this power is

revealed. This hiding of sisterly power is especially apparent in the North Indian village of Karimpur, where Susan Wadley studied women's songs and rituals.[74] There, a rite in which the sister ties a protective band around her brother's wrist is interpreted by villagers as the sister acting in her own behalf, seeking to obtain her brother's protection of her, rather than acting altruistically to protect him. A *kathā* told in conjunction with this rite is similarly reinterpreted by the villagers. In this story, "at the time of her brother's wedding a sister saves her brother from eating poisoned food, protects him from magical thorns—despite the ridicule of the wedding guests—and ultimately stands guard over her brother and his wife on their wedding night, managing to kill a snake which creeps in to bite the brother."[75] Karimpur villagers telling this story interpret it as a model of the sister "worshipping" the brother and exhort all other sisters to follow her example. For North India, Peterson concludes, "the notion of women as powerful beings is underplayed or suppressed in the ritual as well as in the social realm, perhaps because it is seen as potentially disruptive to the stability of actual social relations between brothers and sisters, not to mention between men and women in general."[76]

By contrast, in South India, the sacred power of sisters over brothers, and indeed of women in general, is more overtly recognized.[77] The institution of cross-cousin marriage has much to do with this recognition, for in South India, as we shall see presently, the marital tie is clearly represented in important ancient and modern stories as a continuation of the sibling tie. Further, in such stories, the woman is portrayed as the center of the family, the main unifying force within it, the point of conjunction between otherwise disjoined human beings.[78] Thus Beck argues that the "kin nucleus" as it appears in South Indian mythology is not a married couple nor a male head-of-household but is a female with her father, brother, husband, and sons.[79] The nucleus of this nucleus appears in the great temple of Mīnākshi in Madurai, in which Mīnākshi, owner of the temple, stands at the center flanked by her husband Siva and her brother Vishnu. Minākshi remains eternally at a point of conjunction, precisely between the two males, because in her story, her wedding is celebrated but kept short of completion every year.[80]

As Peterson observes, the brother–sister bond is "*the central focus of the south Indian kinship system and marriage* and no doubt influences the sister's self-image and the brother's image of the sister at all levels of the psyche."[81]

Peterson discusses three major Tamil myths, a novel, and a movie whose central topic is the brother–sister bond. The first of these is the *Auvaiyār Katai*, a story told in conjunction with a ritual of protection

performed by women for their brothers. This ritual, the *Auvaiyār nōnpu*, is supposed to be performed in secret, with no men present (although men can know *about* it), and men are not supposed to hear the story. Peterson, following Reynolds,[82] reports that only low-caste women perform this nōnpu, but I have found that high-caste women also relish telling the Auvaiyār story, and also like to keep it secret from men.

Auvaiyār was an unmarried woman poet of the Sangam era, celebrated for her didactic verse. In the story, Auvaiyār teaches a younger woman to bring posterity to her seven brothers "by ritually eating substances and objects symbolic of death and evil omen. She helps the brothers get married and herself marries a king. When the brothers are once again struck by poverty because of their wives' negligent behavior, the sister intervenes, teaches the nōnpu to her sisters-in-law, and restores them to their prosperous condition."[83] Here the priority of the brother–sister bond over the husband–wife bond is clear. Also evident is a tension between *nāttanār* and *nāttanār*, sisters-in-law, sister and wife of the same man.

This tension is the focus of the story of *Nallataṅkāḷ*, "Good Little Sister," and here even more clearly the sister's bond with her brother has both moral and spiritual priority over the bond with the wife. In this story, Nallataṅkāḷ and her brother Nallatampi ("Good Little Brother") are raised together and love each other so dearly that they are inseparable. When she comes of age, Nallataṅkāḷ is given in marriage against her will to the king of Kāsi, to whom she bears seven children.

> When a great famine afflicts Kāsi, Nallataṅkāḷ decides to seek her brother's aid; busy with a royal campaign, Nallatampi sends his sister home to his wife Muḷiyalaṅkāri ("Inauspicious Witch"). Muḷi insults Nallataṅkāḷ, starves her children, and throws the woman out with her children. With the help of shepherds, the distraught Nallataṅkāḷ finds an abandoned well; she throws all her children into the well, and herself commits suicide by jumping in after them. When Nallatampi comes looking for his lost sister, he finds the well by means of the *tāli* (wedding necklace) and *paṭṭai* (an ornament given to women by their brothers) which she has left outside the well, and which, having been turned into a rock at Nallataṅkāḷ's command, are visible only to him and the woman's husband. The brother cremates the dead bodies and promises to avenge his sister. Going home he arranges for the wedding of his son. At the wedding he denounces Muḷi as a murderess to his own son, and engineers a horrible death for Muḷi and her relatives. When Nallataṅkāḷ's husband arrives, Nallatampi informs him of all the events, and the two brothers-in-law commit suicide. Siva and Parvati revive the brother, sister, husband and the seven children. Nallataṅkāḷ demands and receives the boon of being enshrined in a temple and tank in Kāsi, while her sister-in-law is turned into a stone, to become the laughing-stock of travellers. The two brothers-in-law, rejoicing, ascend to Siva's heaven, Kailasa.[84]

A third major myth in which the sister–brother bond is the central theme is the long Tamil epic, *Aṉṉanmār Katai*, recorded and analyzed by Brenda Beck.[85] The name of this epic, *The Story of the Older Brothers*, perhaps reflects a recent (North Indian influenced?) attempt to mask the importance of women in Tamil culture, just as the other major Tamil epic, *Cilappatikāram*, whose most powerful figures are all women, is nowadays named *Kōvalan Katai* (*The Story of Kōvalan*), after the heroine's rather weak-willed and ineffectual husband.

Beck gives to *Aṉṉanmār Katai* the English title, *The Three Twins*, because the epic is not only about brothers, but about two brothers and a sister, born together as magical triplets, who accompany each other through many adventures. The sister, Taṅkāḷ, has a clairvoyant connection with her brothers, Ponnar and Caṅkar, so that when they die, she learns of their death in a dream, finds their bodies in the forest, temporarily revives them, and then dies and rises to heaven with them. Taṅkāḷ never marries; Ponnar and Caṅkar do (Taṅkāḷ helpfully cremates their wives when she learns of her brothers' death). Beck shows that the epic in its entirety shows a repetition of certain relations over the generations; in each generation a powerful female aids the heroes; with each succeeding generation this female becomes smaller and more specific: Great Goddess Parvati, regional goddess Cellattā, local goddess Kāli, mother of the heroes Tāmarai, sister of the heroes Taṅkāḷ. Each of these magical females, Beck says, blends into the others above or below her. Perhaps, therefore, we may speak of a kind of mythic matriline as forming the backbone of this epic. However the main point to be stressed here is that *Aṉṉanmār Katai* represents yet another piece of Tamil literature of widespread and enduring power whose main import is the celebration of the brother–sister tie.

When we come down to modern times and modern art forms, we find the same themes expressed, if anything, even more clearly than before. Here the best I can do is quote Peterson's beautiful translation of a passage from a Tamil novel of 1968, Nila Padmanabhan's *Talaimuṟaikaḷ* (*Generations*). I reproduce this passage here just because it gives us a very precise "native exegesis" of the biological-cum-emotional heart of

Tamil kinship. In this passage a brother faces his sister for the first time after determining to rescue her from a life of lonely widowhood imprisoned within her father's house:

> . . . perhaps these two hearts met and communed with each other in that immortal moment when face met face, and eyes embraced eyes.
>
> In those silent moments, no words passed between them. They felt a kind of joy sweep over them, as if, simply through the exchange of glances, each heart had shared with the other all its sorrows, troubles, and hopes for release. It seemed as though the most ingenious edifices of language and phrase, the most intricate dexterities of conversation, handed down through generations, through eons—it seemed as though in the eternal flow [*piravākam*] of that soundless [*anasvara*] moment, all these were blunted, rendered useless, smashed to pieces, when they confronted the steady torrent of that wordless moment. . . .
>
> How wonderful!
>
> Tiravi was overcome with wonder at the powerful experience of deep feeling, an experience that he could not quite take in. "Is it possible that, just because the seeds of our life, our bodily substance, our very blood, and our birth itself, came out of a single source, we are blessed with the transcendent vision of uniting with the other in feeling, of intuiting the very thoughts of the other?"

Each "intuiting the very thoughts of the other," the brother and sister find that their oneness of body (*uḍampu*) is transformed into a oneness of spirit (*uyir*); as in *Aṇṇanmār Katai*, those born together willfully die, shed their bodies, and mount to heaven as spirits together. For all the words that are given to its expression, this oneness of brother and sister is "soundless," it "smashes words." The oneness itself "handed down through the generations" makes all the weight, the tradition of these generations, invalid. The longing of brother and sister to reunite with each other can only happen when they step out of the terminology, the eternal tradition, the symbolic world created by their ancestors, which holds them apart even as it is built on the love which binds them. Peterson comments,

> In the affective vision of the brother–sister relationship in the south as well as in the north it is the enduring love between two human beings born out of the same source and the same soil that is ultimately stressed, the Tamil case being different chiefly in this respect, that here there is a tremendous consciousness of the sister as a sacred being, and of the brother and sister as the primordial, nuclear pair.[86]

Peterson does not mention at this point the other great difference between South and North India which affects the brother–sister bond, namely, that in the south, brother and sister may marry their children to each other. But she concludes her paper with a cinema song from the 1960s, which shows more clearly than any other piece of "data" one might produce, how in the Tamil ideal, siblings live in their children, and in uniting their children, unite their own lives again.

The film, *Pācamalar* (Flower of Affection) is about a brother and sister separated against their wills. The song is a lullaby, sung simultaneously by the brother to his baby son and by the sister to her baby daughter. They sing about marrying the babies to each other. Two important technical details should be mentioned here: first, the song encourages a reversal of the norms of kanyādāna and dowry-marriage, by suggesting that the boy will offer wealth in exchange for the girl's hand in marriage. Second, the kind of marriage the protagonists here sing about is "within the rules" (the babies are cross-cousins), but it is not the "normative" kind of cross-cousin marriage. Most commonly, mother's brother's daughter marriage is "preferred." MBD is the kind of marriage which, when it becomes patterned and institutionalized, fosters nonreciprocal relations among lines of kindred and "integrates" larger numbers of people. This is also the kind of marriage which is in line with the principle of kanyādāna. But the other kind of cross-cousin marriage, the kind sung about here, may be in some ways more satisfying, in that it approximates more closely the ideal set up by the terminology, it allows for true reciprocity between siblings over the generations, and it transforms the sibling bond into the spousal bond without crossing sexes: the sister returns through her daughter, the brother through his son. Perhaps for this very reason, patrilateral marriage is discouraged.

The song is called "*Malarntum malarāta malar*" (Flower Both Blossomed and Unblossomed or Half-blossomed Flower). The title I think refers both to the nature of the baby and to the nature of brother–sister love. Peterson translates the song thus:

> O child slumbering like a half-blown flower,
> O wild goose who blossoms
> like the dawn turning into day!

Soft breeze rippling through the river,
caressing the vine!
O Tamil poetry, born on Potikai hill,
reared in Maturai city!

Brother: You were born to win many battles
with your elephants and armies
you were born to marry your aunt's [*attai*] daughter
and live in joyful love!

Sister: He'll give you a gold watch and diamond necklace,
he'll ask for your hand—
your uncle [*māman*] will give much wealth,
he'll offer the whole world,
in exchange for the sister's [*taṅkai*] daughter's hand
in marriage for his son!

Sister: Shall I tell you of how my brother brought me up
like a darling daughter,
sheltered me under his wing?
Shall I tell you of the unimaginable misfortune
which separated us?

Together: We were born together, joined like the eye and
the pupil,
like the pupil and the image within!
Though the earth and sea and sky should come to
an end,
we shall not forget our love,
nothing can break our bond!

In later chapters we shall see how such thoughts enter into the lives of ordinary people.

The Bond Between Husband and Wife is Conflictful but Difficult to Sever

Whatever the sources of its strength, the sibling bond is primordial. It comes before any bond with an outsider. In some matrilineal societies, including some South Indian ones, the brother–sister bond retains priority throughout life. A man's home is his mother's and sister's home. Brothers and sisters cooperate. Husbands come and go. Hence in a traditional Nayar household a woman had many quasi-husbands and one "real" husband whom she met only once in her life. All of the husbands were peripheral figures. Only her relations with her brothers were of genuine significance.

In many patrilineal societies, on the other hand, even though the brother–sister bond has temporal and emotional priority, it is expected to give way to the husband–wife bond. To the suppression of erotic ties (if they exist) is added the severance of economic ones. A woman after marriage leaves the household of her mother and her brother and joins the household of her husband. If she is dependent upon the labor or landholdings of a man to support her, her husband or his kin must provide it. Hence in parts of North India, a woman after marriage is considered to be literally no longer of the same blood as her natal kin. In central Uttar Pradesh a rule of village exogamy combined with a rule prohibiting marriage with any close kinsman make for a relatively clean break between a girl and her natal family at marriage and help ensure that her loyalties and dependencies after marriage will be on her husband's side. This is not to say that in North India a married woman does not desire to return to her natal home, or does not have chances, even frequent chances, to do so. But marital conventions are so arranged that a woman's natal ties are clearly secondary to her marital ones, and a woman's husband is clearly dominant over her.

In most of Tamil Nadu, however, the brother–sister tie is neither clearly severed at marriage, nor is its emotional priority over other ties translated into social priority. The blood bond remains, and is affectively the strongest bond, but the marital bond is supposed to take precedence over it in cases where the two bonds conflict.

Meanwhile, the nature of the bond between spouses is vague, neither clearly hierarchical nor clearly egalitarian. On the one hand, the ideal of chastity and devotion to the spouse is entirely a female ideal, entailing a wife's subordination to her husband. On the other hand, it is not unusual to find men espousing a "feminist" point of view on this matter. So for example, one old man, advising a young man on his imminent marriage, told him, "Think that a goddess is entering your home." On the level of ideology, either the male or the female may be regarded as superior, depending upon who is talking, and under what circumstances. In practice, an egalitarian household policy appears to be common. When I asked villagers who made the important decisions in their households, more than half of both males and females said that husband and wife made them together.

In part because (and to the extent that) many of them are wage earners, wives in Tamil Nadu often will not accept a subordinate role with respect to their husbands. As wage earners, women laborers with whom I spoke regarded it as unfair that they received smaller daily wages than their

husbands. They were quite vehement on this issue. They considered the work they did to be equal in value to the work of men.

Within the household, as well as in the domain of paid labor, there was a strong spirit of rivalry between many women and their husbands. Wives would not automatically accept submission. Neither would their husbands. Neither was it easy for wives and husbands to keep out of each other's way, sharing a household as they did. Consequently their relationship was often, from what I was able to observe, disputatious. Nevertheless, at all levels of society, lifelong monogamy and fidelity to the spouse were the ideal, though some honored this rule in the breach more than did others. Even among members of untouchable castes, who are often reported to be more lax than higher castes as regards marriage rules, divorce was not easy. When I asked one young Paraiyar woman whose husband had deserted her and her children why she did not divorce him and remarry, she replied, "It would bring down the caste." Others of her community concurred.

Neither could a man easily break the tie with his wife. In a single village, I heard of three cases of men murdering their wives, and one case of a man committing suicide, because their wives stood in the way of their marrying another woman. Murder and suicide are desperate ways out of a situation from which there is no other escape. While the prevalence of such violence does not support the idea that women in South India have relatively high status, the fact of wife-murder does suggest that the marital bond is taken seriously: only death can sever it.

In the ideal, both the husband and the wife should remain faithful to each other, regardless of the hardships involved. According to one Paraiyar elder, if a couple come into conflict with each other, the other members of their kindred group should help them work things out. Only if a wife is totally insane and uncontrollable should she be sent back to her parents' home, and then only as a last resort. Even if she lives "like an animal in the forest," he said, her husband should put up with her. Women, in the same way, told me that if their husbands were unreasonable, they had to simply not think about it, "not make a big thing out of it [*pericākkakkūḍātu*]," as they said. The adage, "*Oruttar porutta, iruvar vāṛka* [If one can bear it, both can live]," has high salience for such people.

The eternal conflict between spouses is abundantly reflected in Indian mythology, especially Tamil, which debates the issue of male versus female superiority back and forth endlessly on a cosmic level, in the form of battles and contests between deities or demons and their real or would-be mates. Siva and his consort(s) are especially given to such confrontations, but other deities also get into the act often enough (e.g., Rama and Tadaka, Arjuna and Alli, Kanniyamma and the buffalo demon). The rivalrous relationship between spouses contrasts with the cooperative relationship between brother and sister, so that battles for supremacy between brother and sister occur rarely if ever in Tamil myths.

The Spouse Usurps the Place of the Sibling

Both in mythology and in real life, it is painful for a sister to watch another woman become mistress of her mother's house and of her brother, more painful still if it appears that the beloved brother is deceived, and the home closed off, by the newcomer. So Nallataṅkāḷ complains to her older brother, "My mother would herself have invited me into her house, but I don't know whether your wife will do the same."[87] Similarly, a Paraiyar woman sings in a personal lament to her brother, "I go back to the house where I was raised, and find that your wife has set two mongrel dogs to guard it."

By the same token, it is painful for a brother to watch his sister become the possession of another man, more painful still if the man appears to abuse her. There have been at least two very popular Tamil movies on this theme: *Pācamalar*, mentioned earlier, and *Taṅkaikkōr Kītam*. In *Taṅkaikkōr Kītam* (*A Song for My Sister*), released in 1980, a boy struggles as a day-laborer to raise his younger sister, put her through college, and marry her wealthily. In dreams and in waking, he is obsessed by her image. But because of a misunderstanding, after her marriage, she disowns him. Meanwhile, a villain plots to rape the hero's sister's husband's younger sister and put the blame on the hero. The hero saves his sister-in-law by shooting the villain, while the dying villain blows the hero to smithereens with a hand grenade. The closing credits are highlighted by shots of a young boy playing with an even younger girl in an idyllic green pasture.

This movie played for months to theaters packed with sobbing crowds. The theme of the older brother martyred for the sake of his younger sister seemed to strike a nerve in many people. The theme of the cast-off older brother occurs in different form in the myth of Madurai Mīnākshi's wedding. Mīnākshi's older brother Aṛakar (a form of Vishnu) travels to her wedding with Cuntar (a form of Siva) but returns in anger when he is told that the wedding has been started without him. (Coincidentally, the names of Mīnākshi's husband and brother both have the same meaning, "Beautiful Man," in Sanskrit and Tamil respectively).

The story of Aṛakar in turn has local variants, for example, the story of Ponnar-Caṅkar as told to me bv a Paraivar shaman north of Madurai.

According to this shaman, Ponnar-Caṅkar, the patron and possessing deity of the shaman, was a deity in chains. "Why was he in chains?" I asked. "He had to be kept in chains because he was such an angry god," the shaman answered. "Why was he angry?" "Because he couldn't go to his sister's wedding." "Why couldn't he go to his sister's wedding?" "How could he," concluded the shaman, "when he was in chains?"[88]

Strange as the circularity of the shaman's story may seem to us, it reflects with a certain accuracy the bind that ensnares the older brother who loves his younger sister: eternally bound by his passion for his sister because he can never spend it, unable to spend it because of the way in which he is bound to her, he will never be able to break free.

Spouses, meanwhile, are bound in an opposite sense. Though their relationship may be hostile, because of the ideal of fidelity it is difficult for them to sever connections with each other. Indeed, the very fact of their being forcibly bound to each other may induce hostility between them, as we see in the West also. (Plato's *Dialogues* have been translated into Tamil, and several Tamil men told me, with assent in their voices, that Socrates said of marriage, "It's like a fort. Those who are out want in. Those who are in want out.")

Ayya referred to marriage as *ceyaṯkai puṇarcci*, "artificial union." Love that "happens by itself" he called *iyaṯkai puṇarcci*, "natural union." He even likened wives to *porutpeṇḍīr*, "women who live for money" (i.e., prostitutes) because they trade their sexual services for material protection. The massive exchanges of wealth that take place at weddings contribute to this cynical view of marriage, which view is not a novel one in Tamil Nadu. Ayya got his analogy between wives and prostitutes not from Germaine Greer but from the eighth-century Tamil text *Tirumantiram*. The tenth-century text *Tirukkōvaiyār*, more sympathetic to female sensibilities, similarly criticizes the way in which, "like pearls and conch shells, young girls are sent everywhere, anywhere, to be ornaments for men's bodies."

The elements of force, self-interest, and artificiality characterizing marriage contrast with the spontaneity and altruism of the brother–sister bond. Peterson cites proverbs and songs from all over India celebrating the "purity", "unselfishness," and "joy" of this bond.[89] Of folksongs sung upon a bride's return to her natal home, Peterson notes, "the focus of these songs is not the obligatory aspect of the [brother–sister] tie, but the natural, mutual love of the siblings."

In short, one pattern that emerges (with many variants and exceptions) from an examination of sibling and spouse relations in Tamil culture seems to be this: that brother and sister develop a strong affectional bond

Plate 24. Padmini at the doorstep.

for each other but are not allowed to share a life, while spouses are expected to share a life regardless of the degree of their compatibility. The spouse may become in some ways like an unwanted sibling, competing for superiority, for goodness in the eyes of the world, for the favors (such as money) that the world has to offer. And the sibling may become like a desired but forbidden mate. Emotionally, the sibling and spouse relationships seem to switch places back and forth. While in social action, each is kept strictly separate, in the mind, each is easily converted into the other.

In mythology, this interconvertibility of sibling and spouse relationships is clearly apparent. So, for example, in the epic *Cilappatikāram*, an

episode occurs in which the husband and wife Kōvalan and Kaṇṇaki are asleep on the road to Madurai. Two ruffians come along and ask their protector, the Buddhist nun Kavundi, who they are. The nun replies, "They are my children." At this, one ruffian comments, "Have you ever noticed how brother and sister often act as though they were husband and wife?" In the mind of Kavundi, the spouses have been turned into siblings. In the mind of the ruffian, these "siblings" are turned back into spouses again.

In the Aṇṇanmār Katai studied by Beck, the heroine Taṅkāḷ and her brothers Ponnar and Caṅkar are incarnations of the goddess Parvati and her brother Vishnu; but they are *also* incarnations of the Mahabharata heroine Draupadi and her five husbands the Pandava brothers. I have already suggested that in the Aṇṇanmār Katai, the descent-by-incarnation of Taṅkāl from a series of goddesses is a kind of mythic matriliny. If this is so, we may see in the Aṇṇanmār Katai a shadow of the generational alternation of siblings and spouses which Dravidian kinship in its idealized form represents.

A modern singer takes up the theme of sibling-turned-to-spouse when she laments to her older brother, who has forsaken her (so she feels) for his wife, "Have you gone with Madhavi, and have you forgotten my pomegranate garden, the place of your birth?" Madhavi was a courtesan for whose sake Kōvalan deserted Kaṇṇaki. The singer is implying that the wife is like a prostitute, while she herself (the singer, the sister) is the true and original wife, and the rightful representative of the mother.[90]

Sister and wife of the same man, then, are coequals. Often in both myth and life they are bitter rivals and enemies (though sometimes, as we shall see later, they are just the opposite of this). Brother and husband of the same woman are in a similar relationship. If, either the brother–sister bond were less strong to start out with, or the husband–wife bond were looser or more easily dissoluble, we might not find the sibling and spouse relationship in mirror opposition, as we do. Whatever its causes, however, this opposition is a powerful presence in many people's lives.

CONCLUSION

". . . the meeting place that will never reach its end . . ."

Tirukkōvaiyār, 307.

Dravidian kinship terminology is a highly patterned, symmetrical, and indeed aesthetically satisfying verbal system. If the terminology reflected *precisely* the organization of human beings on the ground, then all the tensions described in this chapter would be resolved and all the desires would be fulfilled. Matrilines would not conflict with patrilines, women

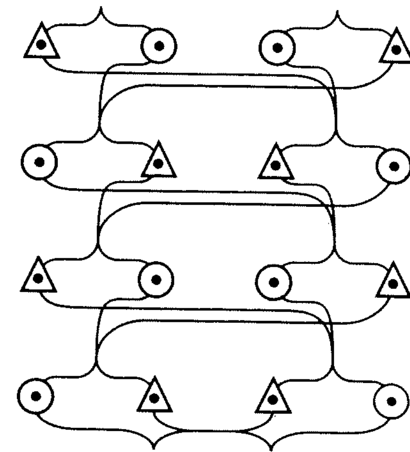

Figure 11. Ideal pattern of bilateral cross-cousin marriage.

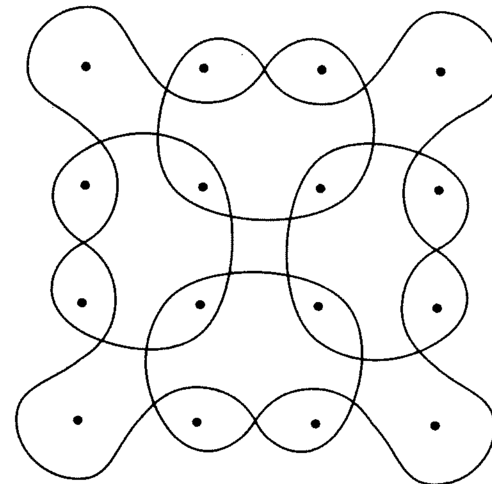

Figure 12. Kolam. *A design drawn by women on the threshold of the house in the morning, when all is well with the family. One of many.*

vould not conflict with men, the bond between siblings would not onflict with the bond between spouses. A single small family, two lines of women, two lines of men, two pairs of siblings, two pairs of spouses, vould meet all its own needs forever. Patrilines and matrilines would arallel and reinforce each other. Father–son continuity and mother–laughter continuity would harmonize. These harmonized continuities, in urn would harmonize the bonds between siblings and spouses. A father vould continue in his son and a mother in her daughter, and then, when he children of siblings became spouses, the siblings themselves, in the odies of their children, would reunite as marriage partners. Spouses vould bear siblings, siblings would bear spouses, and the separate continuities of matrilines and patrilines would merge.

I have tried to show that in Tamil Nadu, there are strong expectations hat each of these different continuities will be maintained; the expectations for harmony are perhaps reinforced by the aesthetic symmetry of the erminology system.

But in real life, as we know, this terminological system is not acted out erfectly, indeed it could never be. Rather it occurs in various partial nanifestations, each of which approximately fulfills some people's reams, but completely baffles others. The baffled dreams are not thereby illed; rather their unfulfillment leads to a sense of injustice—A sister hinks, "My brother *should* have stayed loyal to me, but instead, by avoring his wife, he betrayed me." Or a husband thinks, "My wife *hould* do as I say, but instead she coddles her brother." Or a father hinks, "My daughter *should* have married my sister's son, but instead he eloped with a boy on her mother's side, and so she betrayed my bligations to my affines." Or a daughter thinks, "My mother *should* ave kept me near her, but instead I was sent far away." Complaints like hese, in just such words, are common, even though the offender has cted within the overall rules of the game, only stressing the fulfillment f his or her own desires.

On the ground are such people with their various longings, supporting he continuation of the kinship ideal by investing their different personal reams in it, but in that very process pulling against each other, making he possibility of each other's total fulfillment all the more remote. As ong as this ideal answers to the desires that have been written in their odies since childhood, they will keep reaching for it, and as long as they each, its various imperfect manifestations will continue to be born.

She is driven from her natal home, her mother's