The Indian Economic and
Social History Review, Vol. XVII, No. 3
https://doi.org/10.1177/001946468001700302 1980

On South Indian Bandits and Kings*

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Where are the Robin Hoods of Southern India? This is the question which presents itself to the Tamilist reading through E.J. Hobsbawm's excellent study of bandits[1] Hobsbawm himself notes the difficulty in fitting India's bandits into his typology of noble robbers (the Robin Hoods), *haiduks* (the bands of primitive guerilla fighters), and the pathologically cruel "avengers."[2] Hobsbawm is concerned with what he calls "social banditry"—the peasant heroes regarded by their rural hinterland as champions, and by the state as outlaws and criminals—and he suggests that social banditry was inhibited in India "by the tendency of robbers, like all other sections of society, to form self-contained castes and communities."[3] Here is our problem: on the one hand, Southern India clearly has its examples of what might be called bandits; indeed here, as in the rest of India, the striking innovation lies in the institutionalization of this field of activity by recognizing *jātis* of thieves and dacoits. In South India, a bandit is thus not "made" but rather born as such, and highway robbery becomes a traditional, socially recognized occupation of specific castes with its own symbolic legitimation. On the other hand, the "noble bandits," so beloved in other cultures (England and Scotland, China, Italy, Brazil), hardly emerges with any prominence in Tamil folk poetry. A recent study of Tamil folk ballads has analyzed the social basis of this literature, and the author notes the existence of ballads on "social banditry" themes;[4] there is, indeed, a well-known literature of social protest (largely anti-Brahmin in tone) in medieval Tamil.[5] Nevertheless, the most popular of

*An earlier version of this paper was presented at the annual meeting of the Israel Anthropological Association, Jerusalem, March1980.

[1]E.J. Hobsbawm, *Bandits* (London, 1969).

[2]*Ibid.*, p. 15n.

[3]*Ibid.*

[4]Stuart H. Blackburn, "The Folk Hero and Class Interests in Tamil Heroic Ballads," *Asian Folklore Studies*, 37 (1978), p. 137. See also N. Vanamamalai, "Dacoits and Robbers in Tamil Ballads," *Folklore* (Calcutta), 12 (1971), pp. 66-72 (unfortunately not available to me).

[5]E.g. the famous *akaval* attributed to Kapilar; also the antinomian poems of some of the Tamil *siddhas*. See the discussion in D. Shulman, "The Enemy Within: Idealism and Dissent

the Tamil bandit-ballads portray heroes who, while they may be glorified and even deified, are very far from noble. In fact, so scandalous are these stories that one modern authority on the literature can complain about one composition: "Ballad poetry would certainly have been better without this story!"[6] He is, moreover, quite right in seeing an identifiable type of hero in these poems.

How, then, are we to understand the role of the South Indian bandit? The problem is rendered more interesting by the profound symbolic links between banditry and poetry, divinity and worship. Without denying the social bias of the literature as shown by Blackburn, especially the tendency of the ballads to glorify the localized, low-caste hero in opposition to higher classes, we may still pursue the wider implications of the views expressed through these stories. The intrinsic importance of the folk ballads lies in the clues they offer to a widespread world view. The following pages seek to explore the symbolism of the bandit in South India, and to look beyond it toward the social reality from which it springs. We shall concentrate on one of the ballads, the *Maturaivīracuvāmikatai*, clearly one of the most popular of its kind; but we begin with some general remarks on bandits and thieves.

Coranātha, Karuppaṇṇacuvāmi, and the Kaḷḷar

The local tradition of the Vaiśṇava shrine in Śrīvaikuṇṭam tells of a thief named Kāladūṣaka, the leader of a band of thieves dwelling in the wilderness near the shrine. Kāladūṣaka used to spend half his ill-gotten gains on prostitutes and gambling, but the other half he reserved for the god, Vaikuṇṭhanatha. Eventually the local king closed in on the thief, who sought refuge in Vaikuṇṭhanātha's shrine. The god granted him protection and then, taking the form of a robber, appeared to the king; admonished and instructed by the god, the king forgave Kāladūṣaka and begged Viṣṇu to remain as Coranātha (Tamil Kaḷḷappirāṉ, "lord of thieves") at Śrīvaikuṇṭam. The king and the robber then collaborated in a ritual celebration: in the month of Caitra, the king and the robber decorated the town and distributed presents, especially to the Brahmins. Viṣṇu—"Lord of the Universe and Leader of Robbers"—was pleased, and he gave release to both the king and the robber. The king and

in South Indian Hinduism," paper delivered at the Seminar on Heterodoxy and Dissent in India, Jerusalem, June 1979; to appear in the volume of seminar papers. One of the Tamil poems on Kāttavarāyaṉ may well belong in this class: see M. Arunachalam, *Ballad Poetry* (Tiruchitrambalam, Tanjavur District, 1976), p. 189.

[6] *Ibid.* It should be noted that the use of the term "ballad" for these popular Tamil poems is somewhat problematic; no systematic classification of the genres represented in these compositions has yet been undertaken.

the robber performed this festival together every year.[7]

Some versions of this story make Kāladūṣaka into a Robin-Hood-like hero: he never oppressed the righteous but would seek out evildoers and rob them; after giving half his gains to the god and satisfying his own needs, he would distribute the rest among the poor.[8] This portrayal of the thief, which seems to be missing in the older versions, clearly helps to justify Viṣṇu's intervention on his behalf. But the true basis for the *rapprochement* of king and robber seems to be stated by the god in his sermon to the king: "Things not given as *dharma* will perish; kings seize them, and robbers steal them."[9] In the perspective of this story, kings and thieves can apparently be classed together; the original opposition between the two gives way to a collaboration clearly felt to be quite fitting. This relation between king and robber, which, as we shall see, recurs in many stories, deserves close study.

F. Hardy, who has summarized and discussed the myth from Śrīvaikuṇṭam, interprets it in the light of local politics and society: Śrīvaikuṇṭam is situated in an area inhabited by members of the Kaḷḷar caste (the name means "thieves"), and the chief trustee of the temple is a Kaḷḷar. The story thus describes the modus vivendi achieved by the Kaḷḷar, the Brahmins, and the local ruler, as symbolized by the festival managed jointly by the king and the head of the Kaḷḷar community. In other words, we have here "the legitimization of a particular power-structure."[10] This analysis is undoubtedly correct. For our purposes, it is important to note that the Kaḷḷar fit into the category of institutionalized bandits mentioned earlier. The Kaḷḷar, a colourful community concentrated chiefly in Madura and Tanjore districts of Tamil Nadu, have a well-established reputation as thieves—although they are for the most part settled agriculturist. As Dumont states in his comprehensive study of one branch of this community:

> De nos jours . . . le Kallar apparait avant tout comme un paysan, peut-être un mediocre agriculteur, mais quelqu'un qui est plus ou moins fixé au sol et en tire une partie au moins de sa subsistance. Il a, ou il avait, deux sources de revenus additionnels: d'une part, le vol, et d'autre part, la surveillance contre le vol, la fonction de gardien.[11]

[7] *Vaikuṇṭhanāthamāhātmya* 5.48-52, summarized by Friedhelm Hardy, "Ideology and Cultural Contexts of the Śrīvaiṣṇava Temple" in Burton Stein (ed.), *South Indian Temples: An Analytic Reconsideration* (New Delhi, 1978, Vol. XIV, n. 1 of *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*), pp. 147-48.

[8] Tō. Mu. Pāskarat Tōṇṭaimāṉ, *Veṅkaṭam mutal kumari varai. IV: Porunait turaiyile* (Tirunĕlveli, 1971), pp. 200-201; R.K. Das, *Temples of Tamilnad* (Bombay, 1964), pp. 30-31.

[9] Pāskarat Tōṇṭaimāṉ, p. 201. The god says that he has created Kaladusaka in order to teach this truth.

[10] Hardy, *op. cit.*, p. 148.

[11] Louis Dumont, *Une sous-caste de l'Inde du sud: organisation saciale et religion des Prama-*

The thief becomes a watchman, the guardian steals from his master: the Kaḷḷar belong in this respect in the universal category of dangerous watchmen. As Hobsbawm notes, the ideal is the "formal conversion of poachers into gatekeepers. . . . In India as in Sicily the professions of village and field, or cattle-watchmen, were often interchangeable with that of bandit."[12] This role of the Kaḷḷar is bound up with the institution of *pāṭikāval*, the village police system; traditionally, the Kaḷḷar have been *kāvalkārar* in their areas.[13] In Chola times, when Veḷāḷa agriculturists were sent to settle new lands, the Kaḷḷar were sent with them as watchmen.[14] But the guardian or gatekeeper is by nature a highly ambivalent figure, whether he stands in the village fields or at the threshold of a shrine. One sees this clearly in the cult of Karuppaṉ (Karuppaṇṇa-cuvāmi, Karuppucāmi), who is one of the Kaḷḷar's favoured deities.[15] This god stands as guardian at the entrance to the great shrine of Aḻakar-Viṣṇu (who is also known as Kaḷḷaḻakar because of *his* relation with the Kaḷḷar) at Tirumāliruñcolai near Maturai. The symbolism of the threshold is unmistakable here, for Karuppaṉ has no image in this shrine; he is worshipped in the form of the massive doors to the temple, and offerings are brought to the famous Eighteen Steps beneath these doors.[16] Karuppaṉ is a violent deity: his name means "the Black," and he demands blood sacrifices—indeed, one myth current among the Pramalai Kaḷḷar explains his absence from the temple of

lai Kallar (Paris, 1957), p. 7. For further information on the Kaḷḷar, see E. Thurston, *Castes and Tribes of Southern India* (Madras), 1909, 3: 53-91.

[12]Hobsbawm, *op. cit.*, p. 78.

[13]On *pāṭikāval*, see T.V. Mahalingam, *South Indian Polity* (2nd ed., Madras, 1967), pp. 246-53. Cf. the role of the Beḍar in Karnataka, as described in J. Duncan M. Derrett, *The Hoysalas, A Medieval Indian Royal Family* (Madras, 1957), pp. 7-9.

[14]Stuart H. Blackburn, "The Kallars: A Tamil 'Criminal Tribe' Reconsidered," *South Asia*, n.s. 1 (1978), p. 45.

[15]On Karuppaṉ see Dumont, *op. cit.*, pp. 368-71; *idem*, "A Structural Definition of a Folk Deity of Tamil Nad: Aiyanar, the Lord," in L. Dumont, *Religion/Politics and History in India* (Paris, 1970), pp. 20-32; D. Hudson, "Two Citra Festivals in Madurai" in G.R. Welbon and Glenn E. Yocum (ed.), *Interludes: Religious Festivals in South India and Ceylon* (New Delhi, 1977); Henry Whitehead, *The Village Gods of South India* (2nd ed., Calcutta, 1921), pp. 113-15, mistakenly identifying Karuppaṉ with Maturaivīraṉ; K.N. Radha Krishna, *Thirmalirunjolaimalai (Sri Alagar Kovil) Stala Purana* (= *Vṛṣabhādrimāhātmya*), (Maturai, 1942), pp. 210-15; C.G. Diehl, *Instrument and Purpose: Studies on Rites and Rituals in South India* (Lund, 1956), p. 237; *Alakar varṇippu* (Madras, 1950), p. 6.

[16]*Census of India*, 1961, Vol. IX, Part XI-D: *Temples of Madras State. VI. Madurai and Ramanathapuram* (Madras, 1969), p. 107. The myth told about the Eighteen Steps—under which are said to be buried eighteen magicians from Malabar who came to steal the divinity of this shrine—is given in Whitehead, *loc. cit.*; Radha Krishna, *loc. cit.* There exists a custom of swearing oaths to prove one's innocence at this site, before the doors of Karuppaṉ (*Census of India, loc. cit*; Whitehead, p. 115)—an interesting association of truthfulness with an inherently ambivalent, somewhat menacing guardian-deity. Cf. the theme of the Kaḷḷar's perjury before Karuppaṉ (redeemed by the *mental* offering of a sheep): Thurston, *op. cit.*, pp. 83-84, 88.

Aḷakar (i.e. the absence of an image of him there?) by his dissatisfaction with the vegetarian cuisine offered in the shrine.[17] As the gatekeeper of Aḷakar (and, in other contexts, of the vegetarian god Aiyaṉār), Karuppaṉ may be said to represent the higher deity; as his protector, Karuppaṉ (still invisible, i.e. not represented iconically) accompanies Aḷakar on his annual journey, in the month of Citra, to the boundary of Maturai.[18] (During this latter festival, crowds of Kaḷḷar also accompany the god, supposedly in order to guard the great money chests (*kopparai uṇṭiyal*) which are filled with the devotees' gifts —and thus we see again the persistent paradox of the thieves made into guardians.)[19] Finally, Karuppaṉ is by virtue of his violent tendencies, carnivorous tastes, dark colour, and general personality no different from the demons (*pey*) against whom he must fight.[20] In much the same way, his worshippers, the Kaḷḷar, reveal a collective ambiguity in their character—part peasant, part watchman, part bandit or cattle-thief.

Recently a spirited defense of the Kaḷḷar has been published by Stuart Blackburn, who convincingly shows how external pressures, especially those connected to the extension of British colonial rule, may have reduced the Kaḷḷar to the "wild Collerie" image popular in British writings and, ultimately, to the status of a Criminal Tribe.[21] Blackburn emphasizes the settled role of the Kaḷḷar peasants, although he admits that in the medieval period some Kaḷḷar were "undoubtedly involved in cattle raids and possibly formed a reservoir of warriors for local military chieftains."[22] Yet this diversification would appear to be a matter of principle; the ambivalent nature of the Kaḷḷar, as indicated by their very name, is clearly mentioned in the pre-colonial literature.[23] Moreover, the Kaḷḷar's own traditions indicate something of this conception. The Kaḷḷar share with the Maravar the story of their descent from the union of Indra and Ahalyā: according to this version of the classical myth, Indra seduced Ahalyā, the wife of the Brahmin sage Gautama, and four sons were born—Kaḷḷaṉ, Maravaṉ, Akampaṭiyaṉ, and Veḷāḷaṉ.[24] This story ex-

[17]Dumont, *Sous-caste*, p. 369.

[18]For details see Hudson, *op. cit.*

[19]*Ibid.*; cf. *Alakar Varṇippu*, pp. 6-7: here we learn of the initial subjugation of the Kaḷḷar by the god, after which they become his guardians. Their protection is, apparently, no longer felt to be sufficient, since today policemen also accompany the god on his journey! Kaḷḷalakar appears dressed as a Kaḷḷar during this festival, and the Kaḷḷars are said to have the right to pull his car: Thurston, pp. 84-85, citing J. Sharrock.

[20]See Dumont, "Aiyanar," p. 29.

[21]Blackburn, "Kallars," *passim*.

[22]*Ibid.*, p. 44.

[23]For example, in the Maturaivīraṉ cycle: see below. See also Sathyanatha Aiyar, *History of the Nayaks of Madura* (Oxford, 1924), pp. 253, 289, 252, 305; Hudson, *op. cit.*

[24]The story is given by Thurston, *op. cit.*, 3: 62-63, 5: 23; Dumont, *Sous-caste*, p. 5, with popular etymologies for the names of the four sons. The story is based on *Rāmāyaṇa* 1.47.15-32 (which of course knows nothing of any progeny from the illicit union); cf. the Tamil version of Kampaṉ *Irāmāvatāram* (Tiruvāṉmiyūr, 1967), 1.543-550.

presses the link between the Kaḷḷar and the equally martial Maravar and Akampaṭiyar; these three castes, sometimes referred to as *muventira kulam* ("the three families of Indra"), can claim an original royal status on the basis of their alleged descent from Indra. Again we see king and robber confronted. The relatively low status of these castes can then be explained as the result of the hypogamous (*pratiloma*) union of a king (Indra) and a Brahmin woman (Ahalyā). But the story also reveals the Kaḷḷar's sense of closeness to the Veḷāḷar; a Tamil proverb even speaks of the Kaḷḷar slowly turning into the Veḷāḷar. The tradition taken as a whole thus nicely embodies the conflicting pulls of Kaḷḷar social history.

Cattle-Thieves and Heroes

Perhaps the defense of the Kaḷḷar could be undertaken from a different angle. There is every reason to suppose that the pattern of quasi-sedentary, quasi-predatory existence, or of a regular alternation between the two styles, is an ancient one in India. J.C. Heesterman has explained the enigmatic rites of the Vrātyas as connected to just such a pattern, which may be preserved in the tradition that the Kuru-Pañcālas would set out during the cold season on a *digvijaya*: they would seize the barley crop, forage for food, and return home before the rains in order to work their own fields.[25] If we limit ourselves to the Tamil area, we find an ancient conception of heroism as somehow linked to the raider, robber, and cattle-rustler. There is, in fact, a striking fluctuation in the meanings of the basic terms. Take, for example, *maravan*, defined in the *Dravidian Etymological Dictionary* as "inhabitant of desert tract, of hilly tract, one belonging to the caste of warriors, person of Marava caste, warrior, hero, commander, military chief, cruel, wicked person."[26] We have just met the Maravar as a war-like caste claiming, like the Kaḷḷar, descent from Indra and Ahalyā.[27] But in the *Purapporuḷ veṇpāmālai*, *maravar* is a generalized term for the ancient class (*mūtta kuṭi*) of heroes who appeared with swords in their hands after the universal deluge—when only the mountains were visible, and the earth was still submerged.[28] In this sense the word is sometimes used by the "Caṅkam" poets of the early centuries A.D., while *maram* can mean "heroism, bravery" (usually with the added connotation of fierceness or

[25] J.C. Heesterman, "Vrātya and Sacrifice," *Indo-Iranian Journal* 6 (1962), pp. 1-37.

[26] T. Burrow and M.B. Emeneau, *A Dravidian Etymological Dictionary* (Oxford, 1961), n. 3900, quoting the *Tamil Lexicon*.

[27] See Thurston, *op. cit.*, 5: 22-48; Carol Appadurai Breckenridge, "From Protector to Litigant—Changing Relations between Hindu Temples and the Raja of Ramnad" in Stein (n. 7 above), pp. 57-77.

[28] *Purapporuḷ veṇpāmālai* of Aiyaṉāritaṉār, 2, (*karantai*.), 13-14; cf. the somewhat different translation of G.U. Pope, *Tamil Heroic Poems* (Madras, 1973), p. 23.

even cruelty).[29] But the classical poets also know a distinction between the *marakkuṭi*, the wild, predatory communities, and the *arakkuṭi* or settled agriculturalists. Thus in *Cilappatikāram* 12 (a canto devoted to the Veṭṭuvar or Eyiṉar hunters), Cāliṉi, a young girl possessed by the goddess, cries out:

> In the great villages, the rich herds are flourishing,
> but the meeting-places of the Eyiṉar of the strong bows
> are desolate.
> The inherited path of the heroes gives forth nothing now;
> like settled folk, the Eyiṉar have become cowed,
> their spirit snuffed out.[30]

We also find the Maravar and Eyiṉar as the highway robbers who are the proper residents of the wilderness (*pālai*) tract, according to the textbooks of rhetoric. These Maravar are famous for their cruelty; the *pālai* region is

> a mournful way deserted even by the birds,
> where dwell the fierce-eyed Maravar
> with their robust bodies,
> terrible strength,
> tiger's look,
> bound bows,
> curled hair,
> just waiting to do evil:
> they will take the life of wayfarers
> even when there is nothing to steal,
> just to see their bodies twist in dying.[31]

We thus find two related notions. On the one hand, bandits and robbers are given their place within the conventional scheme of the Tamil universe; they belong in the wilderness and present a contrast to settled peasant life. On the other hand, the very concept of the hero incorporates something of the Maravar as marauder. One sees this in the classification of the cattle-raid (in *vĕṭcittiṇai*) as the normal preliminary to war. We may thus look back to a period when cattle-raiding was a standard feature of the relations between neighbouring "kingdoms," even allowing for the somewhat artificial schema-

[29] In later times *maram* becomes equivalent to *adharma*, but positive connotations linger on—hence the problem presented, for example, by Kampaṉ's anti-hero Rāvaṇa, the embodiment of *maram*. Kampaṉ has been accused of preferring Rāvaṇa to the dharmic hero Rāma.

[30] *Cilappatikāram* 12.12-15.

[31] *Kalittokai* 1.4.1-6.

tization apparent in the Caṅkam conventions.[32] The hero shades off into the cattle-thief. Something of this idea survives throughout the medieval period in Tamil Nadu, as does the practice of worshipping a fallen hero by erecting a hero-stone; inscriptions on these memorial stones often point to the hero's death in the course of a cattle-raid—usually while the hero was *defending* the village cattle from thieves.[33] The hero-stone, it must be stressed, is perceived as the abode of a divine presence.

It is in this light that we may regard the Maravar cattle-raiders and hunters of medieval times,[34] and, perhaps, the traditions linking the Kaḷḷar to highway robbery. The Kaḷḷar appear for the most part as settled peasants, but they stand outside the right-left division of Tamil society. They are not, apparently, seen as wholly rooted in their agricultural pursuits. But, whether as peasants or as raiders, they have a recognized role in society. Moreover, their seemingly anti-social characteristics are precisely what relates them to heroism and even kingship. Endowed with the symbolism of the watchman-thief, they share the image of the "outsider" whose relative freedom is translated into anomalous status. Usually ranked as low, they are in some ways remarkably close to prestigious figures in the social hierarchy. Their "outsider" quality, far from implying any real form of exclusion, seems rather to connect them with central symbols of the social order.

Divine Thieves and Bandit-Poets

We have by no means exhausted the symbolism of the bandit or of his alter ego, the guardian. In particular, we need to clarify the transition from bandit-hero to divinity. Perhaps we may approach the problem the other way round: if the hero who is half-bandit can be deified and worshipped, we need not be surprised to find a deity dressed up as a bandit. Indeed, we have already noted one instance of this possibility in the myth of Coranātha from Śrīvaikuṇṭam. South India, in fact, offers a considerable theology of thieving.

One can observe this in both Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva variants. To begin with the latter: Śiva, the antinomian deity *par excellence*, is at his best not far removed from a bandit. South Indian Śaivas have made valiant efforts to

[32]For comparative evidence, see Bruce Lincoln, "The Indo-European Cattle-Raiding Myth," *History of Religions* 16 (1976), pp. 42-65; Peter Walcot, "Cattle Raiding, Heroic Tradition, and Ritual: The Greek Evidence," *History of Religions* 18 (1979), pp. 326-51; see also J.C. Heesterman, *The Ancient Indian Royal Consecration* (The Hague, 1957), Chapter 16.

[33]This motif also occurs in the folk ballads: see Blackburn, "Folk Hero," p. 135. On the hero-stones, see George L. Hart, III, *The Poems of Ancient Tamil, Their Milieu and Their Sanskrit Counterparts* (Berkeley, 1975), pp. 25-26, 42; K.K.N. Kurup, *The Cult of Teyyam and Hero Worship in Kerala* (Calcutta, 1973), pp. 18-20; Derrett, *op. cit*, pp. 9-10. G.A. Deleury, *The Cult of Viṭhobā* (Poona, 1960), p. 198, argues that the famous Viṭhobā of Paṇḍharpūr is a "later development of a primitive hero-stone."

[34]See *Periya Purāṇam* of Cekkilār, 3.3.5-7, 65.

reform this recalcitrant god, and thus we find that many of his most anti-social traits have been either toned down or reinterpreted;[35] for all that, Śiva remains unpredictable, delightfully mischievous, entirely unbound by conventions or properties. In this character he may represent the divine force underlying the world of dharmic order and transcending its limits.[36] He is thus quite capable of robbing his own devotee, Cuntaramūrttināyaṉār, by sending his troops of *bhūtas* dressed as hunters (*veṭar*) or by appearing himself as a *veṭan*.[37] This story, which appears in Cekkaiḻār's *pĕriya Purāṇam* in connection with Cuntarar's visit to the town of Tirumurukaṉpūṇṭi, may well have been developed by the tradition on the basis of Cuntarar's *Tevāram*-hymn 49; this poem describes Tirumurukaṉpūṇṭi as infested by bandits of the type discussed earlier with reference to the Caṅkam *pālai*-poems. If such was the development of the tradition, we may note a fascinating transition: the god who is worshipped in the *Tevāram* poem as somehow opposed to the bandits (he dwells defenseless in their town, where he seeks alms, rides the bull, unites with Umā, etc.) appears in the later tradition as a local bandit-chief himself! This development is, of course, quite reasonable, given Siva's essential nature; and one is reminded of another classic role of this god, that of Arjuna's Kirāta-antagonist.[38]

Many other stories follow this pattern. Śiva thinks nothing of making off with his devotee's wife (this time with the husband's consent).[39] He similarly steals the bridegroom—once again, Cuntaramūrttināyaṉār—at a Brahmin wedding;[40] and, in the main Tamil version of the Dakṣa myth, Siva steals away his own bride, Umā, from her father's house, just as the lovers in the Caṅkam love-poems conventionally elope.[41] This conjunction of marriage and robbery is clearly a standard theme, which the *bhakti* poets use metaphorically to suggest the ravishing of the soul by the divine: God is "the thief

[35]I have discussed this development at some length in my book, *Tamil Temple Myths: Sacrifice and Divine Marriage in the South Indian Śaiva Tradition* (Princeton, 1980). In the North Indian tradition, Śiva is a *brahmahan*, adulterer, Outcaste, etc. Śiva's antecedent, the Vedic Rudra, is also a robber and the lord of highwaymen (*VS* 16.20-21).

[36]See D. Shulman, "The Crossing of the Wilderness: Landscape and Myth in the Tamil Story of Rāma," *Acta Orientalia* (in press); G.L Hart, *The Relation between Tamil and Classical Sanskrit Literature*, Vol. X Fasc. 2 of J. Gonda (ed.), *A History of Indian Literature* (Wiesbaden, 1976), pp. 350-51.

[37]*Periya Purāṇam* 7.4.164-8; W. Francis, *South Arcot District Gazeteer* (Madras, 1906), p. 398; T.B. Krishnaswami, *South Arcot in Sacred Song* (Madras, 1937), p. 10.

[38]*MBh* 3.40.1-62. This story seems to be represented in the great frieze at Mahābalipuram ("Arjuna's Penance").

[39]*Periya Purāṇam* 2.3.1-36 (the story of Iyarpakaiyār).

[40]*Ibid.*, 1.4.1-74.

[41]*Kantapurāṇam* of Kacciyappacivācāriyar (Madras, 1907), 6.1-2, 5-11, 16-20; see discussion in *Tamil Temple Myths*, pp. 337-46.

who steals my heart" *ênn̲ uḷḷaṅ kavar kaḷvan̲*).[42] Devotion to the deity is sometimes perceived in antinomian terms, even if the *bhakti* movements historically have tended rather to reinforce than to undermine social norms; thus Śiva is seen as a wild bandit who preys upon the devotee, and the love which the latter feels for the god threatens to break through all of society's barriers.

The same term (*uḷḷaṅ kavar kaḷvan̲*) is used pointedly to describe Viṣṇu as Kaḷḷappirān-Coranātha,[43] thus fusing the metaphorical and the mythic usages; the Vaiṣṇava poet-saints are no less fond of referring to their god as a thief than are their Śaiva counterparts.[44] But it is, of course, Kṛṣṇa—especially the young Kṛṣṇa, the butter-thief and, slightly older, the cowherd who hides the *gopīs*' saris—who merits the title of robber or bandit.[45] Here again one finds the notion of divinity as transcending order and as exemplifying the wild love (*preman*) opposed to structure, sanity, and control.

What is perhaps most striking in all this is the interesting possibility that emerges for *imitatio Dei*. If god is a bandit, to rob is divine—especially if one robs in the name or interests of the deity. Thus Māṇikkavācakar can spend his king's funds on various pious purposes, and the treasurer of Kṛṣṇadevarāya empties the king's treasury to build a temple at Lepākṣi.[46] More remarkable still is the story of Tirumaṅkaiyāḻvār as it appears in the later Vaiṣṇava hagiographic literature (and as distinct from what may be deduced about the real biography of this poet).[47] Tirumaṅkaiyāḻvār is said to have been a highwayman who robbed travellers in order to defray the expense of feeding 1008 Vaiṣṇavas each day; who stole the golden image of the Buddha in Nākapaṭṭiṉam; and who even waylaid and despoiled the great god Viṣṇu himself. Tirumaṅkaiyāḻvā is, of course, one of the great poets of South Indian Vaiṣṇava *bhakti*; we thus see in his case the convergence of three basic roles—bandit, poet, and devotee.

[42]Tiruñāṉacampantar, *Tevāram* 1.1-10.

[43]*uḷḷaṅ kavar kaḷvaṉ āṉa parantāmaṉ kaḷḷappirāṉākavum niṉṟ irukkirār:* Pāskarat Tŏṇṭaimāṉ, *op. cit.*, p. 201.

[44]See, e.g., the verse of Nammālvār cited by A.K. Ramanujan, "The Relevance of South Asian Folklore," ms. 1979, p. 63. In the *Irāmāyaṭāṟam* (1.611), Rāma is described by the lovesick Sītā as a thief who entered her by way of her eyes and robbed her of her feminine modesty.

[45]See J. Hawley, "Thief of Butter, Thief of Love," *History of Religions* 18 (1979), pp. 203-20. A Gujarati temple myth relates how Kṛṣṇa helped his devotee Bodana steal his (Kṛṣṇa's) image from the temple in Dvārakā: D.F. Pocock, *Mind, Body and Wealth: A Study of Belief and Practice in an Indian Village* (Oxford, 1973), pp. 106-107. This story is perfectly in harmony with Kṛṣṇa's character.

[46]*Tiruviḷaiyāṭaṟpurāṇam* of Parañcotimuṉivar, cantos, 58-60; N. Ramesan, *Temples and Legends of Andhra Pradesh* (Bombay, 1962), pp. 40-41.

[47]For the traditional account, see Aḷkoṇḍavilli Govindacarya, *The Holy Lives of the Azhvars or the Dravida Saints* (Mysore, 1902), pp. 164ff; Cu. A. Irāmacāmip Pulavar, *Merkoḷ viḷakka akaravaricai* (Madras, 1963), 2:595; and cf. F.E. Hardy, *Emotional Kṛṣṇa Bhakti*, Diss., Oxford, 1976, pp. 320-21.

The association of banditry and poetry may derive in part from what might be called the "liminal" nature of both. The role of the bandit as an exemplar of disorder and of a rather violent freedom—these "outer" features which are nevertheless recognized and incorporated by the social order—may put him in touch with the mysterious forces seeking expression in poetry. Thus we find other poet-figures, among them the outstanding example of Vyāsa, the supposed composer of the *Mahābhārata*, defined as descendents of mixed unions and hence of anomalous status (like the Kaḷḷar claiming descent from Brahmin-Kṣatriya hypogamy).[48] In any case, the association is confirmed by the popular tradition which makes Vālmīki—author of the *Rāmāyaṇa* and, according to tradition, the very first poet (*ādikavi*)—a hunter-bandit. Vālmīki waylays hapless travellers in order to support his wife and children, until one day one of his victims (in some versions, the Seven Sages) proves to him that his family refuses to share any part of the burden of evil he is accumulating; shocked by this revelation, Vālmīki allows himself to be given a *mantra* (the word *marā*, the name of a tree which figures in the Rāma story); as he repeats this *mantra* incessantly, over a period of many years, the word turns into "Rāma," and an anthill grows over the immobile bandit-devotee—whence his name, Vālmīki (*valmīka*, anthill).[49] This story stresses the poet's transition from the violent life of a bandit to the saintly role of a sage; it remains significant that the tradition identifies its first poet as a bandit.

The Hero of Maturai

With these associations in mind, we may now turn to the *Maturaivīracuvāmikatai* and its hero, Maturaivīraṉ. Although this hero lacks certain features we would expect from a South Indian bandit—he is not a member of a bandit-caste, lives in towns rather than the wilderness, does not prey upon travellers—he does exemplify many of the traits we have been discussing: the identification as a hero connected to disorder and violent force; the tendency to

[48]See the discussion in Shulman, "The Enemy Within." On the concept of liminality: Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process* (Chicago, 1969). The Sūta and Māgadha—the "charioteers" and bards who are the keepers of tradition in ancient India—are also defined as descendents of hypogamous unions. A partial parallel to the idea of the bandit as liminal culture-carrier may be seen in the Talmudic sage Resh Lakish, who began his carrier as a bandit (*listim*): see *Baba Metzi'a* 84a.

[49]*Adhyātmarāmāyaṇa* 2.6 64ff, cited by Helmuth von Glasenapp, "Zwei Philosophische Ramayaṇas," Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur in Mainz, *Abhandlungen der Geistes- und Sozial-wissenschaftlichen Klasse*, Wiesbaden, 1951, no. 6, p. 499; cf. *Merkol viḷakka akaravaricai*, 2:993-5; for a delightful modern version, R.K. Narayan, *Gods, Demons and Others* (Mysore, 1973), pp. 126-135. A brief version, which makes Vālmīki a hunter (*veṭaṉ*) without referring to his bandit's role, appears in *Ceyaṅkoṇṭar valakkam*, ed. T. Chandrasekharan (Madras, 1955), verse 1 with commentary (p. 3). The story is absent from the *Vālmīkirāmāyaṇa*, cf. MBh. (SR) 13.24.6-8 (Vālmīki accused of Brahminicide).

plunder and steal (both money or goods and, especially, women); a social role which pits him in interesting ways against the king; the symbolism of the gatekeeper-guard; the attribution of divinity with all its accompanying ambivalence and tension. Maturaivīraṉ belongs, moreover, in a category which includes other "disreputable" divine heroes and thieves such as Kāttavarāyaṉ and Cuṭalaimāṭaṉ (the latter more localized in his fame). Maturaivīraṉ is worshipped today in shrines throughout the Tamil area, often as an attendant or gatekeeper of the village goddess, sometimes in connection with another god.[50] His story is told in the quasi-literary poetic style of much popular narrative in Tamil, replete with colloquialisms, formulae, and other signs of an oral milieu; the version I have used[51] runs to approximately 2,200 lines. The poem purports to describe events which occurred in the seventeenth century, during the rule in Maturai of the famous Tirumalai Nāyakkar (1623-1659). The story may be briefly summarized as follows:

Tuḷacimakārājaṉ, the righteous king of Kāśī, had no children. He worshipped Viśvanātha (Śiva in Kāśī) and performed the pious acts recommended by his Brahmin advisers; Śiva was pleased and granted him a son. But no sooner was the child born than the king's astrologer predicted that, if the baby were allowed to remain in his home, the entire kingdom would perish. The grief-stricken king reluctantly ordered his son to be carried on a golden platter, honoured by soldiers, musicians and dancers, to the forest and abandoned there.

The child was deposited at the base of a tree. Soon a serpent was attracted by his cries; the serpent prophecied a great future for the child—at the age of 10 he would defeat an entire army; he would rule Maturai after routing the Kaḷḷar; he would reach a great station because of women, and would be worshipped at the feet of the goddess Mīnākṣī. Each day this serpent brought *amṛta* to sustain the baby, until one day he was found by a Cakkili woman (a member of the Untouchable caste of leather-workers and shoemakers). She took him home to her husband, who rejoiced with her at this gift of a child by Śiva; they called a carpenter to make him a cradle, and they brought the child up according to the proper way.

Eventually, however, word spread that the king's son was growing up in the house of an Untouchable shoemaker. When the Cakkili foster-parents heard that the king had learned of this, they fled with the child to another land, where Pŏmmaṇa Nāyakkaṉ the Tŏṭṭiyaṉ[52] was ruling. The father joined the

[50]See Whitehead, *op. cit.*, pp. 25, 33, 89, 92, 113. To cite one example of his appearance in other shrines: in the small shrine of Maṉṉātīcuvarar-Śiva at Tirumullaivāyil (outside the main Brahminical shrine at this spot), one finds an image of Śiva, with Piḷḷaiyār on the right and the goddess and Naṭarāja to the left; behind them is a portrait of Maturaivīraṉ with a single bride.

[51]Published by Ār. Ji. Pati Kampĕṉi (Madras, 1972).

[52]The Tŏṭṭiyar are Telugu-speaking agriculturists settled in the Tamil country; their caste

ranks of the king's servant-guards.

Meanwhile the child was growing up into a strong and fearless lad who roamed the forests hunting bears, tigers, lions, and elephants. One day his father was sent to guard the daughter of Pŏmmaṇa Nayakkaṉ; the girl had just reached puberty and was secluded in a hut at the edge of the town during the period of her impurity. But Varuṇa sent a great storm which darkened the entire universe, and the old Cakkiliyaṉ was reluctant to go to his post. His son volunteered to take his place. There he succeeded in seducing the girl, Pŏmmiyammāḷ, after claimng her fears by revealing his original, royal birth; convinced that he was not, after all, an Untouchable, Pŏmmi embraced him as her husband and her god.

Our hero, Maturaivīraṉ, remained at his post as Pŏmmi's guardian. Secretly he brought her a wedding-chain (*tāli*) and married her in the presence of the gods. He also made her a pair of fine slippers (*mitiyaṭi*) according to the craftsmanship standards of Maturai (*maturaivelai*).

After thirty days, Pŏmmi's father sent a procession to bring his daughter back to the palace. They burned her hut and took Pŏmmi home, while the Cakkiliyar blew horns and beat drums and servant-girls waved lights to ward off the evil eye. Pŏmmaṇaṉ gave a great feast in celebration of this occasion. But that night Maturaivīraṉ longed for Pŏmmi. Taking the form of a fly, he flew past the guards and entered the palace through the eaves under the roof. Once inside, he resumed his proper form and embraced his beloved. Taking a thousand gold coins, a tent (*kūṭāram*), and the king's horse, they evaded the guards and fled together into the night.

In the morning, when Pŏmmaṇaṉ discovered that his daughter was missing, he gathered an army to pursue her. They encountered a shepherd (*āṭṭiṭaiyaṉ*) who pointed the way, and thus they soon came upon the lovers encamped in the dry bed of the Kāveri River. Pŏmmi pleaded with Maturaivīraṉ not to kill her father, but to no avail: the hero annihilated the entire army[53] and then, refusing to regard Pŏmmaṇaṉ as his father-in-law (*māmaṉ*), slew him with his sword. He returned smiling to the tent and informed Pŏmmi of her father's death; together they burned the body and performed the proper rites.

Maturaivīraṉ and his bride then moved on to Tiruccirāppaḷḷi, where they were welcomed by the king, Vijayaraṅkacŏkkaliṅkam. The king took Maturaivīraṉ into his service as a gatekeeper at the entrance to the palace, for a

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title is Nāyakkaṉ, and they may be descended from soldiers of the Nāyak kings of Vijayanagar. See Thurston, *op. cit.*, 7: 183-97. Thurston notes (p. 191) the custom whereby a Tŏṭṭiyaṉ girl upon attaining puberty is kept in a separate hut watched by a Cakkiliyaṉ; see the summary of our text, below. Stein notes that Tŏṭṭiyaṉ is a generic term for Telugu-speaking groups in Tamil Nadu: Burton Stein, "Temples in Tamil Country, 1300-1750 A.D." in Stein (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 35 n. 5.

[53]The (Muslim?) soldiers of Pŏmmaṇaṉ die with the cry *cākip calām* (p. 44).

salary of a thousand gold coins a month. The hero lived happily in the city; he dressed well, rode elephants or horses, seduced chaste wives, and worshipped the god Śrīraṅkanātar. But one day the king was told of the depredations of the wild Kaḷḷar in his kingdom: they would rob pilgrims to the shrine of Aḻakar;[54] they despoiled the peasants and brought agriculture and commerce to a standstill. The king sent Maturaivīraṉ with 5000 troops to the south to subdue the unruly Kaḷḷar.

Maturaivīraṉ, the plundering hero (*kolḷai koṇṭa vīraiyaṉ*), toured the districts south of Tiruccirāppaḷḷi, exacting tribute and service from the various local landlords and men of power (*paḷaiyakkārar*).[55] When he arrived at the banks of the Vaikai River, in the territory of Tirumalai Nāyakkar, he was summoned to the court of the latter in Maturai. He discussed with Tirumalai Nāyakkar his mission of subduing the Kaḷḷar; the ruler of Maturai kept him and his wife as honoured guests in the palace. One day the Kaḷḷar descended with their boomerang-like weapons (*vaḷai taṭi*) upon the bazaar in Maturai; as they were in the midst of robbing the merchants, the alarm reached Maturaivīraṉ. He hastened to the northern gate of the city, where he fellupon the thieves as a lion attacks a herd of elephants. The Kaḷḷars perished.

Tirumalai Nāyakkar was delighted by this victory. He sent a thousand dancing-girls (*tātiyar*) to welcome back the hero; and Maturaivīraṉ fell in love with one of them, Veḷḷaiyammāl. That night he attempted to steal her away from her station in front of the shrine of Mīṇākṣī. But the guards caught him at the gate: "A Kaḷḷar has come here in disguise," they cried. Maturaivīraṉ said nothing, for he was thinking: "The evil of stealing the chaste woman (*pattiṉi*) has borne fruit." He was brought before Tirumalai Nāyakkar, who failed to recognize him because of his disguise; he ordered him punished by having him taken to the forest, where his arm and leg were amputated.

The dancing-girl Veḷḷaiyammāḷ sought him out there and wept over him: since he had touched her, his sorrow was hers, and she would die with him. Pŏmmiyammāḷ also heard the lamentations and rushed to the forest to behold her dying husband. By now the true identity of the "thief" was known; Tirumalai Nāyakkar, stricken with remorse, prayed to the goddess Mīnākṣī to restore his hero to health. His prayer was granted; the arm and leg of Maturaivīraṉ grew back by the command of the goddess. But Maturaivīraṉ now ran to tell Tirumalai Nāyakkar of his resolve to die: life was inconstant as a bubble; he would give up his life in accordance with the fate decreed by God. With the consent of the king, his two wives, Pŏmmiyammāl and Veḷḷaiyammaḷ, entered a fire-pit and were consumed. Then Maturaivīraṉ bathed in the

[54]Presumably, Kaḷḷalakar of Tirumāliruñcolai (mentioned earlier because of his affinity with the Kaḷḷar).

[55]I delete the detailed description of his reception by these "poligars," though it may be noted in passing that these pages are an excellent source for the system of collection and service of this period in Tamil Nadu.

Pŏrrāmarai Tank and, standing at the feet of the goddess Mīnākṣī, cut his throat with a little knife. His head fell at Mīnākṣī's feet.

When, after three days, no worship had yet been offered to the dead hero, he complained to Mīnākṣī: "The people of the city are not supporting me." At her suggestion, he appeared as an Untouchable (*toṭṭi*) in a dream to Tirumalai Nāyakkar; he also prowled around the city during the night, causing havoc. In the morning, the king prostrated himself before Cŏkkar (Śiva in Maturai) and Mīnākṣī; they informed him that the trouble was due to the neglect of Maturaivīraṉ's worship. So Tirumalai Nāyakkar built a *maṇḍapa* for the hero and devoted 500 gold coins for his daily worship. Maturaiviran took possession of one of the king's servants and announced his satisfaction. Thus the worship of Maturaivīraṉ was established in Maturai. When a son was born to Tirumalai Nāyakkar, he was given the name Āṇimuttuvīraṉ in honour of the hero.

Remnant and Centre, Bandit and King

Such is the story, in its barest outline; our summary fails to convey more than the simple narrative structure, while for a Tamil audience the power of the poem must derive largely from its texture—the richly colloquial language, the boldness and immediacy of the descriptions (including the unusually frank seduction-scenes, which are moments of high narrative tension), the stylistic devices which heighten the pathos, humour, and other affective elements in the story. Among the Tamil popular narrative poems, the *Maturaivīracuvāmikatai* is one of the most deserving of translation and close annotation. Yet even in the absence of such a complete version, the above summary reveals several important themes. The following interpretation does not aim to be exhaustive but rather to suggest certain themes which are connected to our major concerns in this paper.

(1) One sees, once again, the rooted ambivalence of the guardian. Maturaivīraṉ is a gatekeeper-watchman—first of Pŏmmiyammāḷ, in his father's stead; then in the employ of the rulers of Tiruccirāppaḷḷi and Maturai; finally, of the goddess Mīnākṣī, at whose feet he stands today. Maturaivīraṉ is worshipped at the threshold of many Tamil shrines. But the full force of his ambivalence is clearly expressed in his actions: he seduces and steals the woman he is supposed to be guarding; and, as a disembodied spirit at the entrance to the Mīnākṣī shrine, he preys upon the citizens of Maturai in order to extort offerings from them. This is a guardian who is innately dangerous: one is never sure on which side of the boundary he stands—in the realm of order or of disorder, as protector or plunderer. His identity includes both roles, which seem to alternate rather unpredictably. It appears that he can be held in place, so to speak, only by constant appeasement and worship, i.e. by voluntarily giving up to him the offerings (women, gold, food, honour) which he would

otherwise forcibly take for himself. By definition a boundary-figure, he knows no real boundary himself—although he does succumb to a paralyzing consciousness of his own transgressions when he is apprehended with the ravished dancing-girl at the gate of Mīnākṣī's shrine. All in all, he recalls the symbolism of his Kaḷḷar opponents and rivals, with whom Mīnākṣī's gatekeepers quite understandably identify him.

(2) The link between divinity and outrageous heroism is again apparent. Maturaivīraṉ is a quintessential Tamil hero (*vīra*) endowed with a perilous plenitude of power which cannot but spill over the paltry limits set by society. Violence, freedom of action, a contempt for risks and dangerous consequences, a certain hardness of character, the abrogation of boundaries (including, in particular, sexual restrictions)—all these are part of the hero's nature. They also appear to justify his claim to popular admiration and, ultimately, to divinity. As the poet Kampaṉ says in another context—in describing the enormous power of Rāma's opponent and victim, Vālin—"Who does not love a hero (*vīrar*)?"[56] Maturaivīraṉ draws on these connotations of heroism in making the transition from human "bandit" to ambivalent god.[57] We may note a strikingly similar example in the case of the famous Kārtavīrya-Arjuna, the king punished by Paraśurāma for making off with his father Jamadagni's cow: Kārtavīrya, an outstanding example of the predatory robber-king, is eventually worshipped as a guardian-deity who offers protection against thieves.[58] Although some texts seek to show Kārtavīrya in a more positive light, as a righteous ruler and partial avatar of Viṣṇu, his emergence as a deity seems more closely related to his inherent ambivalence as a hero and thief.

(3) There is, however, another side to Maturaivīraṉ's divinity. It is not

[56]*Irāmāvatāram* 4.7.67.

[57]Cf. the cult of the hero-stones mentioned earlier. Many of the Teyyam stories recorded by Kurup follow a similar pattern: *op. cit.*, pp. 59-60, 66-67, 71-72, etc. A narrative sequence similar to that of the Maturaivīraṉ story occurs in several of the Tamil *noṇṭināṭakam* ("drama of a cripple") compositions: the hero is apprehended while trying to steal (usually a horse) and is maimed in punishment; he regains the use of his limb by the grace of a deity. See, for example, the *noṇṭināṭakam* of Maṉapĕrumāḷ Pulavar, or the Muslim *Cītakkātinoṇṭināṭakam*.

[58]*Mahābhārata* 3.116-117. See the discussion by Gaya-Charan Tripathi, "The Worship of Kārtavīrya-Arjuna: On the Deification of a Royal Personage in India," *JRAS*, 1979, no. 1, pp. 37-52, and the sources cited there (including a *Kārtavīryavijayacampū*); cf. *Takkayākapparaṇi* of Oṭṭakkūttar (Madras, 1945), comm. to v. 417. The Kārtavīrya myths have been extensively studied by Madeleine Biardeau, who also suggests that the name of this king may underly that of the Tamil bandit-deity Kāttavarāyaṉ (Kāttāṉ): see "Brahmanes combattants dans un mythe du sud de l 'Inde," *Adyar Library Bulletin* 31-32 (1967-68), p. 528; "La Decapitation de Reṇukā dans le mythe de Paraśurāma" in *Pratidānam* (Festschrift Kuiper, the Hague, 1968), pp. 563-72; "The Story of Arjuna Kārtavīrya without Reconstruction," *Purāṇa* 12, 2 (1970), pp. 286-303. See also J.A.B. van Buitenen in his introductions to the *Mahābhārata*, Vol. II (Chicago, 1975), pp. 193-95; Vol. III (Chicago, 1978), pp. 142-50. A detailed study of the Tamil Kāttavarāyaṉ myths, both in their own right and in the light of the Kārtavīrya materials, is greatly needed.

altogether simple to ignore the breaking of a moral barrier, not even in a society which insists that banditry is divine. Hence the moralistic note which creeps into the denouement of our poem: Maturaivīraṉ sees the evil of his ways and accepts his punishment in silence, even reimposes a punishment upon himself after his miraculous cure. But this theme probably goes much deeper. The hero's transiation to divinity requires his death in a spectacularly self-sacrificing fashion. Indeed, the entire episode of the king's intervention with the goddess and her response to his prayers seems designed to allow Maturaivīraṉ the possibility of a total, consciously willed renunciation and death. Such self-sacrifice has a double edge to it: on the one hand, it aligns the bandit hero with other "renunciatory" figures (e.g. the king, as we shall see); on the other hand, it functions as yet another power ploy, a kind of last-ditch trump card in the hands of the antinomian tragic hero. For the act of self-sacrifice creates a controlled imbalance in the cosmic reckoning; it demands recompense on a higher level, in the form of a more permanent power to extract goods or worship.[59] Like any sacrifice, it opens up a gap which must be filled from the other side—in the case of Maturaivīraṉ, through the cooperation of the goddess Mīnākṣī and her people. In this way, by choosing his death and dramatically achieving it, the hero realizes the divine potential which inheres in his *human* role. There is also a convergence here with the idea, widespread in South Indian village cults, that injustice—especially an injust or premature death—can create the conditions for the worship of the now divinely powerful victim.[60]

(4) Note the focus on the woman as the source of conflict. The abduction of Pŏmmiyammāḷ leads to the battle between Pŏmmaṇaṉ and Maturaivīraṉ and to the death of the former. The attempted rape of Vèḷḷaiyammāḷ brings about Maturaivīraṉ's punishment and eventual death. The erotic adventures of the hero both symbolize his freedom and pave the way to his ruin. The major theme of forbidden sexual union (between Untouchable male and high-caste female)—here softened by the admission of the hero's royal birth—recurs in the Kāttavarāyaṉ story and in many village myths.[61] Here is disorder in its supreme affective symbol—the violation of ihe virgin by an untouchable male, at the height of her impurity (first menses). Small wonder that the hero must

[59]See *Tamil Temple Myths*, Chapter V.

[60]See the fine discussion by Richard Brubaker, *The Ambivalent Mistress: A Study of South Indian Village Goddesses and Their Religious Meaning*, Diss., University of Chicago, 1978, pp. 86-90, 99-124. The Teyyam stories also include this type, e.g. Kurup, *op. cit.*, pp. 62-64.

[61]Brubaker, *op. cit.*, pp. 89-94, 331-59; *Kāttavarāya curvāmi kaṭai* (Madras, 1974), *passim*. Kāttavarāyaṉ lusts for Āriyamālai, the daughter of a Brahmin temple-priest (*kurukkal*); his mother, the seductive goddess Kāmākṣī, sets trials for her son before allowing him to win the girl. Like Maturaivīraṉ, Kāttavarāyaṉ undergoes a self-sacrificing death and becomes a gate-keeper-figure. Cf. G. Oppert, *On the Original Inhabitants of Bharatavarṣa or India* (Westminster, 1893), pp. 482-83. For an interpretation of the forbidden sexual union, see *Tamil Temple Myths*, pp. 176-92.

pay with his life. The prominence of this theme fits well with the dominant role of the goddess in the Maturaivīraṉ cult: he now guards the shrine which he violated by abducting the dancing-girl of Mīnākṣī. The story fits into a pervasive in Tamil myths, in which a divine protagonist dies in embracing a virgin goddess or in breaking into her sanctuary.

At the same time, however, the goddess is the source and guarantor of a transformation toward a higher unity or harmony. Mīnākṣī—or her human representative (*paṭṭiṉi*), stolen by the hero—accepts his self-sacrifice and thereby effects his transition from the bandit-servant of the king to a divinity worshipped by the king. In other words, the conflict centered on the woman is also in some sense resolved or mediated by the woman, with the help, of course, of the main male figures (the king and Maturaivīraṉ). Dennis Hudson has written cogently of this role of the woman in Tamil myths as the focal point of a unity or balance which is riddled with tension, antagonism, and rivalry.[62] In order to appreciate this structure in our story, we must now return to one of the basic relations mentioned earlier.

(5) This is the relation between bandit and king. Maturaivīraṉ is royal by birth, but he is raised by Untouchables, while his career closely resembles that of a Kaḷḷar watchman-thief. Much depends here on the interpretation one gives to the theme of the exiled prince. To begin with, this is, of course, a common folklore motif (the prince brought up in humble surroundings, usually in ignorance of his true birth).[63] The theme has even been adopted by Indian philosophical schools as a metaphor for the original, forgotten divinity of the soul: like the king's son (*rājaputravat*) exiled from the capital and brought up among wild tribes and outcasts, the *puruṣa* lives in the exile of *saṁsāra* and is unaware of its true nature.[64] There are other possibilities for interpreting the theme: Blackburn sees here a process of "puranization" by which an original Untouchable hero, popular among lower castes and expressing their protest, was made palatable to the Brahmins.[65] Maturaivīraṉ's royal birth would then be a later addition grafted on to the original story and legitimizing it in the eyes of the higher castes, the central motif of the illicit sexual union having in this way been neatly emptied of its horror. Blackburn points out other "puranic" features of the text and cites parallel instances of popular texts "revised" according to high-caste pressures. Nevertheless, the relation which is established by our text through the use of this theme—the king's son who acts for all the world like the Untouchables who reared him—is by

[62]Dennis Hudson, "Śiva, Mīnākṣī, Viṣṇu—Reflections on a Popular Myth in Madurai" in Stein (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 107-18. Cf. J.C. Heesterman, "Kauṭalya and the Ancient Indian State," *Wiener Zeitschrift fur die Kunde Les Süd-und Ostasiens* 15 (1971), pp. 12-15.

[63]Stith Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk Literature* (Copenhagen, 1955-58), motifs p. 31, p. 35, H. 41.5. Cf. the *Sippurei Maasiyot* of Rabbi Nahman of Bratzlav, story 11.

[64]See H. Zimmer, *Philosophies of India* (Princeton, 1969), pp. 308-09.

[65]Blackburn, "Folk Hero," pp. 143-44.

no means devoid of meaning. Rather, we seem to have here a structural relation no less "loaded" with significance than the celebrated conjuction of Brahmins and Untouchables.[66]

Without seeking to be deliberately paradoxical, I suggest that we may formulate the relation King-Untouchable/bandit under three headings—opposition, identity, and complementarity. Let us take them one by one.

Opposition is much the easiest and requires little comment. In India as in the West, the king opposes bandits as order struggles against disorder. Even if, as we have seen, the bandit has a recognized place in the social scheme, the king will attempt to contain him. Thus, in our text, we find the contest between the Kaḷḷar raiders and the forces or order embodied in Maturaivīraṉ as representative of the rulers of Tiruccirāppaḷḷi and Maturai. On the other hand, Maturaivīraṉ is himself the bandit who attempts to steal a woman and is punished accordingly by the king. In caste terms, the king is high, the bandit low (even an Outcaste); there is a clear polarization between them.

Identity simultaneously permeates their relationship. One can observe this in many ways—the royal birth of our bandit-hero; the royal titles which the text constantly gives him; the attributes he shares with the king, notably the role of protection which is the central task of the ruler[67] and the basic reliance on brute force. Let us recall the comparison of kings and robbers as stated by Coranātha-Viṣṇu in Śrīvaikuṇṭam: both take money by force.[68] Kings and bandits share the use, and the misuse, of power. It is in this light that we see Maturaivīraṉ high-handedly exacting tribute from the "poligars" south of Tiruccirāppaḷḷi; theoretically, he represents that city's king, but in reality he seems to be acting for himself. Is he king or bandit here? Both, it would seem, for the two are intertwined. There is something royal in the bandit— as one learns from the tradition of royal descent kept alive by the Kaḷḷar, Maravar. and Akampaṭiyar. There is also a great deal of the bandit in the king. We might say that the bandit gives expression to the real ambivalence of power; he "lives through" the latent violence, the spontaneity and instability, the recurring impurity which theory attempts to deny the ideal king. Divinity also lurks in both figures: we have seen how it is attached to the bandit, while the king claims it by virtue of his role, irrespective of his original caste—*nāviṣṇuḥ-pṛthivīpatiḥ* there is no king who is not divine.[69]

[66]See the discussion in my "The Enemy Within." Note that even *after* Maturaivīraṉ's death, he takes the form of an Untouchable when he appears in Tirumalai Nāyakkar's dream.

[67] *Yājñavalkya* 1.119; *Manu* 7.3.

[68]See n. 9 above. *Tirukkural* 552 equates the king who asks for money from his people with the bandit who robs wayfarers. And cf. *Cīvakacintāmaṇi* of Tiruttakatevar, v. 741, and the discussion of this verse by U. Ve. Cāminātaiyar, *Niṉaivu maṉcari* II (Madras, 1953), pp. 106-113.

[69]V. Raghavan, "Variety and Integration in the Pattern of Indian Culture," *Far Eastern Quarterly* 15 (1956), p. 499; cf. J.C. Heesterman, "The Conundrum of the King's Authority" in J.F. Richards (ed.), *Kingship Authority in South Asia* (Madison, 1978).

If so much is shared, in what ways are the two figures distinct? The relations of opposition and identity issue into *complementary* symbolic roles. On a superficial level, one can see this complementarity in the professed relation of hierarchy and service: Maturaivīraṉ claims to be the servant of the king (Pŏmmaṇaṉ, Vijayarańkacŏkkaliṅkam, Tirumalai Nāyakkar), from whom he derives his authority; the king, for his part, receives the beṅefits of service (suppression of the Kaḷḷar; a share in the tribute exacted from local landlords). Yet we have seen how readily the servant merges with the rival; the hero's subordination to the king is always problematic, always in danger of dissolving into equality and opposition. Complementarity is nevertheless affirmed in subtler ways. We might formulate this relation as expressive of two distinct notions of transcendence which reveal the higher and lower limits of the society. The king, who is so closely identified with the community that his freedom of action is seriously impaired,[70] desperately seeks a transcendent source for his authority; he finds it, on the one hand, in his relation with the Brahmins, and, on the other, in imitating the renunciatory aspects of the Brahmins himself. This association of the king with renunciation is apparent already in Kauṭalya[71] and may go back to the king's identity as the *dīkṣita* committed to ascetic practices;[72] it reappears in the epic figures, e.g. Yudhiṣṭhira who longs for the freedom of release, and in the myths of the "first kings" who renounced the world and their kingdoms with it.[73] We should note that this aspect of the king has an echo in Maturaivīraṉ's self-sacrificing death, which is even framed by the language of *māyā* and *mokṣa*; again the king and the bandit have coalesced. In general, however, the bandit represents the transcendence associated with disorder and impurity. His true home is the dangerous wilderness which threatens to engulf the settled world of city and village but which also imparts vitality to that world. The difficulty here is that these two kinds of transcendence tend to merge with one another; the upper and lower limits are uncannily close.[74] The freedom and wholeness of release are theoretically opposed to but in reality not far removed from the wild breaking down of barriers associated with the disorderly bandit or thief.

The relation we are describing could be formulated in the language of Indian symbols as the classical tension between the centre and the remnant or remainder. The centre, basically pure, linked by the *axis mundi* with the transcendent worlds above and below, integrates the scattered segments into a unified whole; the centre contains the totality while it holds conflicting forces

[70] *Ibid*; see also J. C. Heesterman, "Power and Authority in Indian Tradition" in R.J. Moore (ed.), *Tradition and Politics in South Asia* (Delhi, 1979), pp. 60-85.

[71] *Arthaśāstra* 1.6; cf. Heesterman, "Kauṭalya," p. 9; *Manu* 7.44-51.

[72] Heesterman, "Conundrum."

[73] *Mahābhārata* 12.59.87ff. One thinks also of Daśaratha's eagerness for renunciation, echoed by Rāma: Kampaṉ, *Irāmāvataram* 2.1.16-31, 2.3.293-5.

[74] See "The Enemy Within" for a fuller discussion of this fusion.

in balanced suspension. In Hindu mythology, this concept is often represented by the god Viṣṇu. The remnant, on the other hand, is impure and dynamic; as leavings, it can only be dangerously impure, yet it constitutes the seed of a new birth. Śiva, or his antecedent Rudra, the sacrificial butcher, is the god of the remnant. Centre and remnant stand apart, opposed, yet each partakes of the other's nature—the centre is also, in a sense, left over or set apart from all other points, while the remnant has the essential wholeness of the centre, the possibility of generating an entire universe. Each can easily become the other.[75]

The same logic underlies the close affinity between bandit and king. The king is identified with the center, the balancing-point of conflict and tension; as we have seen, he is equated with the whole community. The bandit is the remnant which is both excluded and somehow incorporated, even sought after and worshipped as divine. Both identities, moreover, interpenetrate and merge. One wonders if this kind of complexity is not, indeed, characteristic of symbolic identities in India generally. Opposite poles are joined in tense amalgams felt to constitute a unity, and the result is an unending oscillation, an alternation of contending phases, or a simultaneous multiplicity of meanings. One thinks, for example, of the cosmic Puruṣa, at once officiant, victim, and recipient of the sacrifice;[76] or of Śiva, swinging madly from violent lust to violent asceticism; or of the Hindu androgyne, in which masculine and feminine identities are merged in creative conflict.[77] The concept of the king seems no less complex than these examples. We may also seek here an explanation of what could be called the "neurotic" side of South Indian kingship, i.e. the compulsive righteousness and responsibility demanded of the ideal king. The king bears a unique responsibility for the rule of *dharma* in his kingdom; any infraction of the rules—which may be revealed by an untimely death, disease, lack of rainfall, or a variety of other disasters which can hardly have been rare in any historical Indian kingdom—is immediately laid at his door. Hence the appallingly severe standards of personal conduct applied to the king. Rāma stands out as the classic exemplar of this ideal carried to its farthest

[75]See D. Shulman, "The Green Goddess of Tirumullaivāyil," *East and West*, in press. Both centre and remnant have important corresponding elements in the Brahminical sacrificial system. Similarly, the common identification of Śiva and Viṣṇu as aspects or representatives of one another in puranic texts is not always a result of sectarian "one-upmanship" but may reflect an underlying reality of shared identities.

[76]RV 10.90; cf. the verse which makes the gods both celebrants and recipients of the sacrifice; RV 10.164.50; Heesterman, "Conundrum," at n. 19.

[77]Cf. D. Shulman, "Imperfect Paradise: Some Uses of the Androgyne," to appear in a volume edited by R. Brubaker on sexuality and religion in India. On "correlative opposites" as "essential relationships" in Hindu mythology, see Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, *Asceticism and Eroticism in the Mythology of Śiva* (Oxford, 1973), p. 34. Opposites may thus polarize precisely because of their inherent proximity and attraction—a principle systematically exploited by Hindu Tantric schools,

limits, for example in his banishment of Sītā in response to his citizens' slanderous gossip about her. The Sanskrit poet Bhavabhuti shows, in a pathos-laden scene, Rāma's agony over what he knows to be Sītā's totally unmerited punishment.[78] Apparently, Rāma has no real choice: he must preserve a state of utter blamelessness, leaving no room for error or reproach. But it is perhaps significant that, having determined to exile Sītā, our ideal ruler falls into a paroxysm of *self*-blame and *self*-hatred—he calls himself a horrifying monster, a poisonous tree, a criminal, even an Untouchable Caṇḍāla. In this rather startling scene, the ruler's unflinching, self-abnegating righteousness ironically brings out his darker aspect or, perhaps, what may be seen as the tragic side of dharmic kingship; the personal cost of too much *dharma* is a kind of evil. More generally, one senses here a profound ambivalence based on the reality of kingship. Put somewhat differently, the king must hold relentlessly to a severe ideal of righteousness lest he stand revealed in his inner nature as no better than the bandit whom he knows to be his alter ego.

The Kingdom of Disorder

What can we infer about a social order conceived along these lines? First, we must note the extent to which the South Indian state incorporates disorder. The state may, in fact, be said to be founded on the principle of inherent internal conflict. Far from excluding violence and disruption, the state organizes itself around them. Disorder is an integral constituent of the existing order: we find castes of dacoits given a recognized place, both geographically and socially; the king's servants—whether guards or tax-collectors, or combinations of such roles—are bandits. One is reminded here of Augustine's famous description of the state as "a great robber-band—for robber-bands, what are they but little states?"[79] What is striking about the South Indian case is the way this concept is integrated and expressed on the symbolic level, as it is in social reality. Thus the European description of the bandit as an "outlaw," with both positive and negative connotations, seems hardly to apply to South India, where bandits are, if anything, "inlaws"—however troublesome or dangerous they may be for any given kingdom.[80] Despite the threat he poses to settled life, the bandit is no less a part of the social order than is his mirror-image, the king. He can be controlled only to the extent that he is allowed to fulfil his normal role, which will bring him a tangible, but of course unspecified, portion of wealth. He is a representative of the chaotic "outside" brought

[78] *Uttararāmacarita*, Act I (from verse 40 onwards).

[79] Cited by P. Spear, *Twilight of the Mughuls: Studies in Late Mughul Delhi* (Cambridge, 1951), p. 126. R.E. Frykenberg has applied the image of the robber-band to South Indian society generally: "Traditional Processes of Power in South India: An Historical Analysis of Local Influence," *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 1, n. 2 (1963), pp. 122-42.

[80] I am indebted to Henry Abramowitz for this formulation.

into the heart of the traditional order as one of its defining elements; nor is he alone in his unruly role. Rather, the bandit takes his place in a wider series of seemingly antinomian social types, among whom we may even find, at times, the king, the central embodiment of "inner" order. Naturally, this makes for a highly fragmented, internally divided polity. This is, indeed, what one finds in analyses of various South Indian systems: thus Dennis Hudson describes Tamil kinship patterns in terms of a "tension-ridden unity" of rival, interdependent lineages;[81] Peter Claus portrays Tulu society as organized around servitude, on the one hand, and fierce antagonisms and rivalry on the other;[82] Richard Brubaker, discussing South Indian village cults, speaks of a "dialectic of attraction and repulsion" between the forces of order and disorder, in this case the goddess and the demons who show both an "extreme polarization" and a "hidden affinity."[83] Classical North Indian texts, from the *Arthaśāstra* on, reveal a similar consciousness of the strife-ridden nature of the political order, as can be seen, for example, by the role given to the enemy or rival as one of the constituent elements of the polity—just as the South Indian bandit is seen as necessary to the kingdom's structure.[84]

Secondly, a rooted ambivalence attaches to central figures in the social order, notably the Brahmin, whom we cannot discuss here, but also, as we have seen, the king. From behind the mask of the perfect monarch, rigidly applying the dharmic rules, the bandit-rival stares out at us. Bandit and king are bound together in the kind of intimate conflict that seems to be a recurrent feature of symbolic identities in South India. This ambivalence within the individual *persona* corresponds to the basic ambivalence of the social order itself, which has incorporated its own antithesis.[85]

Finally, the functional equivalents of these views can be seen in the diffusion of power and the basic weakness of the centre. The king is less a source of compelling power and creative direction of affairs than the focus of a delicate balance, the embodiment of the community's consensus, which finds expression in his powers of arbitration.[86] This consensus is, moreover, primarily achieved

[81]Hudson, "Śiva, Viṣṇu, Mīnākṣī," p. 115.

[82]Peter J. Claus, "Oral Traditions, Royal Cults and Materials for a Reconsideration of the Caste System in South India," *Journal of Indian Folkl ristics* 1 (1979), pp. 18-21.

[83]Brubaker, *op. cit.*, p. 292.

[84]See *Arthaśāstra* 6.2.13-40.

[85]Brubaker, *op. cit.*, discusses ambivalence as an inherent feature—perhaps an organizing principle—of South Indian village cults; it would seem to be an essential characteristic of South Indian symbolic systems generally.

[86]See Heesterman, "Conundrum," Arjun Appadurai and Carol Appadurai Breckenridge, "The South Indian Temple: Authority, Honour, and Redistribution," *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, n.s. 10 (1976), pp. 187-211, where the king's role, at least *vis-a-vis* the temple and the conflicts centred upon it, is shown to be not legislative but *administrative*. On the symbolic plane, one could go so far as to question the very existence of a single centre: each point can become in turn the centre in relation to other points; every ruler is a universal monarch, each court the *sabhā* of Indra, every shrine a Kailāsa. But this is the subject of a separate study.

through conflict. The king's role is inherently agonistic, in that it pits him against an endless series of potential rivals and replacements, each with his own claim to legitimacy and equal power. For his part, the king is forced to prove his own claim again and again, in various fields of activity—on the battlefield, in expeditions of plunder, in his court, in the temple, in the sacrificial arena; his "coronation" is always less of a defined moment marking a real beginning than a temporary, symbolic triumph over the forces arrayed against him, a triumph which, indeed, has to be periodically renewed. Even if a strong king manages to entrench his position enough to secure a steady flow of resources, either through conquest or collection, he seems compelled always to disperse these same resources (in gifts to Brahmins, shrines, sectarian leaders, and other figures,[87] or in buying off his rivals) in order to enhance his own authority. The enormous corpus of South Indian inscriptions bears eloquent testimony to this presistent need of the ruler to divest himself of resources. The more general trend is, in any case, to leave collection of the king's share in the hands of the king's bandit-like servants and rivals—as in the case of Maturaivīraṉ. In short, at no point does the centre seem capable of accumulating an enduring surplus and thus of shoring up its position vis-á-vis the web of interlocking rivalries within which the king is caught. Power is concentrated only in momentary spurts in the hands of the king; he himself often promotes its diffusion throughout the system. Why this should be so, or rather should have remained so, is a problem requiring further analysis; the relation of the king and the Brahmin is no doubt crucial here, as is, perhaps, the seemingly fundamental attack on the ruler's legitimacy. The symbolism of the South Indian bandit is but one expression of this persistent pattern.

[87]See Arjun Appadurai, "Kings, Sects and Temples in South India, 1350-1700 A.D." in Stein (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 47-73; George W. Spencer, "Religious Networks and Royal Influence in Eleventh Century South India," *JESHO* 12, 1 (1969), pp. 42-56.