

SANTI'S *LILA*: GOD-BEARING IN INDIA

SANTI'S *LILA*: GOD-BEARING IN INDIA

By

RICHARD DONALD MACPHAIL, M.A.

A Thesis

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies

in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements

for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

McMaster University

June, 1995

(c) Copyright by Richard Donald MacPhail, June, 1995

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY (1995)
(Religious Studies)

McMaster University
Hamilton, Ontario

TITLE: Santi's *Lila*: God-bearing in India

AUTHOR: Richard Donald MacPhail

B.A. (University of Saskatchewan)

M.A. (University of Madras)

M.A. (McMaster University)

SUPERVISION COMMITTEE: Dr. Paul Younger
Dr. David Kinsley
Dr. Ellen Badone

NUMBER OF PAGES: xiii, 472

FOR AMIT

Abstract

This study examines the construction of the sacred in a person, Maryamma of Vadiyakkadu, and the symbolic resources which constitute her identity as a Marian seer in India. It examines how sacred selfhood has been personally and socially initiated, constructed, challenged, reconstructed, dramatized and revalued. The origins of the symbolic resources and transitions involved in these processes are the presence of a nearby major Marian pilgrimage shrine, the existential circumstances of the seer herself, internal dynamics among the variety of adherents who have formed a cult following around her, and external pressures which have come to bear on her and on her disciples.

The study shows how the symbol of the Virgin Mary is used by Tamil Catholics and how it accommodates and is assimilated by non-Catholics. Called *Amma*, or Mother, the Virgin Mary is at the heart of Maryamma's cult. She is the source of healing and the context for meaning in cult members' lives. Speaking in Tamil, the Virgin displays distinctively Indian characteristics and many of her devotees are non-Christians. *Amma* has chastised Roman Catholic Church authorities in her messages, and although the Church has inderdicted the sacraments at the cult's shrine, its priests continue to celebrate them.

There is a thinly veiled claim to the identity of Maryamma with *Amma* herself in the recounting of her miracles, and this identification is only the hub around which are connected more profound theological claims concerning privileged intimations of the premillennial Second Coming of Christ.

Maryamma's personal visionary charisma, her imaginative rendering and interpretation of miracles, and the theologically astute correctives of a popular Jesuit and other priests, have

generated a symbolic resource at Vadiyakkadu which promises to pose a continuing challenge to the authority of the Roman Catholic Church in India. [*Arokkiya Mada*, caste, charismatic, Christian, Coromandel, ethnography, field work, goddess, Hindu, Kaveri, Our Lady, possession, subaltern, syncretism, Tanjavur (Tanjore), thaumaturgy, Velanganni]

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank Fr. A. Arockiasamy of *Velanganni Kuraloli*, Tanjavur, my initial contact and correspondent. Without his generous communications, this study would never have begun. His constant good humour was a joy to me but all his concerted, priestly, efforts to guard me against the moral depravity of observing erotic *karagattam* dancing at Narttamalai festival, Pudukkottai were, alas, to no avail.

The following people deserve special mention: Mr. Antony Thomas Rowe, a beggar at Velanganni, my first informant; Mr. V. S. Arokkiyasamy of Velanganni, for his patient interest and intimate knowledge of the village, its church, and its festival; Fr. Maria Arokiam of Mandalakkottai for his openness and hospitality; Fr. A. S. Antonysamy of the Pondichery Multipurpose Social Service Society, who rescued my wife, Heather, and myself in a crisis; Mr. M. A. Arokkiyasami and his wife and children, of Velanganni, who gave me reliable, if often frustrating, fellowship; Fr. Anand Amaladass, sj, of *Satya Nilayam*, Madras, for consenting to be my research guide in India; Rector M. M. Sammanasu and his many assistants and colleagues at Velanganni Shrine; the curator of the Madras-Mylapore Diocesan Archive, Fr. Vijaykiran, and the curators of the Madurai Province Jesuit Archives, Shembaganur, Kodaikanal, and the Library of the Jesuit Philosophate, *Satya Nilayam*, Madras.

I am grateful to the Shastri Indo-Canadian Institute for a 1991-92 Junior Research Fellowship which supported twelve of the eighteen months of my field research. The School of Graduate Studies, McMaster University, supported my studies with an annual Graduate Scholarship and transportation for a second field trip in 1993.

My appreciation is extended to my advisors, Dr. Paul Younger, Dr. David Kinsley, and Dr. Ellen Badone, each of whom

contributed in a special way to the completion of this work.

As ever, my parents, Archie and Beth MacPhail deserve special thanks for their enduring moral support.

My deepest debt is to my wife, Heather, the best multilingual interpreter and fieldwork assistant anyone could hope for. We met in the course of my research. Her enthusiasm for my project sustained me. Her endurance on long motorcycle trips under the south Indian summer sun made me proud, and her forbearance through the writing of this dissertation is admired with gratitude. This work is dedicated to our son, Amit, who was not favoured to know the pains and joys of birth and life, and whose name means "incommensurable".

Format of Citations and Notes

Intratextual citations refer the reader to the "Resources" section where full publication data of the sources may be found. They take the form: (MacPhail 1988: 149) i.e., Author's surname, Year of publication: Page number.

Interviews are cited similarly: (Mary 1993.06.14) i.e., Informant's surname followed by the Year, Month, and Day of the interview.

Cross-references to sections of the dissertation, which indicate the the chapter, and up to three levels of subdivision, take the forms: (2.3.1.4; 5.1; 7.7.10).

Substantive notes, arranged by chapter with a separate series for each, are located between "Appendices" and the "Resources". They are indicated by serial superscript in the text.

Transliteration

The Tamil Alphabet, as Used in this Work

Vowels:		Consonants:	
அ - a -->	ஆ - ā	க - k/g -->	ங - ṅ
இ - i -->	ஈ - ī	ச - c/s -->	ஞ - ṇ
உ - u -->	ஊ - ū	ட - ṭ/d -->	ண் - ṇ
எ - e -->	ஏ - ē	த - t/d -->	ந - n
ஐ - ai		ப - p/b -->	ம - m
ஓ - o -->	ஔ - ō	ய - y	ழ - ḷ
ஔ - au		ர - r	ல - ḷ
ஃ - k		ல - l	ர - ṛ
		வ - v	ன - ṇ

Standard Transcription and Pronunciation of Tamil

The standard Roman orthography with diacritical marks developed for transliteration of Tamil by Madras University (*Tamil Lexicon* [1924-36]) precisely represents written Tamil. Spoken Tamil is not precisely nor consistently represented by its native orthography. The sound of a written character need to be construed in reading from its relations with other characters.

The Tamil characters which represent single stops (k, c, ṭ, t, p, ṛ) also represent the voiced series (g, j, ḍ, d, b). Tamil orthography includes nasals (ṅ, ṇ, ṇ, n, m, ṇ), but there is no aspirate set, voiced or unvoiced (kh-gh, ch-jh, ṭh-dh, th-dh, ph-bh), as in Sanskrit. A nasal preceding a single unvoiced stop converts it to a voiced stop ("aṅka" becomes "aṅga", "aṅca" - "aṅja", "aṅṭa" - "aṅḍa", "anta" - "anda", and "ampa" - "amba". Alveolar "ṇ" and "ṛ", pronounced against the ridge behind the upper teeth, combined as "ṇṛ", are pronounced "ndr" (eg. "hundred"), and "ṛṛ" as "ttr" (eg. "hat-tree").

Tamil "l" is dental, the tongue touching the teeth, "ḷ" is retroflexed, the tongue touching the soft palate, and "ḷ" is a retroflexed continuant produced much like an American untrilled "r", as in "practice".

Tamil has both long "ō, ē" and short "o, e" but only short diphthongs "ai" and "au" (eg. "kite" and "doubt". Where Sanskrit terms appear, their long "o", "e", "ai" and "au" are not indicated by diacritics.

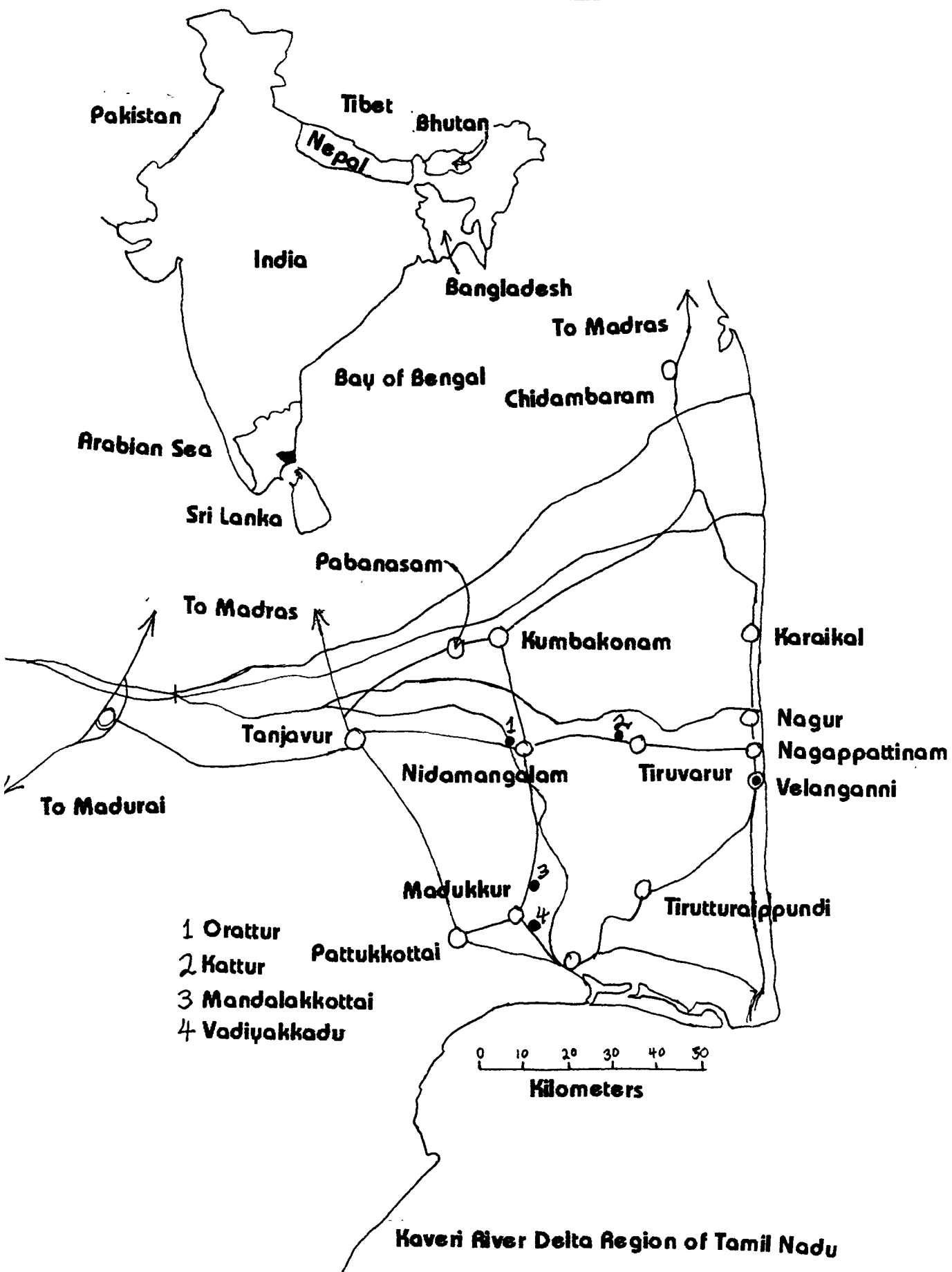
Tamil has attempted to represent adopted words with its own orthography. Thus, the Tamil "c" represents Sansrit "s", "ś", and "ṣ", indiscriminately. In initial position "c" may either retain its own sound (eg. "charm") or become a fricative, "s".

Transliteration in this Study

In the absence of any standard transliteration, popular Roman orthographies developed, based on the colonial powers' usages and sound values. These spellings continue in use in English publications in India. For most English readers, Indian and non-Indian, the *Lexicon* spellings are not intuitive. I prefer a system which better represents Tamil sounds- the voiced stops, fricatives, and alveolars - and which is more intuitive for English readers. Thus, "śānti", the Sanskrit name of our protagonist, becomes "cānti" in Tamil. Since this might be taken for an initial "k", I have used a dental fricative "s", which accurately represents the actual Tamil value. I have represented both Sanskrit "s" and "ś" as "s", and "ṣ" as "sh".

A variety of casual spellings derived from English phonology have come into use in India to represent personal and place names. As my sources would wish, I have used their own spellings to represent personal names. My transliteration has been used for names I have heard spoken but have not seen written. In the case of Velanganni (Vailankanni, Vailangunni, Velangunny, etc.), I have settled on a single spelling.

For ease of reading, diacritical marks are not used in the text. An index of Tamil and Sanskrit terms, with standard Roman transliterations, may be found in the Appendix.



CONTENTS

Dedication	iii
Abstract	iv
Acknowledgements	vi
Format of Citations and Notes.	viii
Transliteration.	ix
Map of Kaveri River Delta Region of Tamil Nadu	xi
Table of Contents.	xii
0.0 Introduction	1
0.1 Program of the Dissertation.	2
0.2 Discourses, Representation, and the Narrative Form of this Study	9
1.0 Context of the Study: Geography, Society and Religion	19
1.1 Geographical and Social Contexts	19
1.2 Cultural and Hindu Religious Contexts.	24
1.3 Christian Context.	33
1.4 Veneration of the Saints	37
1.5 Keys to Understanding the Indian Virgin Mary . .	40
1.6 Velanganni Shrine - Location, Origin and Feast .	41
1.7 Velanganni as a Pilgrimage Destination	69
1.8 Maryamma, Velanganni, and the <i>Amma</i> Cult.	75
2.0 Introduction to Maryamma's Life.	80
2.1 Images	80
2.2 Beginning Research	83
2.3 Orientation to the Task.	84
2.4 Santi's Early Life - The Third Daughter.	85
2.5 Institutionalization	90
2.6 End of Seclusion, Misery, and Escape from Orattur	97
2.7 New Afflictions, New Popularity.	99
2.8 I First Learn of Maryamma.	101
2.9 Consolidation, Resurrection, and Response to the Church.	108
2.10 Special Times, Specialists, Miraculous Signs . .	113
3.0 Truth-Claims of Maryamma's Cult.	119
3.1 Problems Within and Among the Sources.	119
3.2 Kanakambujam's Story	124
3.3 Ramamani's Story	127
3.4 The View from Orattur.	129
3.5 Forced Solutions, New Contexts	144
3.6 Spreading the Net for Sources in Tanjavur. . . .	145
3.7 Meeting Viraiyan's Family.	154
3.8 Summary - Faith, Tensions, Credibility	170

4.0	<i>Amma</i> Cult Insiders	177
4.1	Josephine Thomas' Tales.	178
4.2	Defending Our Ground at Vadiyakkadu.	195
4.3	A "First-hand" Look at Moses' Resurrection	203
4.4	Sr. Jacinta, osm	207
4.5	Elsamma of Palaiyaputtur	216
4.6	A Very Special Child	226
4.7	Fr. Kulandairaj - A Separate Agenda?	239
4.8	Summing Up	247
5.0	Disaffection	249
5.1	Josephine's Hope, and a Sense of Broken Trust.	250
5.2	Balraj Rages - Faith Tested, and Hopes Dashed.	264
5.3	Two Faces of Disaffection.	292
5.4	Summing Up Contested Events.	297
6.0	Goddesses, Saints, and Apparitions	301
6.1	Spirit Possession and Goddess Religion	302
6.2	The Goddess' Mouth	305
6.3	An Unusual Hierophany.	306
6.4	Explaining Away the Most Important Thing	308
6.5	Was Santi Ever "Really" Possessed?	311
6.6	Divine Competition	314
6.7	Some Comparisons in Constructing the Sacred.	315
6.8	Faith and Order on the Margins of the Catholic Church	337
7.0	"The Web of Time Entangles and Enslaves": Conclusion	349
7.1	Sacred Personae and Private Motives.	350
7.2	The Construction of Maryamma's Holiness.	353
7.3	Contributions of this Study.	386
7.4	The Significance of the <i>Amma</i> Cult for Catholicism in India and Beyond.	390
	Appendices	393
	Chronology	393
	Identification of Characters, Dates of Interviews.	400
	Genealogy of Maryamma and <i>Aiya</i>	408
	Vocabulary	409
	Illustrations	417
	Notes (by chapter)	424
	Resources.	448
	Manuscript Sources	448
	Published Sources.	448
	Interviews and Personal Communications	468

Introduction

This study examines the construction of the sacred in an incipient, but symbolically potent, Indian apparitional healing cult associated with the Virgin Mary located in a rural area of east central Tamil Nadu, in the south-east of India, near the coast of the Bay of Bengal. The cult's principals and many of its followers are drawn from among devotees of a nearby major Marian pilgrimage center, Velanganni Basilica. This shrine, which attracts more than four million pilgrims annually, exhibits many unusual innovations in Catholic worship adapted to Indian patterns, has defined the general devotional tone of the cult, and has supplied its central symbol, the Virgin Mary, known at Velanganni as "*Arokkiya Mada*", Our Lady of Good Health.

Among the features which immediately distinguish the shrine from Marian devotions in Euro-American contexts are its Hindu-Catholic syncretic features. The faithful of this cult on the margin of the Velanganni Shrine refer to the Virgin as *Amma*, "Mother". For ease of reference I shall simply call her devotees and their religious orientation the "*Amma* cult".¹ This cult diverges further than the shrine from Western models of Marian devotion by displaying additional innovations in the portrayal and meaning of Mary, while in recent years it has shown a tendency to express characteristics peculiar to conservative Catholicism.

In terms of the Turners' classification of pilgrimages, each of these two religious phenomena exhibits traits of both the modern and archaic types. Velanganni Shrine inclines toward the "modern" type, characterized by fervent piety in response to miracles and rejection of modern values, while ambivalently adopting and instrumentally using modern technologies for its own purposes. The *Amma* cult leans toward the "archaic" paradigm, although it represents not the diachronic syncretism of Turners'

model, but a synchronic syncretism (Turner and Turner 1978: 17-19).

The cultural origins of the *Amma* cult lie in a complex blending of a contemporary Marian apparition on the Catholic side, and contemporary phenomena which resemble possession states commonly associated with Tamil *ammans* and *peys* on the Hindu side. The *Amma* cult is intimate and its symbolism is highly personalized through the special relations of the group's leader and seer, originally called Santi and later known as "Maryamma", with the Virgin. A new millennial vision is emerging from their continuing mutual relationship.

The events, religious ideas and myths, tensions and contests for control discussed here are set against two backgrounds - a characteristically Tamil religious context which valorizes divinity as feminine and a conservative Roman Catholic context, set in the Tamil cultural scene, which has historically emphasized Mary's motherly and cosmic roles. These two contexts coalesce around a distinctively Indian expression of Marian devotion in the person of *Arokkiya Mada*. This advocacy, or specific, named presence of the Virgin Mary, is understood by Tamil Catholics to be an indigenous one, localized at Velanganni Shrine, which originated in a series of sixteenth and seventeenth century apparitions.

0.1 Program of the Dissertation

This study is about religious belief, but not about religious truth. It is about religious events and truth-claims, and contests for control of their meanings. It is about constructing a personal and social identity through religious narratives, and about repairing and renovating these narratives while enhancing and preserving the construct. The study alternates between a descriptive, phenomenological treatment, and reflexive and analytical treatments of its material while exploring informants' problems of interpretation. My own struggles while observing and inscribing it will also be evident. I attempt to

chart domains of competing discourse about meaning, identity, and social power by focussing on the flexible discourses generated by the faithful as they encounter and alter a vision of sacred reality through time (Eade and Sallnow 1991).

The thesis advanced is as follows: Sacred personhood is represented and constructed through cult principals' narratives which are edited by them in response to emergent contingencies to enhance in fact or style the desired sacred reputation. Implicit in their narratives is the problem of how to reconfigure a publicly contested identity in strategic respects without undermining its perceived continuity, consistency, and integrity. In this process of reductive construction, the static, framed and reified product, rather than the process itself seen in its entirety, revealing all its actual shifts and details diachronically, becomes the basis of a polyvocal, or polyvalent, symbol which lends itself ideally to the predication of religious claims. I show how this process has altered, and is continuing to alter, the style of devotions and the premises of fact on which the *Amma* cult operates.

As this study examines symbols of the sacred other, the sacred self, and the sacred community, its concern is primarily with public meanings and how symbols have been borrowed for their construction - especially of the public identities of Maryamma, her holy child *Aiya*, and of cult allegiance to them. Complementary to this process is the establishment of symbolic limits or boundaries between the identities being created and the source of their formative symbols, an individuation similar to the socialization of children (Pandian 1991: 4). Taking place in the historical present of 1991-93, the study is mainly about followers, rather than about Maryamma, the charismatic *Amma* cult leader herself, although it must begin with her story. I ask these questions: From what personal circumstances and resources did the *Amma* cult begin? What were the social responses to Maryamma's psychological resolution? In what ways have supporters modified

the course and meaning of the cult's development by their personal needs? How has Maryamma used her repertoire of symbolic resources to respond to external exigencies, and how has she expanded it?

Throughout the study it will be apparent that some of those involved with the cult are straddling two credibilities, two ways of seeing events. Josephine Thomas and A. Balraj, for example, are torn between their desires for what the cult revelations might ultimately mean and their ambivalent relations with cult leaders. Some of the priests who serve the cult must divide their loyalties between it and their Church.

The trajectory of Maryamma's sacred career resembles those of the women discussed by Obeyesekere (1981). He shows how socially marginalized and disempowered female subjects personalize a public symbol in Sinhala culture - matted hair - by investing it with experiential import through possession states in such a way that it addresses their own personal anguish and empowers them to assume a positive stance toward their social world.² Although Maryamma seems to have no such local models for her own development, similar processes appear to be at work, with similar effects, in terms of her personal reaffirmation and social validation through her "personalization" of the public symbol of the Virgin Mary. My concern is not, however, so much with Maryamma's psychological transformations as with symbolic boundaries, symbol borrowing, and social competition for the construction of meaning. Obeyesekere, in contrast, accounts for the construction of sacral personhood psychoanalytically through the "psychogenetic" movement originating in individual psychic states.

Obeyesekere uses a psychological model to account for the origin of the symbols and identities he studies, but is cautious about its limitations. He argues that some private experiences are so complex and painful that persons can only express and represent them indirectly through symbol formation (1981: 33). A movement away from psychic disorder which is manageable in no other way,

symbol formation is thus a healing process. "Complex personal experiences are crystallized into the (public) symbol" (1981: 13), writes Obeyesekere, who sees symbols originating from private, unconscious sources which are then substantialized, become public, and a part of the common discourse about communication and meaning (1981: 14). It is then the use and articulation of such symbols as have interpersonal appeal and significance that transforms them into personal symbols (Obeyesekere 1981: 44). This view frames my search for answers to the questions of cult origins and the initial public response.

In the face of psychic dissonance, for which no acceptable social expression is available, humans begin to manifest symptoms of psychopathology. Persons may then modify public symbols in a personal way so as to make the symptoms yield sense, permitting individual suffering, for example, to be accepted emotionally and intellectually. In Obeyesekere's terminology, such imagery can be "subjectified", by which he means that cultural categories can be used to justify the externalization of innovative categories of meaning and action (1981: 123). On this model, the identity of the Virgin Mary at Velanganni Shrine provides the cultural framework used by Maryamma first to generate, and then to validate, her innovative strategies for channeling her disordered subjective images into private symbols expressive of her personal needs, then into public symbols, which cease thereby to be merely private fantasy (cf. Obeyesekere 1981: 137).

By attributing the origins of public symbols to private pathology, despite his sympathy for the women of his study, Obeyesekere is attempting to "explain away" the personally enriched meanings these women generate for themselves. Kathleen M. Erndl (1990: 176-7, 227 [note 1]), on the other hand, holds that it is fruitless to try to explain possession states through models of pathology. Any mode of explanation external to the terminology and semantics of the people studied, argues Erndl, is necessarily reductionist and dismissive. James Clifford agrees: "Transcendent

meanings are not abstractions or interpretations 'added' to the original 'simple' account. Rather, they are the conditions of its meaningfulness" (Clifford 1986: 99).

Psychoanalytic insights provide fruitful suggestions with regard to the genesis of the *Amma* cult. I do not, however, wish to apply a systematic psychoanalytic treatment to the deep motives of cult adherents in their struggles to interpret and construct the cult's meaning for themselves. The materials of this study might just as well be approached from the perspectives of innovative religious vision, caste and family conflict, interreligious relations, institutional structure and authority, ritual studies, intersubjectivity, or semiotics, as the sources speak, variously, to each of these perspectives. This study is framed as a set of efforts by many people to construe symbols, and construct readings of events, so as to infuse a personalistic oracular phenomenon with personally and socially usable meanings. As will become evident, these meanings assume no natural congruence, not because of my treatment of the sources, but because congruence is not intrinsic to them.

It is not my role to create some single definitive interpretation of *Amma* cult meanings when this eludes my sources themselves. I do, however, venture to speculate, just as participants must, on "what was really going on" with Maryamma during a particular stage in her career of which few present cult members could have had either experience or memory. In Chapter 6 (6.5-6.5.2), I explore what appears to be a structural correspondence between the Hindu village goddess model of affliction and Santi's early affliction. The goddess inflicts people with a disease, understood as her presence in the afflicted, in order to induce a worshipful affirmation of her in the community. The goddess responds to the community's ritual attentions by healing the affliction for which she was initially responsible. I suggest that Santi's initial affliction is most intelligible as a transformation of this pattern, with *Amma* in the goddess' role, rather than an unrelated demonic possession.

I prefer, with Erndl and Clifford, to regard the ontological status of my sources' categories as primary, rather than to begin with some explanatory paradigm from the Euro-American cultural repertoire, and arrived in the field with that intention in mind. It is especially important to take seriously the figuring of the divine as a real agent. The categories I discovered in the field, however, crossed boundaries between East and West, in accord with the syncretic Hindu-Catholic culture of *Amma* cult adherents. It did not take long to discover, also, that such categories as I first discovered were subject to deconstruction by my sources themselves, through personal contests for authority, and their own constructions of personal and social identity.

So it was that I found myself hearing "truths" from one source undermined by another. This discord has given the study its form as an organized plurality of stories based on observations of a set of contests for meaning within and at the margins of the *Amma* cult. Thus, to valorize the ontological foundations of my sources' categories as Erndl recommends is not simply to accept *Amma* as a real participant in her own right, alongside her human community, but to take equally seriously the denial of her presence in events, if not her actuality. My deconstruction of *Amma* cult claims is a response to the doubts of several of my sources whose own access to the details of events is deficient in comparison with my own. My efforts to explain how certain miracles appear to have been scripted and staged are efforts to provide satisfactory answers to the questions posed by these voices.

James Clifford raises the question of authority when the voices of theory and interpretation are conceived as yet additional allegorical registers in an ethnographic text, thereby "weakening" the ethnographer's own voice. I have with reluctance attempted to "explain" the *Amma* cult theoretically, apart from

framing it, as Clifford recommends, by giving the multiple voices of my sources a semi-independent status in the text (Clifford 1986: 103). I was a participant in several aspects which concern the cult, from my own psychic disturbance at experiencing its relics to carefully guarded discussion of my research with the local Bishop. I am in my own way as much a part of the *Amma* cult phenomena as are believers, or one-time believers.

The themes which animate and run through this study are the processes of the cult's seer's articulating her personal needs into acceptably usable public symbols, the tensions and struggles between the cult and the Roman Catholic Church over the representation of borrowed symbols, and borrowed loyalties to these symbols, and the contests among cult adherents over their eventual import, interpretation, and use - which may diverge dramatically from the original intent of the cult's founder - are the key concerns of this study.³ In each of these processes real people strive, with circumstance and with each other, utilizing all the personal and social resources at their disposal, to construct a tacitly meaningful world.

In his studies of Spanish Catholicism, William Christian has placed much emphasis on correlations between apparitional phenomena as transformations of political tensions (Christian 1987, 1992). Richard Stirrat uses a similar approach for Sri Lanka (6.7.3; Stirrat 1992). Politics in India invariably touches on religious issues, but the kind of polarization found by Christian between monarchy and church in support of miracles, and secularist labour scoffing at them, is not characteristic of the Indian setting. For one thing, thaumaturgical phenomena are so much a part of Indian life that they do not reach the media as they did in Spain to become sources for Christian's research. The constituency served by the *Amma* cult is an interreligious and intercaste one, and I have no reason to believe that particular sectarian or caste interests are currently being served by the processes of cult formation or functioning. I have, therefore, not

explored the political and socioeconomic aspects of the *Amma* cult as they do not appear to be significant in the ways that Christian finds them to be in his context. Politics in India is always religious politics, but there is no obvious evidence of socio-economic struggles behind or giving form to the phenomena described here.

0.2 Discourses, Representation, and the Narrative

Form of this Study

In their introduction to *Contesting the sacred: The anthropology of Christian pilgrimage*, John Eade and Michael Sallnow announce a "new agenda" for pilgrimage studies in recognition "that pilgrimage is... an arena for competing religious and secular discourses, for both the official co-optation and the non-official recovery of religious meanings, for conflict between orthodoxies, sects, and confessional groups, for drives towards consensus and *communitas*, and for countermovements towards separateness and division" (Eade and Sallnow 1991: 2). By seeing pilgrimage as a "realm of competing discourses", it is possible to conceive of the pilgrim cult as constituted by the efforts of the categories of participants - pilgrims, residents, ritual specialists - to interpret the mutual understandings and misunderstandings each brings to the shrine (Eade and Sallnow 1991: 5). While the conventional goal of pilgrimage is a stationary shrine, this is not the only possible form of sacral localization, and a shift from place to person-centered sacredness may indicate a more independent and radical transformation of the religious domain (Stirrat 1991: 129-31).

A charismatic leader or seer who is able to personify the sacred in an imaginative, appealing, and pragmatic way is a natural challenge to hierarchical authority and a movement toward the limits of institutional control (Eade and Sallnow 1991: 7). The *Amma* cult represents a movement to, and possibly beyond, the margins of the Catholic Church's control.

The institution can only take control of such a living saint's personal charisma when it is localized, or transferred to a particular place (Eade and Sallnow 1991: 8, 14).⁴ While the holy person remains alive, a complete transfer is not possible. At Velanganni Shrine, we see the process complete. The original apparitions on which it is founded are deep in the past, and *Arokkiya Mada* is under the control of her shrine's duly constituted authorities. In the *Amma* Cult at Vadiyakkadu, on the other hand, we may observe not only a living personification of divine maternity, but in a "special child" who has been entrusted to Maryamma, its continuity on earth in the next generation. Maryamma, however, has not broken wilfully with the Church, but has attempted to remain within its ritual parameters, moving as a personification of the sacred within a local sacred geography already defined by the Church, and recruiting Catholic priests to validate her use of borrowed symbols and to legitimate her leadership within the cult.

The tension between her support of and challenge to the official Church is evident in Maryamma's borrowing of Marian symbols from Velanganni, then seeking approval of her apparitions from Church authorities at the shrine. Given the reputation and implicit authority held by *Arokkiya Mada* in Tamil Catholicism, Maryamma would have seen the shrine as the accessible center of the Catholic symbolic world, even if she were aware of the scale of the Church as an international institution centered on Rome. Thus, within weeks of her first vision, Maryamma went to Velanganni with great expectations, intending to so impress the shrine's parish priest by sharing a Marian vision with him, that he would certify and acknowledge her as a genuine seer. In Maryamma's imagination, this recognition by the head of the Catholic world, as she knew it, would have conferred on her all of the honours which are due to *Arokkiya Mada* (2.4.8).⁵ Likewise, priests use their leverage in the *Amma* cult to challenge the authority of their ecclesiastical superiors. Sacred meanings, as

personal symbols, appear to motivate some of these priests. The works of William A. Christian, Jr. on Spain and Richard L. Stirrat on Sri Lanka exemplify similar tensions between lay people and their Church elsewhere in the Catholic world (Christian 1972, 1981a, 1981b, 1982, 1984, 1987, 1992; Stirrat 1977, 1981, 1982, 1992).

This study reveals the powerful role a charismatic individual can play in initiating religious solidarity, as well as controversy, in response to the need for personalized religious experience. The central narrative of the *Amma* cult presents Maryamma's special status as the favoured medium of *Amma's* grace. The narrative describes the miracles which have been mediated through her, and which have occurred spontaneously because of her presence. One narrative from the cult's early stages which was critical of priests and the Church, and featured the premature wilting of a flower, has been altered in a more recent version to avoid appearing too harsh. Such narratives attempt to provide an appearance of continuity between cult and Church, of Catholic orthodoxy in current devotions through the traditional symbolism of bleeding crucifixes and statues, but especially in the Mass. This trend to minimizing differences will likely continue, at least until the *Amma* cult's leaders can feel safe enough to promote and popularize features of the cult which are almost certain to^{bc} be regarded by the Church as heterodox and non-Catholic.

Discord forms the background of the *Amma* cult phenomenon from its origin in valuing male over female children, resulting in the rejection of a third daughter, to current contests for authority between Jesuits and Bishops. Woven among these major sources of discord, and not addressed in a systematic way, are tensions between and within village families over the propriety of affirming Maryamma's acts, imperatives of *kallar* caste marriage patterns, differences among cult adherents regarding what is to be public knowledge and what is not, contests in cult leadership between the priority of male and female roles, discord among

priests debating the merits of a new messianic dispensation, tensions among competing claimants to priority and status within the cult, and competition between the claims of ordained duty and a renewed spirit.

At the margins of the cult, for example, subordinate discourses support rival claims for the priority of two sacred spaces. Residents of Orattur, site of Maryamma's initial affliction and seclusion, argue that their village, rather than Vadiyakkadu where Maryamma currently stays, should be recognized as the primary holy place, for it was at Orattur that *Amma* first appeared to Santi, as she was then known. Maryamma, embodying in herself a flexibly mobile holy personhood, betrays little concern for this issue. Other discourses have been developed which emphasize concerns and values that are subsidiary to the main story - precedence among devotees, *Amma's* taking the form of certain devotees and leaving behind physical signs, bleeding statues and crucifixes, and other miraculous and memorable phenomena - which are very important to some participants in the cult, but matter less to others.

In writing this dissertation, I have two story-telling tasks. The first is the collation of others' stories, concordant or aberrant as they may be, into an account which reveals the tensions which suffuse people's efforts to make religiously ordered social life work. The second task concerns my own tale of discovery and wonder which cannot be extricated from the first. Telling the first story, the task of meeting others in their own discourses, is the major challenge. I was first tempted to fashion my subject through the narration of my discoveries, to relate the sequence of insight and information which occurred as my field experience developed, treating it as a rite of passage (Clifford 1986: 109). Serendipitous at its best and fissiparous at worst, this sequence offers few resources, however, for the construction of cogency, and my story, however engaging it has been and remains for me, had to be subjected to the "natural order" of others'

stories (Clifford 1986: 106). However, my story need not, indeed cannot, be erased and will reemerge from time to time.

How else, then, might it be possible to link the tangible realities of the field with the task of their inscription? The problem of writing is located in telling others' stories, often contending and contrary, *as if* they had some natural order in which they might be framed. I have attempted to be true to the people who inhabit this study, portraying them neither as complete and static, nor as products of my narrative (Clifford 1986: 115). When order, constituting therein the authoritative voice one seeks, does indeed appear to emerge from the resources gathered in the field, the naive ethnographer's heart is bound to feel a certain satisfaction.

While there is a value in treating preferentially those voices which tend, or appear, to articulate a possible consensus, and which can be drawn together to produce an intelligible account of events and ideas, such consensus will exist only within socially delimited bounds. The ethnographer will be fortunate to find other voices which warn against the dangers of hegemony. Every fieldworker comes across marginalized characters - expressive voices, coherent or febrile - and wonders what to do with them. Some simply must be allowed to speak for themselves, rendered in the language of the text as literally, yet evocatively, as possible. In the present work, the radically contrary testimony of some marginal voices undercuts and counters the claims of the principals. These refractory voices, sometimes, are the most useful for constructing a judicious reading of the whole and their prophetic critique may well produce, for the enquirer, a deeper level of comprehension and appreciation.

Our task as enquirers is as much to understand the processes of interpretation and evaluation as it is to interpret proffered versions, hegemonic or dissenting, of religious phenomena. Where discordant voices are discerned to provide a critical and cogent interpretation of events, they must receive

the same careful attention and the full credence, on their own terms, as that accorded to those in authority, purveyors of the dominant discourse.

Following James Clifford, I regard indigenous discourses as allegorical registers, alongside my own, within the text. These registers, which assume dialogical form, play mutually upon one another, powerfully translating, encountering, and recontextualizing each other (Clifford 1986: 121) to build up the complex and finely-woven context-in-process-of-revision with which we are familiar in our own every-day mental and social life.

Testimony when all parties are heard may turn out to be so discordant that no single coherent interpretation is possible in which the good faith of all participants can be recognized. I have found this to be so in this study and have, accordingly, presented the personal testimonies of my informants in the form of direct speech with all the ambivalence which that requires. This has involved several layers of processing.

The ethnography draws on material provided by a population of two hundred and forty individuals who do not form a single community in any sense but whose opinions about, or enactments concerning, Indian Christianity and Marianism, especially the *Amma* cult, have informed my own understanding and my narrative. This relatively large group of people was encountered in two periods of fieldwork - fifteen months in 1991-92 and three months in 1993. Ninety-eight persons directly informed my enquiry, and the content of this essay is constructed from the discourses of twenty-five of them.

The initial fieldwork for this study began in December, 1991 as I was researching syncretic Hindu-Catholic devotions at Velanganni Shrine. By March, 1992, the *Amma* cult had become my primary research interest, while I continued my work at both localities through September, 1992. In May, I met Dr. Heather Fernandez, a zoologist and Roman Catholic college instructor from Hyderabad. We married in October, 1992, at the end of which month

I was obliged to return to Canada. In May, 1993, I returned to India for my second period of fieldwork which continued until August. Heather speaks four Indian languages, has excellent interpersonal skills, and matured into a better social research assistant than I could ever have hoped for. My most valuable sources turned out to be women and gaining access to female sources is extremely difficult for a Western male researcher. Heather was more than an assistant; she was a co-enquirerer, a reality check in cultural territory which was nearly as alien to her, a Malayali-speaking native of Telugu-speaking Andhra Pradesh, as it was to myself.

The interviews which make up the voices in this study (and those which had to be excluded), if done in Tamil and English, were conducted jointly. If done in Tamil or Malayalam, they were conducted by Heather alone. The open-ended interview method produced the leads by which other sources were located, in a sequence which led back, earlier and deeper into Maryamma's life. Most were single interviews and, although they were "cold", the sources proved to be generous and quick to understand their purpose. A few interviews were complicated by the involvement of third parties, through whose efforts the interview was made possible, and who contributed to the conversation. Most of the interviews were recorded by dictaphone. The tapes were first transcribed as a verbatim record by word processor, simultaneously translated from Tamil or Malayalam to English as necessary, then filtered to remove "artifacts" - the "umms", "ahhs", and verbal irregularities - which are not part of the meaning but had been assiduously transcribed from the original tapes. These raw transcripts were then edited to produce a statement, still in the sequential order of the interview (many of which were unstructured and rambled about their subjects), and re-edited to construct a denser representation of the content while striving to retain some of the style and conversational tone used by the informant. None of the dialogue appearing below has been fictionalized. Each

person actually said what he or she is represented to have said. In my representation, I have had to assume more control of sequencing than was available to me in the initial interviews.⁶

Where I present a composite account, as in the "Introduction to Maryamma's Life", I indicate the interview source, but have not cited elisions - the passages which I deleted because they are better told by another narrator. As ethnographer, one is liable, entirely without malice, to commit some betrayal of any particular informant's trust. My task is not to provide a definitive reading, even of the so-called "facts" which are discussed here, but to present each voice, even if ambivalent, in its own strongest tones. In what follows, the controversies that have been generated are so strongly felt, and the claims made by the parties often so unsystematically stated, that no single narrator would recognize my compilation of fact and opinion as her or his own. The net result is that no one's story is told entirely as I received it, not even mine. The final contribution, the last word, must be the reader's own.

The abstract, disembodied ethnographer, speaking with the voice of exclusive and privileged authority, has vanished as surely as has the abstracted and generalized ethnographic subject. Ethnographic discourse has become just one among many "voices", relativized in a cultural babble of competing claims. The task now is to see how one's ethnographic voice can best contribute, not to telling about others better than we can tell about ourselves, nor to knowing ourselves by means of a detour through the other, but to appreciating human difference and the integrity of many possible ways of ordering reality.

Upon detecting its multiple voices, the task of the reader of this ethnography will be to judge the coherence and integrity of each. Ethnography has, fortunately, been reduced from the perilous heights of empiricist authoritarianism to that more comfortable, perceptive, reflective, and humanely productive function performed by philosophy among our ancients.

Chapter One surveys the general cultural patterns which ground this study and provides a more specialized background for the *Amma* cult by examining Indian Marianism and the ethos, scale, and meaning of Velanganni Shrine. Chapter Two introduces Santi/Maryamma's biography and her distinctive claims to sacral authority. Chapter Three amplifies and appraises these claims through the experiences of some of Maryamma's early patrons, her family members, followers, and witnesses to some of her miracles. Chapter Four looks more deeply into the experiences of leading figures and exponents of the *Amma* cult, and details in a more authoritative way the circumstances of some of its truth-claims. Chapter Five examines contests and controversies taking shape among some of the parties to the cult.

In Chapter Six, Indian goddess religion and possession states are examined and aspects of method are discussed in a search for structural parallels with the *Amma* cult. The cult is discussed as a minority syncretic religious phenomenon located in a predominantly Hindu culture through comparison with similar charismatic and personalistic phenomena among Catholics in neighbouring Sri Lanka, where the hegemonic religious discourse is Buddhist. Some questions of hierarchical authority in the Roman Catholic Church in relation to marginal healing cults are examined in this context, followed by a discussion of the criteria used by the Church in examining evidences of apparitional phenomena for the recognition of "private revelation".

Chapter Seven examines the sequence and character of the events which constitute the *Amma* cult's religious charter, from Maryamma's birth through the advent of *Aiya*. *Amma*'s and Maryamma's identities are examined in terms of their fluidity through time. Stages in the cult's development are marked by keynote events which are viewed as responses to emergent issues. The *Amma* cult is thus seen not to be functioning, for most of its development, from any clear vision, but rather in terms of expediency, from the need to address in some appropriate and dramatic way whatever

circumstances arise. This may, or may not, have been reversed with the advent, identification, and acknowledgement by the cult of *Aiya* in November, 1990, as its new focal point. The construction of sacral reality and the fictive project of ethnographic writing are seen to be of the same order. The potential of the *Amma* cult for generating wider symbolic and personal contests for authority within the Catholic Church is noted.

Chapter 1

Context of the Study: Geography, Society and Religion

1.1 Geographical and Social Contexts

The geographical background for this study is the coastal delta formed by distributaries of the Kaveri River in the east-central region of the Indian state of Tamil Nadu. The region's traditional name is *Cholamandalam*, literally *Chola*-circle, corrupted in English into "Coromandel".

The Tamils have an ancient high literary and political culture. The *Chola* royal dynasty flourished around the beginning of the Common Era and went into eclipse in the fourth century (Srinivasa Aiyangar 1929). The period of the *Chola* cultural efflorescence from the ninth to fourteenth centuries (Nilakanta Sastri 1975, 1976; Stein 1980) was a time of great empire, with *Chola* hegemony extending north into what is now Orissa and Maharashtra, and south to Sri Lanka (Hemingway 1906: 29-30). *Chola* political influence was felt throughout southeast Asia, in *Sri Vijaya* (Indonesia), Cambodia, and *Annam* (Viet Nam). During the period of empire, sea trade through the Coromandel coastal ports such as Nagappattinam flourished.

Unreliable seasonal rainfall has made the region, except for land immediately adjacent to the Kaveri river channel itself, dry throughout most of the year. The *Chola* kings promoted development of a vast irrigation system which diverted river water from a point just downstream from the present city of Tirucchirappalli, through canals fanning out east and south-east to permit cultivation of the arid delta. This massive engineering project at the eastern end of Srirangam Island is called *Kalanai*, or Grand Anicut. Owing to *Chola* alteration of the land and waterscape, and to subsequent improvements made to their system,

this region is known today as the "rice bowl" of Tamil Nadu, and the Kaveri delta is among the most densely populated rural areas of India.

1.1.1 Landholding Jatis

The *jati* or birth-group known as *vellalar*, which seems to have been the pioneer of plow and rice cultivation, was instrumental in constructing and maintaining the water conduits through which Kaveri water was distributed from *Kalanai*. In *Cholamandalam*, *vellalar* are the principal land-holding *jati*, its members functioning as patrons to subordinate *jatis* which may be small freeholders or, more often, tenant farmers. (Hemingway 1906: 82). Other *jatis* like the *udaiyar*, lesser in number, play a similar role. These land-holding *jatis* are also patrons to the massive stone Brahmanical temples which are the most tangible and evocative cultural landmarks throughout this region (Stein 1975: 72; Swaminathan 1981, *passim*). Their patrons represent an alliance of political and ritual elites which has managed economic life in this region for many centuries in the service of its own interests and of its gods. Within this alliance, these *jatis* tend to compete among themselves for ritual honours conferred by religious institutions.

1.1.2 Service Jatis

Because of the labour-intensive nature of rice cultivation, a large population of landless labourers came into being as the scale of wet farming spread in response to expanded irrigation potential to assist the land-owning community during the *Chola* imperial hegemony. The origin of the labourers who were incorporated into this socio-economic system is unknown. They may have been indigenous tribal peoples attracted to earning their livelihood as dependent agricultural workers by the greater security of the agrarian patron-client system of mutual obligations called *yajnamani*, or "Jajmani" (Steen 1986; Veer 1988: 209-10, 242-6, 261-4). They may have been semi-nomadic gatherers and hunters from the many hilly areas nearby which rise up from

the plains in this part of India. In any case, they were classified by the Brahmanical *varna-dharma* social system as *avarna*, without *varna*, or as *panchamas*, members of the so-called "fifth" *varna*. This classification put them in a supernumerary class below the rank of the *sudras*, the fourth and lowest *varna*. *Sudras* are the servants to the three elite *dviya*, or "twice-born", *varnas* of *brahmanas*, *kshatriyas*, and *vaisyas*. In terms of that system, only the first three categories are entitled to education, and only they and the subordinate *sudras* are considered to be ritually "clean".

These *panchamas* became the "Untouchables" of the colonial period, and during the freedom struggle, M.K. Gandhi's *harijans*. Today they prefer to call themselves *dalits*. The *dalits* have traditionally been kept at the margins of society, forced to find separate residential quarters and sources of water, and refused any sort of ritual honours or recognition, except such as complement and reinforce their menial social functions.

In northern India, in ancient times, the *varna-dharma* scheme permitted a locally dominant political, military, or land-holding *jati* to be honoured with the status of *kshatriya* or *vaisya*. Local labouring and service groups were regarded as *sudras*. The need to incorporate both local elites and common people in this way seems to have faded by the time of the system's application in the Tamil country of southern India. The *brahmanas* who settled in this area from the north attributed only *sudra* ritual status to the locally dominant *vellalar*, leaving vacant the categories of *kshatriya* and *vaisya*, although the martial, merchant and farming interests were well represented in the indigenous social order. This absence of official intermediate ranks of "twice-born" has resulted in a greater polarization between *brahmana* and non-*brahmana* in the south than in the north of India, with a tendency to push service groups - quite large populations of varying origins and a variety of honourable livelihoods, who

would have been categorized as *sudras* in the north - into the marginal *panchama* category.

Status is as hotly contested among *dalit* or *panchama jatis* themselves as it is among *jatis* superior to them in the hierarchy like the *vellalar* and *udaiyar*. In the geographical area which concerns us here, the *jatis* called *paraiyar*, or "drummers", and *pallar* make up the bulk of these landless *dalit* labourers. Each of these two *jatis* considers the other an inferior rival.¹

1.1.3 The Kallar and their Cousins

Three other *jatis*, the *maravar*, *kallar*, and *agamudaiyar*, are the major non-*brahmana* landholders, after the *vellalar* in the southern districts of Tamil Nadu. These *jatis* had a strong martial tradition under the Vijayanagar Empire, and under the Nayaks who succeeded it they became settled agriculturists and tax farmers. I learned in discussion with members of these clans that they call themselves, collectively, *muvendira kulam*, the "triple race of the vedic warrior god Indra", or *mukulattor*, simply the "three clans" and that each has several hierarchically ordered subdivisions. The *kallar* live primarily in Tanjavur, Madurai, and Pudukkottai Districts, the *maravar* in districts to their south, and the *agamudaiyar* to their north and west (Dumont 1986: 9). All three are mostly dryland farmers, but where irrigation water is available, they also engage in wet cultivation.

Members of a certain *kallar* family group distributed over several localities of Tanjavur and Nagappattinam Districts, coterminous with the Kaveri delta and the Roman Catholic Diocese of Tanjavur, figure as the central focus of this dissertation. *Kallan* literally means "thief" and *maravan* means "killer", and these *jatis* have come by their names honestly. The British classified both *maravar* and *kallar* under the official census designation, "criminal tribes". The *kallar* are constituted by several local sub-groups with quite different characteristics. The existing research observes a wide range of marriage and other social practices making it difficult to extrapolate from one group

to another. Dumont studied localized *kallar* in Madurai and Ramanadapuram Districts (Dumont 1957, 1986), but no kinship and values studies have been done, to my knowledge, of Tanjavur *kallar*. The *Piramaalai kallar* of Madurai are patrilinear and patrilocal, while the *Paganeri kallar* of Ramanadapuram are matrilineal (Dumont 1957: 8-9).

The account of *kallar* which stood the test of time prior to Dumont was Thurston, *Castes and tribes of southern India*, in which Tanjavur *kallar*, especially, are noted to differ from those in other localities, mainly due to their emulation of the practices of *brahmanas* and *vellalar* (Thurston 1909: 61). *Kallar* are agriculturists and obtained much of the land they now possess through an interesting tactic. Arriving in an area, they would enter the service of higher, landowning *jatis* such as *vellalar* as watchmen, then coerce them with what would today be called a "protection racket". They would so oppress their employers with petty theft, promises to recover the goods for a reward (Thurston 1909: 64-5), and challenges to personal authority, that the dominant *jati* would be forced to abandon its lands, along with the property of dependent *jatis* - as *kallar* do not use service *jatis* - which the *kallar* would then occupy (Thurston 1909: 57). This resulted in *Kallar* villages often being single-*jati* villages as the dependent *jatis* had fled with their masters, there being no place in the *kallar* social system for them.

Cross-cousin marriage, in which a woman's obligatory marriage partner is her maternal uncle's son (though the maternal uncle himself is forbidden), is the rule among Tanjavur *kallar*, and this privileged relationship, grounded in an obsolete matrilineal order (Thurston 1909: 76-7), figures in the tensions within the family studied. Serial marriage is common, polygyny occasional, divorce easy to obtain, and *kallar* women have an autonomy which those of other *jatis* do not (Dumont 1986: 199-200). However, marriage is the norm, and while formalized extra-marital relations with non-*kallar* may be for a man a substitute for a

second wife, such relations involving *kallar* women are rare (Dumont 1986: 199). Thurston describes *kallar* women colourfully as "inflexibly vindictive and furious on the least [suspicion of] injury" (Thurston 1909: 54). For young *kallar* males, *jallikkattu*, the vigorous sport of bull-baiting, is a favourite challenge and suits their *macho* swagger (Thurston 1909: 89-90; Dumont 1986: 423).

1.2 Cultural and Hindu Religious Contexts

Many contemporary Tamil values and images of women and men, gender and power, in Tamil culture are based on the literary epics, and their cognate folk-tales, which originated in the *Sangam* and post-*Sangam* epic periods in Tamil Nadu's ancient culture. Ordinary people use images, metaphors, and proverbs drawn from these texts in everyday conversation and model their own social relations on those of epic characters. "Every child growing up in Tamil society", writes Jacob Pandian, "acquires an understanding of the significance of the myth of Kannagi for Tamils" (Pandian 1991: 146). It is not uncommon, for example, for women who are survivors of family violence to assume possession states through which they become socially empowered (Obeyesekere 1981). After victimization and suffering a particularly wretched or untimely death, some of these women are even today sublimated as objects of ritual propitiation on the model of *Kannagi*, heroine of the epic *Silappadigaram*, and worshipped as local protectresses (Brubaker 1978; Blackburn 1985; Dumont 1986: 435-9).

1.2.1 The Classical Age

The *Sangam* age in the history of the Tamil country flourished between 200 B.C.E. to 200 C.E. (Arokiaswami 1972; Thani Nayagam 1970). Literary culture was its defining characteristic, the *Sangam* itself being an assembly of poets, grammarians, and critics. Patronized by the *Pandiya* kingdom of Madurai in southern Tamil Nadu, the *Sangam* is thought to have attracted the best composers and singers from the neighbouring *Chola* kingdom to its north and east, and the *Chera* kingdom which occupied the Western

Ghat mountains and the littoral plain bordering the Arabian Sea. *Sangam* literature was framed within two permissible poetic categories. These were *aham*, a figuratively "interior" genre of anonymous love-poetry, and *puram*, a genre of "exterior" panegyric poetry which immortalized particular contemporary military and political figures, commending them by name, and often explicitly soliciting their patronage. (Hart 1979; Kailasapathy 1968; Ramanujan 1967, 1985).

At the end of the *Sangam* period, a narrative style of epic literature emerged which, in some respects, both followed and diverged from the classical conventions. *Silappadigaram* and its sequel, *Manimegalai*, are two of these epics. The first concerns a young woman whose virtue, conjugal faithfulness, and suffering in an arranged marriage to a dissolute youth confer on her the power to summon the fire god *Agni* to consume the city of a king who, through lack of discernment, negligently orders the execution of her innocent husband. After dying, neglected, *Kannagi* becomes a goddess whose compassion, generosity, and faithfulness empower her, animated by her experience of horror and grief, to help the weak in their life-struggles. She is believed to be able to bring or to withhold precious rainfall at will (Comacuntaran 1977; Caminatha Aiyar 1955; Daniélou 1961, 1965; Ramachandra Dikshitar 1978; MacPhail 1988; Parthasarthy 1992). *Manimegalai*, meaning "jewelled-girdle", a personification of the sparkling ocean which encircles the land, is the heroine of the epic named after her. She is the daughter of *Kannagi's* husband and a courtesan, *Madavi*. His and *Kannagi's* brutal deaths move *Madavi* to take herself and her child away from the courtesan community so *Manimegalai's* life will not replicate her own. Both become Buddhist *bhikshunis*, or nuns. The heroine evades the lustful attentions of a prince, suffers imprisonment, and is gifted with a magical bowl from which issues a continuous supply of food. With it she feeds all who are in need. In the end, she realizes Buddhism's ultimate principles

and reaches *nirvana*, the highest state of consciousness (Caminatha Iyer 1956; Krishnaswami Aiyangar 1928; Vinson 1969).

1.2.2 Divine Images

The image of the unjustly suffering woman who is transformed through death into a fiercely protective, but equally fiercely vindictive, goddess is persistently reinforced in the Tamil popular cinema, which is a primary medium for the modelling of values and roles in the culture. Such deities are often accompanied by a subordinate male protector or "body-guard" god (Erndl 1989: 239).

While it has become common in recent decades to build permanent temples, enclosing anthropomorphic images of these deities in a sanctuary on the model of Brahmanical temples, such a goddess continues to be represented in villages by a temporary festival icon formed of earth, by a pot (Meyer 1986: 235-7), or an entranced dancer - more permanently by a tree, a well or pond, or a stone (Ramachandra Rao 1980: 54-63). More accurately, she is not represented by, but inhabits, these objects (Hiltebeitel 1988; Meyer 1986: 331-3). Loyal as these humble, immobile symbols may be to their locality and to those who acknowledge the goddess' protection, if neglected she may temporarily afflict her people with misfortune or disease (Whitehead 1921). Such troubles are a signal for the people to invite the goddess to be a conscious presence among them in the form of a festival, and the abating of such troubles is a sign of her satisfaction with their renewed ritual attentions (Beck 1981).

1.2.3 Thaumaturgy

Pillisuniyam, or possession by a *pey*, is a commonly understood category of psychosomatic affliction in Tamil culture. When a *pey*, a malignant spirit of one who has died before his or her time, possesses some vulnerable person, it afflicts its victim emotionally and psychically. Women, more than men tend to be afflicted in this way. A *pey* may sometimes speak through the victim, treating her or him as an oracle (cf. Obeyesekere 1981;

Meyer 1986: 257-263). Such a possession state is therefore ambivalent, for even as it causes grief within the victim's social circle, it offers an opportunity for communication with a state of being and knowing beyond this world. Often help from a saint or local deity will be sought through vows and trials of physical endurance to exorcise this interference by the dead (Moffat 1979: 219-289). Under the duress of exorcism a previously silent *pey* will speak, identify itself, argue its case to continue in possession of its victim, and insist on changes in the social arrangements in which its victim lives (Obeyesekere 1981; Gold 1988: 36). On 13 June, 1992, I witnessed such procedures at a festival dedicated to St. Antony in Melnariyappanur, Tamil Nadu. A *pey* may advocate in disturbing ways for what may be perceived as its victim's best interests, and so become a radical instrument for her or his social empowerment. In a similar way, a goddess may possess a devotee to bring that person closer to herself in worship. In *Silappadigaram*, the goddess *Kotravai* possesses a young girl in order to pronounce upon *Kannagi's* true identity and her divine fate (Ramachandra Dikshitar 1978: 206).

1.2.4 The Goddess and her Place

Through suffering and *apotheosis* (Egnor 1980: 13-19), the landscape itself is made sacred by the lives of those who have occupied it and affirmed the sacred in it (Bayly 1989: 34-40; Spencer 1970: 241). This sacredness is expressed through the mouths of humans, both male and female, who are possessed by goddesses once also human, as well as by dangerous and malign spirits (Caplan 1985: 113). The boundary between the human and the divine remains indefinite and there is, here, no clearly distinguished, radical otherness of god as found in the Abrahamic traditions (Bayly 1989: 28; Stirrat 1992: 86). "In this system", writes Susan Bayly,

there is no real distinction between affliction and its relief, between the disease and its cure.... At the same time the disease is the fiery wrath of the goddess. Her *sakti* is deployed in a righteous cause, but it is capricious, vengeful and destructive once it is liberated and allowed to carry out its terrible cleansing function (Bayly 1989: 133; cf. 6.5.2).

Tamil ideas about divinity are set in and conditioned by this indigenous tradition of localized deities who sacralize the landscape, and who appear and speak through the bodies of specially chosen worshippers (Weissman 1988). Human communities ritually acknowledge such protectors through periodic festivals and construct their social identity through their relations with these predominantly female divine patrons. Hindus desire personal communication with the goddess (Meyer 1986: 250-7; Younger 1980: 497) and approach her with reverence and trepidation (Shulman 1976) for the resolution of all sorts of domestic, material, and social problems, believing that her knowledge and compassion exceeds their own in space, time, and wisdom. Petitioners seek the goddess' insights and blessings which, they hope, will confer some advantage in the competitive employment and education markets of today's world (Younger 1980: 500-501). The goddess is not distant from human life for she lurks, interacting obliquely with humans behind the scenes of the commonplace, sharing human passions and the generative forces associated with sex and agricultural fertility (Bayly 1989: 29).

In the region of east central Tamil Nadu with which we are concerned, the goddess *Mariyamman* is the commonest and most popular object of worship by the lowest *jatis* and *panchamas*, which constitute the majority of the population, through the possession states which she induces (Younger 1980). This goddess of the village "presents as the popular deity par excellence, to the point of practically identifying the villagers' religion with her cult" (Dumont 1986: 431). Isolated and wild, a resident of forests and more distant realms of uncertainty, the goddess initiates contact with the human world by afflicting its inhabitants, usually by drought or disease. She is figured as fierce and malevolent when "heated" or disturbed, requiring ritual attentions to "cool" her (Beck 1969). Festival is a time of danger when the unpredictable goddess is "activated" by inviting her for a limited time into the community which acknowledges her. The goddess is

brought to center stage, but only briefly, for her continuing presence is dangerous (Bayly 1989: 37). Contact with the goddess is possible only at the point where chaos breaks its bounds, for worlds usually separated now meet (Shulman 1980: 40-57). This transaction is what the goddess festival accomplishes and why it must be carefully circumscribed.

Imagined as awesomely destructive and capricious in her relations with the world of humans, the goddess, even in her frenzy, is yet a stabilizing force, for she is in perpetual battle with demons which threaten cosmic order in more fundamental ways (Bayly 1989: 136; ^{cf. 5.1.3.4}). To be effective in this perpetual struggle for order over chaos, in which victory is temporary, the goddess must become even more terrible than her enemies (Bayly 1989: 29).

Eveline Meyer relates how one of these goddesses, *Angalamman*, a resident of the wild and chaotic jungle [*vana*] seeks to enter the realm of the settled and ordered [*kshetra*], to be recognized and worshipped there (Meyer 1986: 193-4).² In the human world, "cooled", the goddess becomes benign, a comforter, healer, and source of refuge in affliction. Active and powerful, she works miracles, leads her disciples and intercedes to help her human protegees (Bayly 1989: 132-133). Maryamma's efforts to become recognized as a Marian seer at Velanganni by inviting Fr. Gabriel to witness a miracle parallels this motif of entry, acknowledgement and succour. The goddess remains, however, moody and ambivalent and is never to be taken lightly (cf. Carroll 1992: 68). It is at this point that the local goddess begins to be recognizable as a manifestation of Mary, whose compassion and grace may seem somewhat more stable to the south Indian devotee. Represented as more universal, with broader powers and a wider geographical scope than the *ammans*, Mary may not require quite their pitch of ferocity to accomplish her cosmic work of sustaining order. Mary is better at "keeping her cool" than are the *ammans*.

The social understanding and significance today of these goddesses of special places is the end product of contests between supporters of these indigenous female images of deity and advocates of patriarchal gods who entered the Tamil land in the first millenium C.E. with their *brahmana* worshippers. The village goddesses were challenged by the rise of *brahmana* influence among the leading landed *jatis*, such as the *vellalar* during the medieval period. Local dominant *jatis* began building permanent stone temples in the Kaveri delta in which to house their anthropomorphic deities during the period of *Chola* empire, beginning in the ninth century. The *brahmana* priests introduced the worship of patriarchal deities, especially *Siva* and *Vishnu*. Each god was conceived, and represented iconically in his temple, as husband of a beneficent and subordinate consort goddess who was understood as his active principal, or *sakti* (Bayly 1989: 28; cf. Daniel 1980: 79-84). Over time two orders of discourse have developed concerning the status of the goddesses. The elite *brahmana*-dominated discourse attempts to disempower, subordinate, and minimize the goddess. ^(Gatwood 1985: 50-5) The subaltern discourse, which thrives in the villages, has sustained the indigenous forms of representation and worship in which the goddess is dominant (Shulman 1980; Gatwood 1985; Kinsley 1986).

Both discourses have defined religious power in terms of the purity and sanctity of women. The Sanskrit epic, dramatic, and puranic literatures of north India support the image of woman as the modest bride, be she goddess or human, courageous or timid. In the Tamil tradition of the *Sangam*, the notion of *karpu*, or chastity, is the defining feature of a model wife (Devapoopathy 1969: 9-25; Meyer 1986: 54-8). This *karpu* is a latent power which may be catalyzed into ferocity when it is transgressed, and this is what produces a goddess (MacPhail 1988: 76). Since it is precisely the transaction with symbolic impurity in the form of violence and affliction which grounds the local goddess' power (Shulman 1980: 40-57; Rajam 1986) and which generates much of her mysterious

appeal, where she is presented iconically and in literature as placid and maternal, the *brahmanas'* discourse has, for the time being, won out (Shulman 1980). Where she is figured alone or acting through her own, non-derivative, exclusive power, undomesticated, fierce and combatively unpredictable, battling demons, to be sated by blood offerings, guarded by a subordinate male "body-guard" god, and expressing her will through ecstatic possession phenomena, the indigenous mode of understanding deity has been sustained. Such goddesses are called *ammans* (Bayly 1989: 27-31).³

When an *amman* assumes extra-local prominence, action may be initiated by elite interests to put her places of worship under the administration of ritual specialists sympathetic to the elite discourse (Younger 1980: 495). This effort is intended to ensure that the male symbol of deity, in the case of the Minakshi Temple at Madurai, *Siva*, called *Sokkanadar* or *Sundaresvara*, receives the worshippers' primary attention (Harman 1989: 22). One tendency among devotees is nominally to accept this ritual innovation of honouring the male deity while reserving their more intimate devotion for the goddess, and this is so with *Minakshi*. Physical evidence of this contest between male and female deities in the Madurai temple is demonstrated by architectural alterations. A separate entrance through a circumambulatory passage [*prakaram*] wall to provide an unobstructed view of *Minakshi's* image was cut after the wall's construction, while the east gate, constructed to give an unobstructed view of *Sokkanadar's* image and which is the usual entrance of a Brahmanical temple, has been filled in with masonry.⁴

Among the many local *amman* goddesses in Tamil Nadu, *Mariyamman* is by far the best known, and is immensely popular. Traditionally conceived as a pox and rain goddess, *Mariyamman* is ubiquitous in the Tamil Hindu conscience. Her sacrificial cult is maintained in thousands of villages, towns, and cities. Dumont notes:

She is the one whom the literature most often calls "village goddess".... The expression "village goddess" is ambiguous.... We have used it [to mean] the goddess common to all the inhabitants of a locality... in the functional sense of being in charge of protecting the locality against illness. This goddess.... is not an eponymous goddess of local origin, the creator or mother of the locality. There is not a distinct goddess for each locality, one whose name would set her off from those of neighbouring localities. Although this type of goddess appears under many names, each name has a very extensive geographical distribution.... Indeed, several of these personifications can coexist in a single village. Her myth and her function are always fundamentally the same; the goddess is... the universal goddess of the village [my emphasis] (Dumont 1986: 431).

In some of the larger temples where Mariyamman is worshipped, an uneasy truce prevails between *brahmana* ritualists and administrators, appointed by the government, and the devout laity. These "outside" officials, representatives of the dominant discourse, tend to be marginalized by devotees until the officials have conceded, in an acceptable degree, to the religious style and substance of the local subordinate discourse. In the case, for example, of the *Mariyamman* temple at Samayapuram north of Tirucchirappalli, ritual specialists are appointed by the administrators of the Vaishnava *Sri Ranganathaswami Devasthanam* at Srirangam (Younger 1980: 495). These specialists have attempted to introduce brahmanical-style worship practices such as car processions, which have largely been ignored by worshippers, but no serious attempt has been made to subordinate *Mariyamman* to any male god and, in fact, an anti-brahmanical tone is part of the festival tradition (Younger 1983). *Mariyamman* remains staunchly independent in the eyes of her devotees. Paul Younger sees in the social and religious tensions present in this temple and the image of its goddess an example of the "structured interdependence between religion built around local loyalties of village and caste,... and religion which purports to have a universal and cosmic reference,... characteristic of Tamilnadu throughout its history" (Younger 1980: 501). These tensions between locality and universality, and feminine dependence and independence which are found in the deities, patrons, and shrines of Tamil Hinduism carry over into Tamil Christianity as well, the Virgin Mary assuming in

popular imagination the independence of the Tamil goddess as a protectress of a locality (albeit a very large one, the whole Kaveri delta coast), and mistress of the sea which represents to Hindus a place of demonic chaos embodying wild, destructive energies (Bayly 1989: 333), while evoking cosmic universality through her well-known extra-Indian identity as well.

1.3 Christian Context

Both Hindu and Christian religious traditions have a share in giving form to the kinds of symbolic expression in use in the *Amma* cult. I turn now to the role of Christianity in the south Indian context.

Christian cultural influence has so long been present in India, that Christianity is virtually an indigenous tradition. The Syrian Christians, the oldest known Indian Christians, who are concentrated on the Malabar or Arabian Sea coast of India and speak the Malayalam language, call themselves "St. Thomas Christians" after the apostle whom they believe came to the *Chera* kingdom in the first century of the Common Era. As a missionary, tradition claims, St. Thomas the Apostle was to India what St. Paul was to Greece, though he left no epistles by which to trace his ministry. After establishing several churches in the region now known as Kerala (D'Souza 1972: 15-23, St. Thomas went to a place on the Bay of Bengal coast called *Maiyilapur*, in *Tondaimandalam*, to the north of *Cholamandalam*. There he preached at a place now called "Little Mount", and was martyred late in the first century C.E. on a nearby hill called "St. Thomas' Mount" (D'Souza 1972: 23-34; Karttunen 1986: 196). The Basilica and Cathedral church of St. Thomas at *Maiyilapur* (Mylapore) which purports to contain his relics is, in respect of ancient claims, the most important Roman Catholic site in India. Mylapore, Little Mount, and St. Thomas Mount are now suburbs of Madras, the capital of Tamil Nadu (Mundadan 1989: 21-49).

The presence of Jewish traders on the Malabar coast (Wester 1986) was probably the immediate reason that Thomas the

Apostle might have come here (D'Souza 1972: 17; Mundadan 1989: 19-21).⁵ These merchants seem to have taken part in a thriving Levantine trade with Kerala in textiles, spices, and such exotic animals as monkeys, peacocks, and perhaps even elephants.⁶ These Jews continued their commercial relations with India through the exigencies of Muslim and Portuguese Catholic hostility up to the mid-20th century when many of them emigrated to Israel. Historic synagogues can still be found in Kerala.

Armenian and Syrian Orthodox Christians, also traders, followed the Jews and settled on the Malabar coast in large numbers about the 4th or 5th century C.E. (D'Souza).⁷ The Syrians' bishops were then, and continue to be, consecrated by prelates in today's Iraq. Throughout their history, this relationship with the middle eastern church hierarchy has endured. Other Syrians emigrated to Kerala when Islamic rule came to Iraq. Intermarrying with local people, the Syrians quickly became entirely Indian in language and culture, excepting only their Syriac liturgy. At some time in their history, these Syrian Christians took possession of the tomb of St. Thomas at Mylapore, assimilating their own history to that of the saint (Mundadan 1989: 78-108).

The next significant Christian impact on India came with the Portuguese when Vasco da Gama arrived at Calicut in 1498. Fresh from the fifteenth century crusade to drive the last remnants of Islam from Iberia, the Portuguese sought commercial partners in the spice trade, and were prepared to eliminate Muslim competitors by whatever means might be deemed necessary. This aggressive attitude toward Islam led to mass conversions to Catholicism of Tamil fishing communities, called *paravar*, along the coastal strip between *Kanniya Kumari* at the southern tip of India and the *Ramanadapuram* peninsula (Roche 1984: 39-65). The *paravar* were involved in an intense competition for pearl oyster beds with a group of Muslim converts of the same area who had the naval backing of Arab Muslim merchants. In need of an alliance, the *paravar* became Christian in exchange for Portuguese patronage

and protection from these economic forces (Mundadan 1989: 391-401). The Portuguese, controlling the shoreline with *paravar* help, deprived their own ocean-faring Muslim merchant rivals of access to port facilities along this strip of coast.

From the beginning of the sixteenth until the middle of the seventeenth century, owing largely to the efforts of the Franciscans, Dominicans, Jesuits, and members of other religious orders, the Portuguese were the dominant political force among Christians in India (Thekkadath 1988: 5). Portuguese missionaries were under the authority of the *Padroado Real* or royal patronage which had divided the as-yet-unknown world between the Catholic monarchs of Portugal and Spain in the fifteenth century, so each could monopolize trade and conversions in its own sphere without mutual conflict. This situation resulted in Portuguese colonial ventures from Brazil in the west to China in the east and Spanish ventures from the Philippines in the west, across the Pacific Ocean, to Venezuela and Argentina in the east. Under the *Padroado*, to which it was a party, the Papacy agreed to appoint as bishops only the nominees of the two monarchs for their respective territories (Grafe 1990: 241). This resulted, naturally, in a hierarchy comprised entirely of Spanish and Portuguese aristocrats and was eventually to lead to dire contests for authority between Portuguese bishops and the Papacy itself in nineteenth century India.

The Portuguese colonial power made a point of subordinating the Syrian Christians, many of whom became Catholics. The Inquisition, also introduced to India in this period by the Portuguese, condemned Jews, Muslims, Hindus, and refractory Christians alike. While Franciscans did mission work primarily in communities of the Malabar, Coromandel and Sri Lankan coasts, the Jesuits founded the Madura Mission to evangelize the interior of the Tamil country. These Jesuits worked through the inculturation⁸ efforts of Fr. Roberto de Nobili and his colleagues to convert *brahmanas* (Thekkadath 1988: 212-9). In

separate experiments, other Jesuits lived among low-caste people and *panchamas* to introduce Christianity to them (Thekkadath 1988: 220-1). There is today a small community of *brahmana* Catholics in Tirucchirappalli, but the Madura Mission's effect in terms of conversions was most felt among the landowning and agricultural labouring groups such as *vellalar*, *udaiyar*, *pallar*, *paraiyar* and *nadar* (Thekkadath 1988: 210-249). Surprisingly, perhaps, the Madura Mission was also effective among the dryland farming martial clans of *mukulattor* (Nevett 1980), the *maravar* (Thekkadath 1988: 246-8), *kallar* (Thekkadath 1988: 226), and *agamudaiyar* (Bayly 1989: 397-404).

The Catholics dominated the field of Christian proselytism among Hindus until early in the eighteenth century when German Lutherans arrived at *Tarangambadi* (Tranquebar), a Danish enclave on the Coromandel coast, under the auspices of its Royal commercial factory (Hemingway 1906: 57-58). Growth of Christian numbers was slow. Generally a larger proportion of backward caste and *dalit* Hindus became Christian, often in mass conversions, which have continued to disturb certain Hindu interests until today. Controversial caste-based issues of precedence and pollution which these converts brought with them into the churches commonly disrupted life in the Christian community. Only when the British began to permit foreign missionaries to enter their territories in the early nineteenth century did foreign, especially Protestant, missions begin to attract a substantial number of converts.

In the last decade of the nineteenth century and the first two decades of the twentieth, this missionary work was concentrated in tribal areas of colonial India, resulting in 80% to 100% Christian populations, especially in the extreme north-east (Downs 1992, *passim*). Such dramatic realignment of religious affiliation has been regarded by some as politically dangerous to the social composition of India and recent mass conversion of whole backward caste villages, such as the Minakshipuram *pallars*

in Tirunelveli District to Islam, have aggravated these fears (Mosse 1994: 96).

It was 1886 before the Catholic Church established a hierarchy in India which was not dependent on any foreign ecclesiastical or missionary body, but it was 1923 before an ethnically Indian bishop was consecrated (Grafe 1990: 61). It required another generation and Independence before the Indian Protestant communities began to organize themselves independently from the foreign mission societies (Grafe 1990: 75-6), a process which still continues in some churches.

1.4 Veneration of the Saints

Veneration of the saints to intercede with God for favours is an integral part of Iberian Catholic devotions. First among these saints is the Mother of God, the Virgin Mary. In India as in Mexico, Iberian Catholic missionaries found in the Blessed Virgin an ideal symbol for bridging the gap between the Indians' religious propensities and their own (Guerin 1989: 115). The Aztec identity of *Tonantzin*, "mother of the gods", was felicitously usurped by the Virgin Mary through a timely apparition in 1531 to a poor man, Juan Diego, a recent convert to Spanish Catholicism. The tangible evidence for this apparition was her image, portrayed as a young Indian-featured, brown-complexioned girl, miraculously imprinted on the inner surface of Juan Diego's cape, in which she had instructed him to carry Spanish roses, appearing out of season, to his Bishop (Wolf 1958; Watson 1964). Whether this was a victory for *Tonantzin*, imposing her features on a Europeanized Mary, or for the Spanish missionaries is a moot question, for the convergence of these two Aztec and Spanish images of feminine sanctity, conjoined in Our Lady of Guadalupe, has produced the definitive Mexican national symbol. While Marian apparitions have occurred in many forms through the centuries, Our Lady of Guadalupe was the first such apparition to receive official Papal approval, but only after many years, during which the devotion became firmly established.⁹

A similar situation presented itself to the Jesuits and Franciscans of the Portuguese missions in the south of India. However she might be figured, the Mother of Christ was perceived as the surest way to Him for promoting religious conversion of Hindus, a way which posed no conflicts and required no compromises for the Portuguese Catholics. The missionaries found that devotion to the Mother appealed to the Tamils, and by cultivating such devotion, many conversions were won. Other saints such as St. Antony of Padua (*Punita Antoniyar*), the wonder-worker, St. Sebastian (*Punita Sebastiyar*), St. James the Greater (Santiago; *Iyagappar*), and Michael were introduced by priests of these religious orders (Grafe 1990: 177), all of whom met with persecution, and some with martyrs' deaths. Influenced by the Madura Mission and the coastal missions, the landscape of Tamil Nadu was soon sacralized by a network of saints' shrines and the graves of Tamil and European martyrs. Converts were especially attracted to the latter (Bayly 1989: 379-404, 414-9).¹⁰

Set in this Hindu background, and Christian sacred geography, the Virgin assumed some of the ambivalence of the local goddess. While her image in Europe is not entirely free of ambiguity (Perry and Echeverria 1988), a novel dimension was added to her character by the manner of her introduction to India. The Blessed Virgin Mary, Christianity's primary feminine symbol, came to personify, in a unique way, the Catholic church in Tamil Nadu. This strategy was so successful that devotions to Mary became the entrance to the faith. Today any Roman Catholic church or chapel is known in Tamil as *Mada Kovil*, literally, "Mother's Temple" (Grafe 1990: 177). I am not aware of any other locality where this identity is so explicit and pervasive.

The name of the Blessed Mother is so closely associated with that of the Catholic Church in India that if, here in south India, you want to know from a pagan where is the Catholic Church -- the surest way of being understood is to ask him: where is the *Mada Coil* -- Our Lady's Church (Santos 1933: 31).

This identification with Mary does more than distinguish Catholic

from Protestant churches, which are not called *kovils*. It is a clear declaration of the primacy of Mary, of the centrality for Tamils of the feminine expression of the sacred, which must continually occupy the back of the reader's mind.¹¹ Whether expressed in the symbolism of the local goddess or the image of the Virgin Mary, the feminine sacred constitutes, as Wolf found with Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico, "a symbol which seems to enshrine the major hopes and aspirations of an entire society", a master symbol (Wolf 1958: 34).

The masculine is marginalized to a great extent in Tamil Hindu popular devotions and Catholicism has replicated this pattern. While the Christian God in the Trinity stands behind Mary in a theoretical, otiose, and distantly soteriological way, it is she who is figured as being aware of, concerned for, and spontaneously helpful toward a petitioner's need, and graciously intimate with the devout. It is not surprising that indigenous Marian apparitional phenomena occurred in Tamil Nadu, as tradition claims, shortly after the early sixteenth century appearances of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico to empower the missionaries' task of promoting Catholic truth. I was told by Fr. V. M. Gnanapragasam, an expert on the eighteenth century Jesuit, Fr. Beschi, that the statues of Mary he installed in several churches arrived, *via* Manila, all the way from Mexico where they had been made (cf. Gnanapragasam 1988). Considering the role of the divine feminine and apotheosis through undeserved suffering in popular local devotions among Tamil Hindus, neither preference for Mary as divine Mother and bestower of wholeness, nor the sacralizing of the landscape by anxiety-settling saints and martyrs, should be surprising (Bayly 1989: 34-40, 123-130).

Although it is beyond the scope of this study to catalogue Catholic holy places, the Blessed Virgin Mary is patron to a plurality of the thousands of shrines in India dedicated to Catholic saints. Ten of the nineteen Archepiscopal Cathedrals in India (Thomas 1981: 18), and six of India's nine Basilicas Minor,

are dedicated to her (*Catholic Directory* 1993, *passim*).¹² The most revered and popular of all the Marian churches in India is the Basilica of "Our Lady of Good Health", at Velanganni.¹³ There has been almost no scholarly work on Velanganni (Bayly 1989; Younger 1991),¹⁴ nearly all published information being devotional in nature, either in Shrine-published guidebooks for pilgrims (Santos 1933, 1951, 1980; Gabriel, *et al.* 1987, 1989) or in the Shrine's own periodicals, the Tamil monthly *Velanganni Kuraloli* and its English counterpart, *Vailankanni Calling*.

More than a third of parish churches and shrines in Tamil Nadu are dedicated to the Mother under one advocacy or another, and many of these are places of pilgrimage. Using simple frequency of dedication of churches as a measure of popularity, the commonest symbols of sanctity for Catholics, after the Virgin Mary and Christ,¹⁵ are St. Antony of Padua, St. Joseph, St. Francis Xavier, and Michael the Archangel. Of the 884 parishes in the fourteen dioceses and archdioceses in Tamil Nadu, 305 are dedicated to Mary, only 105 to Christ, represented under a variety of names and iconic forms, seventy-two to St. Anthony, and sixty-eight to St. Joseph. The single most popular of Christ's images, the Sacred Heart, ranks after both St. Antony and St. Joseph in number of dedications (*Catholic Directory of India* 1993).

1.5 Keys to Understanding the Indian Virgin Mary

There are two keys to understanding the Holy Mother, *Mada*, as she exists under a variety of names and forms in the Tamil conscience, and both are primarily affective. (The first is that she fulfils a basic prerequisite in the Hindu sacred imagination for assuming the status of a village goddess - she has suffered grievously, and innocently) *Viyagula Mada*, Our Lady of Sorrows, is one of India's favourite representations of St. Mary. (The second key is her motherly constancy. More popular by far than the sorrowing mother, is *Sada Sagaya Mada*, (Our Lady of Perpetual Help). She is depicted as the crowned Mother holding the frightened Holy Child who, in rushing to her for comfort, is

losing his shoe. (Even the Lord seeks comfort in her, proclaims this image, evoking for Tamils and other goddess-oriented Indians a primacy for Mary which is profoundly attractive.) (Mada's concern for her devotees is earnest and intimate, perhaps even jealous. When they journey on pilgrimage, especially, as we shall see, to Mada's shrine at Velanganni, they come yearning to feel her maternal, nurturing presence. The pilgrims long to see and hear her, in her human form, if only they could.)

An appreciation of the manner in which the Virgin Mary, as she has come to be represented at Velanganni shrine, pervades Tamil Catholic imagination is necessary for understanding the symbolic roots of the *Amma* cult and the meaning and impact of the Marian model which its seer, Maryamma, has emulated.

Power over the natural order, derived from purity and undeserved suffering, and the trusted intimacy of mother and child, perhaps especially the male child, are the two traits by which the Virgin has come to be known in thousands of local communities, both Catholic and Hindu, within the Velanganni shrine's symbolic hinterland, the Kaveri River delta and the adjacent Coromandel Coast. How do these characteristics play out in pilgrims' religious understanding and practice once they have left the holy place behind? How is Mada's nurturing and prodigiously protective nature expressed when it finds its way into the life of Christian and Hindu homes? When pilgrims come to Velanganni, it is commonly to bargain with Mada for help with their pragmatic needs. To this end, offerings are brought, promises made, and practical results expected. These expectations occupy the mind of householders in the months between visits to the shrine, which may take place at any time - casually, annually, or after many years. When the expected result occurs, a thanks-offering, either of penance or of money, is made.

1.6 Velanganni Shrine: Location, Origin and Feast

The Kaveri River delta roughly corresponds to the Latin Rite Diocese of Tanjavur. The largest single religious institution

by far in this Diocese, and the cynosure of all Catholic India, is the Shrine to Our Lady of Good Health, or *Arokkiya Mada*, at the seashore village of Velanganni a few kilometers south of the port city and district headquarters of Nagappattinam. At this shrine the Blessed Virgin Mary, an historically formidable Christian symbol, has entered, and assumed a dominant role in, sectarian discourse on local religion in Tamil Nadu by bridging the hiatus between Hindu and Catholic notions of the divine feminine. The shrine's devotional focal point is a miraculous healing statue of the Virgin Mary dressed in a gold silk sari, holding the Infant Jesus (*Kulandai Yesu*) in her left arm and a baton of solid gold in her right hand. Both figures wear golden jewelled crowns. The Shrine has a long history as a pilgrimage destination and today hosts the largest Catholic pilgrimage in India at its annual Feast each September 8, the Nativity of Mary. Its numbers rival those of the largest Catholic pilgrimages in the world.

The Velanganni Shrine's mythic origins lie in three apparitional events set in the late sixteenth or the early seventeenth century. In the first vision, Mother Mary appeared with her Child to two Hindus, in the second, to a Hindu and a Tamil Catholic, and in the third, to the crew of a Portuguese merchant ship. The second apparition produced a miraculous healing, acknowledgement of the Lady of the apparition as Mary, and the foundation of the original Shrine. The third vision established a tradition of European patronage at Velanganni. The first vision is rather more ambivalent. It seems to be practically an afterthought which makes the Mother present, initially, to Hindus alone. Even less definite in its temporal referents than the other two, it projects the woman of the apparition into a period which might be imagined as prior to the arrival of Catholic missionaries, as early as the fifteenth century, and into a situation owned symbolically by the local people.

The most important feature to note about *Arokkiya Mada* at this point is that she is held to be an entirely indigenous

advocation of the Blessed Virgin, and her four-century old apparitions are regarded as an expression of her special favour for India. Though not overtly approved by the official Church, this perception appears to call for distinctively Indian modes of worship and interpretation of her nature and powers. Signs of these may be observed at any time at the shrine.

With the Velanganni cultus as the source of Maryamma's symbol borrowing, I explore how her subaltern discourse concerning the construction of sacred meaning and social identity has positioned the *Amma* cult to challenge, perhaps even to subvert, the hegemonic discourse of the Roman Catholic Church.

1.6.1 Velanganni, Its Sacred Topography and People

The village of Velanganni is located nine kilometers south of the port town of Nagappattinam on the Coromandel coast. It is bounded on the south by a distributary of the Kaveri River, the *Vellaiyaru* which reaches the sea here. This conjunction of waters, along with the natural beauty of the site and the accumulated devotions of generations of pilgrims, confers on Velanganni the characteristic of a *tirtham*, or holy place of crossings, in Hindu cosmology (cf. Saraswati 1985: 12-19; Bhardwaj 1963: 80-96). The village is strung out along a two-kilometer side road, from an arch which greets arriving pilgrims at the main highway to the sands of the Bay of Bengal. Two sacred sites constitute the shrine - *Mada Kulam*, or Our Lady's Tank, in the west, and Velanganni *Peralaya*, or Basilica, in the east. Until the 1970's, the path connecting *Mada Kulam* with the Basilica wound in a leisurely way through fields of cashew trees. Once an open pond of fresh water in a rustic grove, with a row of steps by which to descend to it, *Mada Kulam* is now cemented over, for its own protection, from a vastly increased human traffic. Its water is pumped into an overhead tank and piped to spigots for distribution to queues of waiting pilgrims. *Mada Kulam* is generally thought of as the place of the first of the three foundational apparitions, and so is called *Palaya Velanganni*, or Old Velanganni, to distinguish it

from *Pudiya Velanganni*, or New Velanganni, the environs of the church itself, believed to be the place of subsequent founding apparitions and to have at its core an original seventeenth, perhaps even sixteenth, century structure. The old church faces east toward the sea, and it is a popular practice among pilgrims to stroll from its doors to the beach, between rows of thatched shops selling a wide variety of religious and secular articles, for a ritual bath [*snanam*] in the sea as is universally practiced at Hindu seashore temples and at temple tanks (Bhardwaj 1973: 76-7, 86, 150),¹⁶ to return the same way, dripping wet in their clothes, to worship.

This church has joined to it by a common vestry a massive two-storied extension which accommodates two more churches in separate upper and lower sanctuaries. The extension faces west toward *Mada Kulam* along a broad, straight, Way of the Cross, twelve meters wide, which connects the two sacred sites, the entire complex being 920 meters in length. Each pole of the sacred complex has a collection of subordinate structures clustered around it.

Three communities¹⁷ - Hindus, Christians, and Muslims - live in the village, and each has its temples, chapels, and mosque. A plurality of the approximately ten thousand residents are Hindus, with Muslims the smallest community of the three. The shrine is the largest employer in the village, and Hindus constitute a majority of its eight hundred regular employees who are not directly involved in Catholic liturgy. A small Hindu community of fishers, called *Ariyanattu Chettiyyar* living around a *Vinayagar Kovil* near the shore in the northeast of the village have long associations with the shrine. These are the people from which local Catholic converts were drawn. Scattered households of Christians and Hindus live in neighbourhoods dominated by the other community, while the Muslim community is rather more residentially exclusive. A *Dalit* (Harijan) street has come up

recently on the path running along the north bank of the *Vellaiyaru*.

1.6.2 Foundational Stories

Fr. S. Santos, the shrine's historian, records three stories concerning the early history of Velanganni which provide its founding charter. These stories, collected by Fr. M. Motha Vaz prior to 1920 from local people, relate the dramatic events which brought the shrine into existence and gave the Virgin Mary the reputation for which pilgrims seek her here - exemption from punishment, physical and emotional healing, and safety in life-threatening danger. There are three components involving respectively, a Lame Boy, a Milk Boy, and the crew of a Portuguese sailing ship.

1.6.2.1 The Lame Boy

Sometime in the sixteenth or seventeenth century, a poor Hindu boy who was lame from birth sold *mor*, or buttermilk, for his widowed mother in the shelter of a banyan tree on a raised spot just outside the village of Velanganni. Santos' account emphasizes the virtue and industry of the boy and his mother, and the appeal to passersby of the cool buttermilk in the summer's heat. Suddenly, he saw before him a young woman of matchless beauty, dressed in spotless clothes, holding a child in her arms. She smiled at the lame boy and asked for a cup of *mor* for her child. When he had given it, the woman asked him to carry a message to a man in Nagappattinam that she could be found in Velanganni. He apologized that he could not oblige, because he was lame. The woman spoke to her child, and immediately the boy's lameness was healed. Running to Nagappattinam, he found a Catholic gentleman who had, himself, received a similar vision of the Virgin Mary in his dream the night before (Santos 1933: 4-5). When the Hindu boy returned with this Christian to his spot under the banyan tree, the woman of his vision appeared again asking that a church be built for her there. A mud and thatch chapel was quickly erected, with a statue of Our Lady holding the Infant Jesus. Catholics and

Non-Christians flocked to the spot. Many favours were granted and the fame of the shrine spread far and wide. In view of her first and subsequent cures that took place there, Mary came to be known and invoked as "Our Lady of Health" (Santos 1933: 5-6).

Santos' first origin story thus led to the construction of a temporary shrine sheltering an image of the Virgin, eventually to become known locally as Our Lady of Good Health, "*Arokkiya Mada*". There is no suggestion of an antecedent shrine at this location, nor of any foreign origin for this Marian advocacy.

1.6.2.2 The Milk Boy

Santos' second story antedates the first, providing a retrospective, and a prehistory to the first Christian involvement at Velanganni. This supposedly earlier apparition involved Hindus exclusively, and its origin may be entirely apologetic - an attempt to incorporate Hindu ancestors mythically into the Catholic world.

It was a hot day and a small cowherd boy, carrying milk from Velanganni to his Hindu *veḷḷaḷa* master in Nagappattinam, stopped at a pond to refresh himself. Setting down his milk-pot, he rested under a shady banyan tree. Soon he fell asleep. He was startled by a bright vision of a beautiful young woman holding a child. Her clothes were modest but spotless and her face was serene and majestic. Her son's face was bright as the rising sun. The woman reassured him with a motherly smile, and asked for some of his milk to feed her child (Santos 1933: 6). The boy feared his master's anger if he gave away his milk, but offered it anyway. When the woman and child vanished, he ran to his master, reported the vision to account for his tardiness, and begged forgiveness for the missing milk. When the lid of the pot was lifted, however, it was brim-full. The boy still insisted that he had given much of it away (Santos 1933: 7). Intrigued, the master accompanied the boy to the tank, which is now called *Mada Kulam*, and the woman again gave them her *katchi* [vision].

No special instructions were given and no structures or cultic activities resulted from this apparition. Rather, it conforms to the Hindu tradition of seeing and being seen by the divine. It is more picturesque, containing celestial images absent from the first story, though the modesty of the lady's garments is emphasized in both. Again, no mention is made of an earlier shrine at the place.

1.6.2.3 The Portuguese Sailors

The third origin story accounts for the first permanent shrine structure, established through Portuguese patronage. A 17th century merchant vessel, bound from Macao to Colombo, was caught in a cyclonic storm in the Bay of Bengal. The sailors pleaded to the "Morning Star" [Mary] to save them, vowing to build a church in her honour wherever they might safely reach land. Their prayer was instantly granted by a lull in the cyclone (Santos 1933: 8). Reaching safety on the Coromandel coast at Velanganni on the Feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin on September 8 and going ashore, the sailors prayed. The Virgin appeared to them, led them to her thatched, mud-walled chapel, and indicated the site of the present Basilica as the place where she wanted them to construct a permanent church for her. When their modest but sturdy structure was complete, the seamen wondered whether they should transfer to it the statue in the thatched chapel, or import a new one from home. One morning, to their great wonder, the Indians and the Portuguese found the primitive chapel's miraculous statue transferred to the altar of the new structure. Since they could not discover anyone responsible for this "translation" of the statue, they believed that Our Lady had done it herself (Santos 1933: 9).

The seamen dedicated the chapel to the Nativity of Our Lady. This feast, September 8, which commemorates the date of their safe landing, thus establishes the date of Velanganni shrine's annual Feast. This story differs from the others as it incorporates themes common to both Mediterranean Catholicism and

contemporary worship at Velanganni - helpless desperation, piety, miraculous protection, gratitude, and vow fulfillment (Christian 1972, 1981a; 1981b; Carroll 1992). What became of the original chapel and its patrons is unknown.

1.6.3 Historical Evidence for Apparitions at Velanganni

The foundational stories summarized in the previous section were collected from the people of Velanganni, Nagappattinam, and the surrounding country parishes by Msgr. Motha Vaz and published in 1920.¹⁸

The Franciscans are known to have been in Nagappattinam by 1534 (Santos 1933: 11).¹⁹ When they settled in Velanganni, however, is not clear, but the early Catholic history of Velanganni is Franciscan. The village is not yet mentioned as a posting in the Franciscan General Chapter held in 1612 (Meersman 1962b: 70).²⁰

Paulo da Trinite, ofm, in his 17th century account of Indian Catholic missions, mentions the existence of a Franciscan church *Nossa Senhora da Saude*, Portuguese for "Our Lady of Health" south of Nagappattinam by 1635. This is probably the first recorded mention of Velanganni, if not yet by that name (Meersman 1962b: 67).²¹ If, argues Achilles Meersman, ofm,²² there had been any tradition of apparitional origin for this church, Trinite's fascination with the miraculous would surely have been cause for commenting on, and probably amplifying, it (Meersman 1962b: 67-68). He writes:

Trinite's chronicle... is written in the spirit of the times,... loaded with miracles, visions, apparitions.... He was not one to allow a miracle... to pass unheeded and unheralded. And the fact that he fails to mention anything in the nature of a miracle or apparition is in itself a proof that nothing of the sort ever took place.... Divine interference in human events could be discerned everywhere and constituted the height of proof, the justification of any cause (Meersman 1962a: 73).

As yet, no evidence has been found in the Portuguese records of any primitive shrine, or even a pre-Portuguese Christian chapel, at Velanganni such as is the case at Mylapore. The church emerges in history as just one more Franciscan mission

outpost. It is not until the Franciscan Annual Report of 1784, nearly two centuries after the founding apparitions are alleged to have taken place, that Velanganni is first mentioned as a place of pilgrimage (Meersman 1974: 467).²³

Every one of my Indian sources - lay people, priests, and religious - presumes and insists that Our Lady of Health is an indigenous Indian avocation of Mary. None admits to having any knowledge of Mary under this name outside of India. It is this confidence in its indigenous and apparitional origin which makes Velanganni the premier Marian shrine in India.

Another version of *Arokkiya Mada* exists in Europe, however, as the very name of Our Lady of Good Health is Iberian - *Nossa Senhora da Saude*, in Portuguese - and an old church dedicated to her stands on the island of San Miguel in the Portuguese Atlantic islands of the Azores, a stopping point on the sea route to India.²⁴ It is credible that sailors recruited from these islands carried *Nossa Senhora* with them to India. Other churches in India, older than Velanganni, also bear the same name.²⁵

1.6.4 The Arokkiya Mada Icon and Museum of Offerings

The immediately recognizable symbol of the sacred at Velanganni is the icon of *Annai Velanganni* which stands in a glass case on the wall behind the old pre-Vatican II altar in the Basilica. Another, in some ways more evocative, representation is the shrine's collection, maintained over many years, of pilgrims' votive offerings for blessings received, or favours desired.

No one knows how or where the miraculous, healing statue of Our Lady of Velanganni originated. The tale of the Portuguese sailors simply tells how the statue which they found in the original thatched structure had moved miraculously to their own newly built masonry chapel.

The statue, made of painted wood in Iberian style, depicts Mary holding Jesus in her left arm. Her right hand is designed to hold a baton (or a bouquet of flowers, as I observed in one old

print in the market), and his is raised in a two-fingered blessing. (Three meters of gold brocade Kanchipuram *sari*, with the Tamil prayer "*Arokkiya Madave Engalukkaha Vendikkollum* [Our Lady of Health, Pray for Us]" woven in miniscule letters into the fabric, is wrapped around the image in a distinctive way which gives the image its immediately recognizable form. The statue and the figure of Jesus are then crowned. The statue, without its crown, is about seventy centimeters in height.²⁶ The gold crescent moon hangs in front of her dress at calf-height rather than beneath her feet, as is common with Marian statues elsewhere. This imagery and the array of twelve stars above her crown assert her identity with the woman in the twelfth chapter of the book of *Revelation*, cosmic, resplendent, crushing a serpent under her foot (3.4.1; Chapter 3 note 2).

Now reproduced in photographs, prints, and plastic or plaster statues which incorporate this drapery, the icon of *Velanganni Arokkiya Mada* always appears in this form in Catholic churches, roadside shrines, and Christian and Hindu homes. At Velanganni, the statue is protected by a wood and glass display case, and it is curious that almost everywhere the statue appears, a glass case is a part of its presentation, unlike other images of saints and gods. Prior to 1957, it was draped in a blue *sari* with gold trim, fanned out like a halo behind her head, so the popular image is quite new. So ubiquitous is this new icon that most Indian Catholics would not likely be able to recognize the bare statue with certainty.

Next to the miraculous statue, the principal attraction for visitors to *Pudiya Velanganni* is its "Museum of Offerings". Devoid of any liturgical or sacramental activities, the Museum is yet the repository of most of the evidences of *Mada's* grace and power. Accordingly, many visitors approach the Museum with an awe which may exceed even that experienced before her statue in the Basilica. Inside, one may examine thousands of articles pilgrims have brought as gifts to *Arokkiya Mada*, either in hope of help

with some cure, material ambition, or social solution, or in thanks for it. There are framed testimonials to healings and other favours, often including silver foil or gold medallions representing *Arokkiya Mada*. A pen for getting an office job and a stethoscope for admission to medical school, either the actual objects or full scale silver replicas, are popular votive offerings. Tiny silver cradles represent either hope for, or gratitude for receiving, a child and are common purchases in the village shops and ^{Sales} Depot operated by the shrine. One section is devoted entirely to gold offerings. A sign describing the history of one of the gold displays tells how the collection had once been stolen and recovered, miraculously intact, through the grace of Our Lady.

The current shrine history, unabashedly soliciting more such offerings, suggests norms for donation, and prescribes the logic of exchange between the mundane and sacred which is at work at Velanganni:

No one of a kind and gentle nature would have ever failed to thank Our Lady for the immense help that she has given. In remembrance of those happy occasions that they have experienced with the help of 'Our Lady' they offer offerings to be placed at the Museum of Offerings. Those who come to the Museum become induced to take similar oaths to get their favours granted by 'Our Lady' (Gabriel, et al. 1989: 130-1).

1.6.5 *Annai Velanganni*, the Movie

A Tamil feature film, *Annai Velanganni*, full of cinematic special effects representing the traditional miracles associated with the shrine, was produced by a Hindu film-maker, Thangappan, and distributed in 1971. The film projected a miraculous, other-worldly Velanganni before the mythological imagination of the general, preponderantly Hindu, public. This resulted in a popular upsurge of pilgrimage by many who would otherwise have had little interest to visit. Such so-called "mythologicals" are immensely popular entertainment in India among the common people. Glittering, miraculous visions and mysterious transformations, affliction and its just rectification through intercession by the divine hero, are basic thematic components of this genre.

The film graphically depicts its miracles in genre-bound ways which the local informants and Fr. Motha Vaz could hardly have imagined fifty years earlier. *Annai Velanganni* has clearly supplied graphic models for the way in which devotees of *Arokkiya Mada* should be thought of as appearing and acting, and the manner in which the miracles should be imagined to have actually occurred. The printed accounts of the Milk Boy's miracle pale before the movie version. While he rests under the tree at Velanganni, far away in Nagappattinam the infant of the master is plaguing its mother with insatiable cries of hunger and she, in turn, is haranguing her husband about the boy's tardiness. At just the moment that the Infant Jesus drinks the milk in Velanganni, the master's child in Nagappattinam suddenly becomes satiated. When the master is about to beat the boy for arriving late with the milk on account of the domestic nuisance it has caused, and because some milk has been found missing from the vessel, he is stopped by a shriek from the kitchen and rushes inside to witness the milk-pot bubbling up and overflowing with rich, fresh, creamy milk. The supply does not stop, either, for it runs off the table, across the floor, and down the steps into the yard. Such is the style of the new ethos of the shrine, embraced by the many devotees exposed to this film. The Virgin appears not in her "modest, spotless garments", but as the contemporary icon, dressed in a rich gold brocade *sari* and crown, holding in her left arm a similarly draped and crowned Infant Jesus and in her right hand a solid gold baton or sceptre (Tamil, *cenkol*) of authority.

While this cinematic presentation is "the same" story, essential themes have become radically altered from the version given in the shrine's histories. In the folk version, the boy feared punishment as a matter of conscience, but since the pot arrived full in Nagappattinam, punishment was not an issue at all. Some pretext was necessary to introduce and dramatize a previously absent theme, the overflowing abundance of milk. This bubbling milk connects symbolically with the Tamil Hindu *pongal* harvest

festival when rice cooked in milk is intentionally boiled over, as a harbinger of plenty in the coming year. The motif of overflowing milk is important also for the *Amma* cult, and mediates between the cult's mythology and the Hindu context (2.4.5; 5.2.8). Some local Catholic priests scoff at what they consider to be the film's unnecessary distortions, while others feel there is nothing wrong in a little innocent elaboration intended to subtly enhance a beautiful, and true, tradition.

1.6.6 Facilities, Scale, and Revenues of the Shrine

Services for the convenience of pilgrims have grown enormously at Velanganni since the 1970's. This section attempts to give an impression of the amenities and resources of the shrine, and the scale of its pilgrimage.

1.6.6.1 Pilgrim Accommodations and Other Facilities

Apart from the symbolic, "sacred" amenities of the shrine, there has been a vast expansion of accommodations for pilgrims. The growth cycle appears to be limited only by the physical constraint of space in which to build - the more amenities, the more pilgrims; the more pilgrims, the more revenue; the more revenue, the more construction of amenities. In the past decade, land values in the village have multiplied by a factor of ten. A modest house and plot, which was sold in 1981 for Rs.600,000, was valued in 1992 at more than Rs.5,000,000 (V.S. Arokkiyasamy 1992.09.01).

Until 1963, when the first Tamil parish priest was appointed, Velanganni had been in the care of Portuguese and Goan priests. The new Tamil priest began the first modest but systematic program of lodge construction, and in the 1970's two major projects, the upper and lower church extensions and the Way of the Cross, were conceived and completed. The chief architect of supporting facilities for the shrine was Fr. S.L. Gabriel, parish priest from 1982 to 1990, during whose time seven large pilgrim lodges, a Health Centre, a Middle School, a Higher Secondary School, four staff quarters, an extension to the Museum of

Offerings with a shopping arcade, a tonsure hall where pilgrims may have their heads shaved as a penance, an outdoor stage paved in granite accommodating 3000 spectators, and a hospice for the Missionaries of Charity to serve both the destitute dying and severely handicapped children, were constructed.

In 1992, a new computerized "Shrine Rooms Booking Office" and a combined "Old Age Home" and hostel for homeless young women were opened. In 1993-94, a Rs.7,000,000, 170-room retreat house with a chapel called *Dhyana Asram*, and major extensions to two of the existing lodges have been constructed (John Peter 1993.07.03).

The rapid growth of both the facilities for liturgical practices and ancilliary amenities since the 1960's can be attributed to the shift from Goan to Tamil administration and the style of religiosity Tamils wished to cultivate at the new Basilica. In addition, as mentioned above, the popular 1971 film *Annai Velanganni* familiarized millions, especially Hindus who would otherwise not have known of the wondrous cosmic powers of *Arokkiya Mada*, with the existence of her shrine.

1.6.6.2 Scale of the Pilgrimage

Arokkiya Mada is celebrated annually at Velanganni with a Novena which culminates in the Feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin on 8 September. During the ten days of the Feast, massive public displays of reverence and affection, involving the participation of about two million pilgrims in a festive daily flag-raising and a sequence of evening processions, demonstrate the people's regard for her.

Without a systematic program of controlled access to the environs of the shrine, it is not possible to make an accurate count of pilgrims who attend the Novena and Feast, from August 29 to September 8. On an average day during the first half of the Feast, buses continually arrive packed - each bringing a state-regulated seventy passengers, plus twenty or thirty standees - and depart nearly empty. At the end of this festival, when a million or more pilgrims are attempting to depart, public transit systems

and private carriers are strained far beyond their limits. I counted pilgrims entering the Basilica itself at various times of day to get some quantitative estimate of the human pressure on that particular facility and judged the daily total to range somewhere around 47,500 visits in a twelve-hour period.

The only statement from the Catholic Church I have been able to locate concerning numbers of pilgrims at Velanganni was a 31 July, 1988 address in which Pope John Paul II mentioned the shrine's reputation as "the Lourdes of the Orient" and noted that "up to two million faithful" attend the annual Feast (John Paul II: 1988). Such a favourable comparison of Velanganni with Lourdes at the highest level of the Catholic Church may be taken as the fruition of self-conscious efforts by the principals of the shrine - its Rector, Bishop, and the Roman Catholic hierarchy in India - to make Velanganni internationally known as a pilgrimage destination.²⁷ A "Blessing of the Extremely Sick" with the Blessed Sacrament on the first Saturday of each month (Gabriel 1989: 51-52), introduced by Fr. Gabriel, was intended to reinforce the favourable comparison of Velanganni with Lourdes. Even the shrine guide book is now called *The History of the Shrine Basilica of Our Lady of Health Vailankanni (The Lourdes of the East)* (Gabriel, et al. 1987, 1989)!

A 1986 survey of prominent Indian pilgrimage shrines states:

Of all the shrines, that of Our Lady of Good Health (Velankanni) has the highest number of attendance on feastdays. It is estimated at an average of 15-20 lakhs [1.5 to 2 million] per year (Puthanangady 1986: 632).

Shrine authorities maintain that two-thirds of pilgrim visits take place during the ten days of the Feast. If this estimate is accurate, and my calculations indicate that about 1.4 million visitors attend during the non-Feast period, some 4.2 million pilgrims may attend Velanganni each year, making it third only to Guadalupe in Mexico and Lourdes in France in numbers as a Catholic place of pilgrimage. Lourdes was visited by 4.6 million pilgrims in 1987 (Eade 1991: 76).²⁸

The pilgrimage has grown dramatically during the twentieth century. The *Madras District Gazetteer* for 1906 estimates that 30,000 pilgrims attended the Feast at that time, while the 1915 *Report of the Pilgrim Committee* records that between 50-70,000 pilgrims attended in that year (Noronha 1916).²⁹

Today newspapers carry advertisements and reports of the Feast. Painted life-size "cutouts" of *Arokkiya Mada* and similar travellers' aids at the the Madras train stations and bus terminal direct pilgrims where to transfer to Velanganni-bound buses. Shrine authorities contemplate replacing these cutouts with computer-controlled pixelboards, providing eye-catching and detailed digital promotional information in several languages (Joseph Selvaraj 1993.07.01).

In 1992, a computerized system was installed which manages one-third of bookings for shrine-operated rooms, and there are plans to phase in the remaining accommodations gradually. In May, 1993, the "Marian Month" and a high-season period at Velanganni, about 50,000 persons were registered by computer (Joseph Selvaraj 1993.07.01). Using this figure and information about private lodging (Rayyan 1993.06.30), I estimate the number of pilgrims accommodated in permanent shelters during that month at 250,000. Perhaps 5,000 people sleep nightly at such peak times within the perimeter wall of the Basilica, "in the lap of *Mada*". Many private householders and landowners erect temporary casuarina pole and coconut-leaf shelters for poorer pilgrims in private plots all over the village, extending intermittently all the way to the main highway. The numbers of pilgrims using these facilities and the tens of thousands who sleep on the sands of the beach during the Feast are not estimable.

The three peak pilgrimage periods are the month of May, the Annual Feast from mid-August to mid-September, and Christmas, the last half of December. In the low-season periods between these, probably 950,000 pilgrims visit Velanganni. Occupancy is about the same at Christmas as in May, and the period is half as

long. Therefore, we should expect about 150,000 Christmas visitors, for a subtotal of 1.4 million, excluding the most popular period of the Annual Novena and Feast. If, indeed, two-thirds of pilgrims come during the Feast, the annual total may range around 4.2 million. The shrine's own estimates of 1.5 to 2 million visitors in the 1986 study quoted are from the early 1980's, before the expansion of construction of pilgrim facilities. An increase in attendance of 50% to 60% over the last decade would not be surprising.

During the Feast, the shrine authorities actively urge pilgrims to finish their visit quickly and depart, to make way for newcomers, and will normally give a room for only three nights. With persistent coaxing, this may be extended a further three nights. Thus, during the Feast period proper, there is a rapid turnover of shrine-managed rooms. A very rough and ready estimate of pilgrim numbers throughout the Feast based on these factors, and assuming one full turnover between the initial and terminal events over a ten-day period, might not be far from the estimate of double the non-Feast period attendance, or 2.8 million.

1.6.6.3 Revenues

The Velanganni Shrine counting room is located in the Priests' Residence, and is generally off-limits to visitors. To this room are brought twice a day, on the shoulders of four men, the locked and sealed wooden chests which fit inside the steel *undiyals*, the donation boxes which are located at strategic points throughout the shrine complex. Here several bathtub-sized chests brimming full of loose change, which no one seems to have the time to count or return to circulation, sit untouched in this country which struggles daily from an acute coin shortage. On any day throughout the year in the off-season a few nuns from the Bon Secours Convent may be found in the counting room lethargically counting banknotes and bundling them in hundreds. During the Feast a dozen priests may be found at the same task, chatting jocularly as they work among stacks of Rs.100 notes, Rs.10,000 per bundle,

and so on down - Rs.5,000, Rs.2,000 and Rs.1,000 per bundle for the smaller denominations.

According to a 1986 report on popular Catholic shrines, the largest financial collection reported for an annual Feast was Rs.2.4 million (Puthanangady 1986: 633). In the late 1980's, the shrine contributed about Rs.300,000 to Tanjavur Diocese each month. In addition, about Rs.1.5 million was sent to the Diocese from each Annual Feast, totaling Rs.4.8 million annually. The high school headmaster, a priest, provided me with these figures from his personal knowledge, cautioning me that I should not expect to obtain any financial information from the people who are now in authority (Savarimuthu 1991.11.07).

1.6.7 Shrine Personnel and the Village

The shrine is the main employer in the village and has financed construction of several residential colonies for its employees. More than eight hundred salaries are directly generated by the shrine in this village of 10,000. The Basilica and chapels engage a sacristan and fourteen assistants who receive offerings from visitors and prepare vestments and liturgical provisions. These numbers double temporarily during May and the Feast. The shrine office and Priests' Residence has a staff of twenty. Shrine lodges employ eighteen supervisors and wardens, and 122 in other classes. Between two and three hundred additional sweepers are hired for the Feast. The canteens employ fifty food service staff, whose numbers also double during the Feast.

To oversee shrine property, assist and direct the pilgrims, 110 security guards and watchmen are employed and 100 more are hired during the Feast. Confrontations are frequent between these security-related employees and the village's residents as the domestic business of the local people often causes them to trespass on shrine properties which, at several points in the township, have come to obstruct habitual rights of way that existed before the shrine's recent capital works developments (Wilson Paul 1993.07.06).

Our Lady of Health Higher Secondary School serves 1400 students from Standards 6 to 12. About half are Christian, but two-thirds of these are from outside the parish, living in shrine-supported residences (Savarimuthu 1991.11.07). Though they are not directly employed by the shrine, this shrine-maintained school provides facilities which enable more than twenty teachers to receive salaries from the state.

About thirty Bon Secours sisters look after 150 girls in their convent who study at the High School. They also - regrettably, in the view of some villagers - sell religious articles and plastic bottles for holy water, and count money in the cash room (V.S. Arokkiyasamy 1992.08.31). Three of Mother Theresa's Missionaries of Charity employ a gardener and six local women to care for the wards of their hospice and orphanage.

1.6.7.1 Priests

There are seven priests with official positions in the administration and many more are in residence at the shrine for special events. The Priests' Residence is a three-story building which keeps dozens of guest rooms ready for visiting priests, and mess facilities capable of feeding a hundred people at a sitting.

After the office of Bishop, that of Parish Priest at Velanganni is the single most desirable post in Tanjavur Diocese (V.S. Arokkiyasamy 1992.09.02). Priests holding executive office tend to remain for a number of years, while junior priests receive assignments at Velanganni for brief periods and have little time to become acquainted with the village. Assistants regard posting here as a kind of probation - a test of skills and loyalties (Joseph Selvaraj 1993.07.01).

Older priests criticise the attitude prevalent among diocesan clergy that appointment at the shrine is an opportunity for personal advancement, enrichment, and nepotism. One middle-aged priest told me how difficult his posting at Velanganni in his youth had been. He hated the commercialism, the constant concern for money. After two years without reassignment, he wrote to the

Bishop requesting a transfer. It was refused. Finally, he approached the Bishop in person, explaining that he had been ordained to be a priest and wanted an assignment where it was possible for him to be a real one. He got his transfer, but the chance of promotion was the cost he paid for it (A. Xavier 1992.08.29).

Another long-serving diocesan priest told me how he abhors all the attention and adulation accorded to Mary by Tamils. The shrine, he told me, promotes a mythological, rather than the true Biblical image of Mary and she is treated by the Tamils like a Hindu deity. "So much attention paid to a statue is an insult to the Eucharist," he said, sorrowfully. This priest regretted that Catholics come to Velanganni full of superstitions, driven by self-seeking personal objectives and ambitions, rather than to seek spiritual ends (H. Joseph Amalraj 1991.09.03).

1.6.7.2 Discontent with the Shrine and Priests

Concerns about priests and the management of Velanganni Shrine and village are common among lay people as well. A highly respected senior villager who has been involved with this church as a layman since he was an altar server in the 1930's, V.S. Arokkiyasamy, told me forcefully, "We have priests counting coins and not meeting the people. Do you need so many priests to count coins?" (V.S. Arokkiyasamy 1992.09.02).

Villagers, Catholic and non-Catholic alike, regard the priests as nepotists who neglect their own parishioners while favouring their own relatives from distant places, and pilgrims, over residents. They feel that the village does not receive benefits in proportion to the huge sums of cash which the shrine attracts. Resentment is not difficult to find. "The priests do not visit us, not even an annual visit," said one Catholic merchant. "The Church is supposed to be dedicated to God. They should not be interested in shops. Employment is given to outsiders who are relatives of the priests. Caste feelings run high in these appointments. Our relationship is so strained. I haven't gone to Mass there for years. We celebrate St. Joseph's and St.

Sebastian's feasts in our own chapel belonging to the *agamudaiyar* community with donations from our own people. Except coming to celebrate Mass, the Fathers have nothing to do with it" (William Patrick 1993.06.30).

An Anglo-Indian beggar and former merchant navy seaman, offered, with a sensitive insight, a prospective solution to what he perceives as the single most important social discontinuity in Velanganni. "First the priests must come out and see what is happening, like a doctor comes to see his patient and give him what he needs. The priest is more than a doctor." He identified a problem for the local people in the devolution of authority to shrine servants, especially to the watchmen and security guards. "The parish priest gives one order and a watchman makes nine orders" (Rowe 1991.08.21). When given authority over people regarded as their social inferiors and a stout stick, some security guards have little compunction in using it freely. I once witnessed a vicious beating of a crippled beggar, physically unable to move from a public road as he had been ordered by a temporary guard. Noticing my distress, the guard grinned maliciously and laid into his victim afresh.

Loss of the personal touch, loss of care and directness, loss of the shrine's physically intimate scale in former days, and loss of its rural simplicity, among all the social and physical changes which have taken place recently at Velanganni, are what have most injured the feelings of older people who are either old-time Velanganni residents or have been loyal pilgrims for decades (V. S. Arokkiyasamy 1992.09.02).

Taking their cue from the general tone of controversy and tension, some villagers have demonstrated considerable ingenuity in their relations with the Basilica administration, the dominant landowner in the village. The head of one Catholic family, aware of the potential of competing religious symbols for contesting practical advantage and involved in one of the shrine's many legal disputes over property, has set up a small shrine to the Hindu

goddess *Mariyamman* under a *veppu maram* [neem or margosa tree] next to his house, the property in question, claiming that the goddess had come and healed one of their children. The putative owner has threatened to exploit this shrine to provoke Hindu-Christian hostilities if the Rector does not accede to his legal claims.

1.6.8 Pilgrims

In this section, I offer a few vignettes about pilgrims to Velanganni in order to give some impression, albeit unsystematic, of how some of how some of them come, and how they worship. An attempt to present a comprehensive account of pilgrims would require an entirely different study. This account is intended to evoke a sense of how pilgrims are motivated, how they appear, the symbolism they use, what they may do, and what they may see others doing, as they participate in the annual Feast.

1.6.8.1 The Walking Pilgrimage

An increasing number of parish- or city-based groups of pilgrims now walk to Velanganni, some three hundred kilometers and more, taking ten to fifteen days to cover the distance. Churches along the route provide rest and water. Much of the walking is done at night to avoid the day's heat. This is an old, but only recently popular, practice at Velanganni (V.S. Arokkiyasamy 1992.09.01). Mr. Robert David, leader of one such group, explained just what the walking pilgrimage means to them (David 1993.07.13).

"From 1978 to this year we have been walking each year. About eighty-five went last year. We have old people, too in our group. We don't leave them [behind as we walk]. It is not important to reach on the flag-hoisting day, but it is important to be together, to sacrifice, to pray all through the night. Silently we talk to God. He leads us.

"Our Velanganni walk is not for money-making. It is meant only to spread knowledge of Our Lady. Without Our Lady, there would have been no Jesus. Our Lady always bore everything because of us. When she appeared at different places, she cried. When I share my problems, she cries. The Velanganni walk is to pray that

so many should come to our fold, so many should know Our Lady. We say the Rosary daily together, even for just fifteen minutes. The Rosary keeps sins away; sins keep the Rosary away.

"We have a good group. All are jolly and we pray. In August, the expression [mood] changes. We begin counting the days. Everyone is eager to leave, all dressed in *kavi* [orange-died *khadi* (hand-spun and woven cotton cloth) representing renunciation of the world in the Hindu tradition]. We leave to arrive on 29th August to attend the 5:00 a.m. mass.

"Once we were walking, and at Karaikal an old Muslim man joined us. Hindus also come with us. Some stop going to the temple even though they do not convert. Those coming with us bring other Hindus to join us the following years." David introduced me to Mr. Sivashanmugam, a Hindu, who had been walking with the group for the past four years. "Our Lady appeared to Hindus," David continued. "That is why Hindu practices are there. It is the only place where these things are done. The Tamil Hindus are very mother-oriented."

David was not specific about just what the group does upon reaching Velanganni. The walk itself seems to be the important thing, and they return to Madras by bus. "I have made sacrifice not for outward show but for Our Lady. I'll take everybody to her," Mr. David concluded. "I'll walk until death."

Christian pilgrims are gradually adopting some of the forms and style of Hindus' preparations for *padayattirai* [foot-journey]. In 1988, I attended the penultimate ritual, or *irumudi ketta* ["tying two knots"], which prepares for departure a party of pilgrims, mostly comprised of Hindus but often including some Muslims and Christians, to *Aiyappan* at Sabarimalai (Kjaerholm 1986:130-6; Sekar 1992: 29). A period of forty-one days of obligatory fasting, including abstinence from sex, alcohol, and tobacco, precedes the pilgrims' departure. No footwear is worn from the beginning of this period until the pilgrimage has been completed (cf. Vaidyanathan 1983; Sekar 1992, *passim*). Mr. David's

group, and their Hindu friends, reported that some members of the group emulate these Hindu-style preparations. Usually Velanganni-bound pilgrims are also feasted by their families and neighbours prior to departure, and are often given cash gifts to deposit at the shrine on their behalf.

1.6.8.2 Hindus, and How to Not to Tell them from Catholics

One evening at Velanganni, I approached a group of pilgrims all dressed in red ³⁰ in a van parked near the Basilica. Secured to the front of its roof-rack was a framed, marigold-garlanded devotional picture of the Goddess *Adiparasakti* of Melmaruvatur and her human incarnation, *Bangaru Adigal* (cf. 6.7.7-8). Pointing to this picture, I asked whom the picture represents and was told unhesitatingly that she is the same as *Annai Velanganni*. Asked why they had come to Velanganni, the pilgrims answered promptly. The group was on a circuit tour of several goddess shrines. The Lady in *Velanganni Kovil* is *Mariyamman*, and it is known as one of *Amma's* alayams.

Later, in a Velanganni eating house run by Hindus, I saw the same devotional picture of *Adiparasakti* hanging on a wall. The proprietors confirmed the identity of this goddess with the Lady in the Basilica a hundred meters distant without so much as a hint of curiosity. The identification was simply taken for granted.

On another occasion, I asked Mr. Rowe, a Catholic, if *Arokkiya Mada* were not simply another form of the Hindu goddess *Mariyamman*. How might the two be clearly distinguished? Rowe smiled patronizingly - implying that, while he did not wish to offend me, mine was a very stupid question. On one hand, as an ethnographer, I was thought a fool by Hindus for doubting positive identity of these sacred figures, and on the other hand, by a Catholic for even suggesting it (Rowe 1991.08.21). Different worlds of understanding coexist in one and the same image of *Arokkiya Mada*.

While observing ritual bathing at the seashore, I once asked two women who were dressed entirely in red - *saris*,

underskirts and blouses, including matching *pottus* on their foreheads - if they were Catholics. In all externals, these two were indistinguishable from *Adiparasakti* devotees whose uniform is, exactly like the dress of the two women, a red *sari*, and for men, a red *lungi* or pants and red shirt. With a grand flourish which was a measure of her indignation, one of the women whipped a Crucifix-bearing rosary from out of her blouse, where she had tucked it for her bath in the sea, and brandished it before my face. It would indeed, I realized, be difficult to tell the Hindus from the Catholics.

Any novice attempting to guess the proportion of Hindus to Catholics attending Velanganni Shrine will have to dig deeper than mere visual impressions. V.S. Arokkiyasami estimates that, in his experience of more than fifty years, much of it as the shrine's public address system announcer and general enquiries person, about 55% of pilgrims at the Feast have recently come to be Hindus (V.S. Arokkiyasamy 1992.09.02).

1.6.8.3 Inside the Basilica

During the Novena which precedes the Annual Feast on September 8, thousands upon thousands of pilgrims converge on the Basilica where the Heavenly Mother dispenses her favours. On one such day in September, 1991, I recorded this scene.

On average, one person per second crosses the church's threshold. Many come, carrying small wicker trays in hand which contain a little uncooked rice, oil lamps made of the two halves of a split coconut, and a garland for *Mada's* statue; others bring just one or two candles. They come freshly tonsured, dripping wet from a sea-bath and in freshly starched and pressed shirts and frocks, hair carefully groomed. They come in ethnic dress from a dozen parts of India. They come, Christians and Hindus, jostling and crushing together to pass through the doorway, the ill, physically deformed and disfigured and the healthy, rich and poor, all anxious to come into the presence of *Arokkiya Mada*.

Inside, Catholics kneeling to pray are disturbed by newcomers who scurry left and right to light candles from theirs. A Scout-master and troops from Nagappattinam and Tiruvarur are continuously engaged in keeping the central passage open, by packing those who are kneeling ever more tightly toward the walls, to make way for the constant river of stumbling and erratic pilgrims bearing their offerings, makeshift luggage, and votive coconut sprouts which symbolize a hoped-for fertility. The Boy Scouts loudly and peremptorily admonish the men as they enter to let down their lower garments, *veshtis* (which are usually hitched up from ankle to knee while out in the street, especially in wet weather) out of respect for *Mada's alayam* [sacred place]. It has rained during the night and many have come directly from a bath in the sea, barefoot and still dripping wet. Women pause at the entrance to tie up their hair, still wet from their ocean bath. Obstructing the traffic, they draw the ire of the Scouts, who urge them to come forward. The black and white chequered marble floor is smudged with wet sand.

A young priest standing on a bench behind a barricade partially obstructs a clear view of Our Lady's miraculous statue high above the altar as he continually blesses the endless stream of newcomers. Two large steel boxes, positioned just at the point where pilgrims await their turn for a blessing, receive gifts of cash, silver and gold. The priest prays over a group for fifteen to twenty seconds and sprinkles them with holy water. Twenty to thirty seconds later the watchmen have split the group in two and hurried the people out both side doors, into roofless steel-mesh corridors, to reenter the two Basilica transepts. In each wing, devotees surrender their garlands and other votive offerings, and present mementos of the pilgrimage which they mean to take home to Assistant Sacristans, who carry them up narrow steps, touch them to the glass of *Mada's* statue case, and return them blessed by this contact. Pilgrims place their lit candles in a large candle stand, where they are allowed to burn for a few moments, only to

be brusquely removed and snuffed out by the attendants. They are quickly replaced by others. Oil from the coconut lamps is added to that in an immense brass *kuttuvillakku*, and half of the offered coconut, along with some flower petals, is returned to the pilgrims. The gifted coconut halves will find their way, eventually, to the mess of the Priests' Residence, the Convents, the Home for the Aged, and to the shrine canteen to supplement the subsidized meals supplied there for pilgrims.

A family, owing to the general crush and the need to manage several small children, has not yet succeeded in lighting their coconut lamps and candles. The offerings are snatched away, still unlit, by the attendants. A loud argument ensues, as the wife insists on having her candles back if she will not be allowed to burn them, and the attendants respond with equal vociferousness that the candles are no longer hers, but are gifts to *Mada*. They ought to have been lit earlier, and besides, how could they now be returned? The family leaves, frustrated and angry at this spoiling of the high point of their pilgrimage. Candles, snuffed and unburned alike, are thrown into a large chest, raw material for the shrine's unending supply of new candle stock.

Just inside the main entrance there is an obstruction of bodies as a small group of pilgrims pauses, their *kavi* uniforms dripping wet from their sea-bath, and attempt at the last moment to light their candles with a damp matchbox. The Boy Scouts shout at them to keep moving as the impetuous masses shove from behind, like a great snake desiring to crush its own head with its onward inertia. Frightened babies cry. Toddlers whimper uncertainly, clinging to their parents' legs and further inhibiting their movement up the aisle toward *Mada's* seat. A young man resorts to a back corner, cramming himself into a niche against the bell tower door which also leads up to the choir loft, attempting to perform the devotions prescribed in the shrine guide book, as aloof as he can manage to be from the disturbance which is everywhere about him. Distress is visible in parents' faces as they futilely

attempt, in the unaccustomed bustle and confusion, to keep their small children from injuring each other with candle flames and hot wax.

An old, *kavi*-clad woman carrying a lime in her right hand, her hair matted, appears to be doing *jabam* [recitation] while making motions from time to time which only vaguely resemble the Sign of the Cross. Others touch lips and each collar-bone in a triangular motion, uncertain which collar-bone it is deemed necessary to touch first.

A pilgrim group of about eighty persons, all dressed alike in brown *khadi*, led by banners depicting *Annai Velanganni* enters, chanting. In awe at the realization of their arrival, their song comes to a ragged halt. Many wear large blue and white buttons identifying the group by name and the place from which their pilgrim party had set out on foot. There are many such groups which march for five, ten, or fifteen days through heat, rain, thirst, hunger, worry about family members left behind, and blisters, for this moment.

One man processes up the aisle, his hand held before his mouth in a gesture of fascinated humility, mumbling his wonder at the sight of *Mada*, and hoping, perhaps, that she might see him too, in all this crowd. Bombay fishers' in their distinctive dress make their way up the aisle bearing baskets containing half-meter long wax replicas of human arms. Three Indian Navy officers in crisp white uniforms, one a turbaned *sardarji*, make their difficult way, but in a majestic order, up the congested aisle to pay their respects, discretely courteous, presuming no special treatment on account of their rank.

Another large group enters the Basilica shouting, carrying a flag and four crosses. Is this just an occasion for a big *tamasha*, a dramatic public performance, for an enthusiastic expression and assertion of group identity? These pilgrims are Tamil Catholics, probably a caste assembly, or *sabai*, from some small town or village.

The Scout leader rallies his troops, whose faces have for some time betrayed their fatigue, and efforts are renewed to keep the constant stream of people to the center third of the nave. Maintaining decorum seems impossible as country people, grandmothers especially, show no qualms about shouting at the tops of their voices in the church while directing children.

A third large group clad in brown and purple enters shouting, "*Deva!*" However noisy, such groups are actually quite well disciplined, keeping to the center aisle. They kneel in unison to accept the blessing, while most pilgrims receive it standing, or shuffling. They assemble and exit through the side doors in a most efficient and orderly fashion.

The young priest looks above and past the crowd with a distracted gaze, as though pleading for it to cease, or searching for some glimpse of his relief. The Junior Red Cross, fresh, dressed all in white, with red and white kerchiefs, replaces the irritable and exhausted Scouts.

Surprisingly, most people seem to be unaware of the miraculous statue of *Mada*, visually obscured as it is by the priest performing the blessings, so intent are they on the task of processing up the aisle.

Unnoticed by all but one watchful ethnographer, a young man dressed in brown *khadi* kneels by the exit. His eyes are shut, tears streaming down his face. The candles he once held have completely melted, running down over his hands, to form a congealing puddle of wax on the stone floor. He is saying his *jabamalai*, his rosary, utterly alone with *Mada* in this small corner her great house.

1.7 Velanganni as a Pilgrimage Destination

Velanganni is party to the contemporary surge in pilgrimage activities all over India (Bharati 1963; Bhardwaj 1973; Morinis 1984; Jha 1985; Veer 1988; Sekar 1992) and elsewhereⁱⁿ the world (Turner and Turner 1978; Davies 1988; Gold 1988; Eade and Sallnow 1991; Morinis 1991). Modern media and transportation are

transforming old shrines and facilitating the rise of new ones. Hunger for direct contact with the sacred is stronger than ever before. Standing, as it does, in a small village, at the seashore, on a riverbank, Velanganni Basilica has all the attractions of being rustic and isolated, geographically at the margin between commonplace reality and the unknown, in all respects a *tirtham* incorporating all the favourable conditions for constructing symbolic transitions and transformations (Bhardwaj 1973: 80-96; Turner and Turner 1978: 1-39; Saraswati 1985). In addition, it possesses a miracle-working icon with a "centuries-old" tradition of continual worship and a mythical history which anchors it in space and time - in Hindu notions of space and time.

Some pilgrims come to Velanganni for the sake of nostalgia, because their families have always attended its annual patronal Feast. Some come in despair, all their appeals to other sacred images having failed. Some, plump and prosperous, come to imagine a tangible contact with the miraculous which their materialistic way of life itself precludes. Some, awkward and poor, come hampered by some illness or disability to plead for a tolerable arranged marriage. Some pilgrims come seeking progeny, for *Velanganni Mada* is well-reputed for blessing childless couples.

The current miraculous public image of Velanganni Shrine, assiduously cultivated by the Diocese of Tanjavur over the past thirty-odd years, celebrates a place of Marian apparition implicitly understood as native to Indian soil. This public relations work has brought immense popularity to *Arokkiya Mada* and immense wealth to the Diocese. The Virgin's miracles here were effusive and generous - the welling up and over-bubbling of a pot of milk, for example, and the calming of a cyclone to save some foreign sailors who prayed to her for their lives. She is celebrated annually at Velanganni with a Novena which culminates with the Feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin on 8 September. During the ten days of the Feast, massive public

displays of reverence and affection, involving the participation of about two million pilgrims in a festive daily flag-raising and a sequence of evening processions, demonstrate the people's regard for her. Our Lady of Velanganni bridges the West and the East. Mistress of the cosmos, she has taken up residence in India as her own land, generously offering her graces to strangers and outsiders - that is, to non-Christians and foreigners - alike.

1.7.1 Many Meanings

Any large pilgrimage shrine which attracts millions of visitors each year is a difficult phenomenon to describe and understand in more than a superficial way. A single study of any particular group of pilgrims, observed as if it were a microcosm of Velanganni clientele, will be reductive, as the shrine serves varied and widely distributed constituencies in a multitude of different ways. Velanganni's meanings vary with the cultural origins of its visitors. Goans, Malayalis, Bombayites, Tamils, and Anglo-Indians all seek reaffirmation for their own cultural identities as particular kinds of Catholics through this shrine. At the same time, they also seek validation of their common identity as members of the universal Church. Thus, *Arokkiya Annai* is understood to respond to a uniquely Catholic sense of the universal and the particular. I wonder if Velanganni's non-liturgical conservatism, harking back to time-worn ways in its popular devotional practices, is a part of its appeal for people from such modernizing and fast-paced places as Bombay. It seems to be a kind of stepping back nostalgically into their own Catholic past.

There are also those who come to seek in *Arokkiya Mada* the favour of Mariyam, blessed mother of the Prophet Isa (Jesus), in affirmation of their Muslim faith. It is the Hindus, however, if they can be taken together, bearing within their minds such a vast range of cosmological and divine images and beliefs, who probably constitute the single largest group of pilgrims to Velanganni at the time of its annual festival on 8 September (if not throughout

the year), and are a major source of its wealth (V. S. Arokkiyasamy 1992.08.31).

The Velanganni Shrine has many different social and ideological constituencies - from Hindus to career priests, from infighting caste factions to merchants, from shrine watchmen to beggars - each making its own kinds of claims in its own ways on the shrine as a livelihood-sustaining institution and social meaning-generating symbol. It is this interreligious context, this rather open field of contest and discourse crossing the conventional bounds of religious sectarianism, and what is at stake in these processes, which has made *Velanganni Mada* an appropriate symbolic engine, and Velanganni Shrine a suitable point of reference for the origin and development of the *Amma* cult.

1.7.2 An Unwelcome Client Cult

The *Amma* cult is yet another of the shrine's many symbolic constituencies, one more of the groups which patronize it and utilize its resources in varied ways. How each of these appropriates the symbols, and applies, modifies, and develops them when they reach home, will be a fruitful, but complex and difficult, field of research to explore. Pilgrims come with such a variety of differing purposes, in such different cognitive and emotive worlds of meaning, encounter the sacred here, and then go away without their intentions and understandings becoming known to those whose duty is to serve them at the shrine, and whose duty might, at least in part, perhaps, be to find out what it is that they do think and feel.

Pilgrims arriving in Velanganni are occasionally within the "informational field" (Morinis 1991: 18-19) of the *Amma* cult and have heard of contemporary miracles and apparitions occurring in some unknown place half a day's journey from the shrine, and of a seer whose name, also, they do not know. When they make their pilgrimage, they hope also to visit this new point of living contact with the Virgin. Their enquiries, however, are met with an

unexpected and inexplicable indifference from the shrine's authorities. This official reluctance to disclose information about the *Amma* cult either will send pilgrims home dissatisfied, or will send them in search of Vadiyakkadu which, without guidance, they are unlikely to find.

1.7.3 Ideal and Actuality

Today, *Nossa Senhora da Saude*, *Arokkiya Mada*, *Velanganni Mada*, *Annai Velanganni* - Our Lady of Good Health - stands in her golden robes of honour, in the glass-faced niche which is her throne, looking ever benignly upon the yearning, ever increasing, unceasing throngs of her devotees, and eastward toward the seashore, the margin and final limit of earth-bound safety. She is the uncontested sovereign of this coast. The earth is hers, for so many testify to her aid in the midst of their human problems, but she is also *Stella Maris*, the Star of the Sea, and exceeds all mere human limits in competence as she transcends all human purposes. *Arokkiya Mada* at Velanganni is reputed to be a figure of exceptional compassion and sympathetic holiness, a dispenser of favours without regard for the religious creed of the petitioner, making her available to all.

Chaste and devoted as was Kannagi heroine of the ancient Tamil epic, *Silappadigaram* (1.2.1), broken by her youthful and innocent husband's inevitable judicial murder, Mary - likewise bereaved by her own faultless son's unjust, untimely, but equally inevitable death - fits perfectly the Tamil paradigm of a goddess of power and grace. In a land filled with sacred images representing particular transcendent concerns and sacred specializations, this indiscrimination confers on *Mada* a universality which usually adheres to the images of the most sublime and extra-cosmic Hindu deities. These deities, however, are distant and generally unconcerned with human affairs (cf. Gold 1988: 41). Thus *Annai Velanganni* lays a general claim in her Indian devotees' perceptions to both the transcendent and mundanely intimate dimensions of sacred personhood, and while her pilgrimage

is perhaps the largest of non-Hindu pilgrimages in India, it vies in numbers with all but the very greatest of Hindu religious gatherings.

Velanganni's apparitional past is, however, beyond living memory and beyond verification. The sacred here is somewhat distant, and the eyes of faith tend to wander, to prefer, if they can find it, a more immediate and tangible hierophany. Founded as it is on early modern apparitions which are accepted in practice but not officially approved, Velanganni could be extremely vulnerable to manifest, life-transforming miracles and contemporary apparitions if these were to sprout up within an easy journey of the shrine.

There are those, as well - long-time pilgrims and old-time residents - who tell how the beauty and holiness of the place has been destroyed by all the recent development and the vacationing, pleasure-seeking types of people who are now attracted to it. Like a flag for this change, a block of apartments which belongs to a vacation-sharing scheme has already come up, a little to the north of and opposite the arch, at the main entrance to Velanganni, the junction of the village's Main Road with the highway.

A major real estate developer in Madras, who owns blocks of riverside property now being used to grow casuarina on the south bank of the *Vellaiyaru* opposite Velanganni, is contemplating construction of a private bridge over the river, which would permit a duplication of all the pilgrim amenities in a more ordered, spacious, accessible and comfortable layout, under private ownership. If Velanganni has not already lost its soul, how long can the rustic *tirtham* withstand this kind of speculative commercialization and urbanizing pressure?

With this image of the scale and impersonality of Velanganni as background, let us turn now to a closer consideration of the new Marian apparitional phenomena which have arisen recently in its shadow, in its symbolic hinterland, which have given thousands of people cause to wonder at the tender,

intimate mercies and miracles believed to have been performed by the Virgin herself, and to continue even today, not far from Velanganni. We will observe the boundaries between Christianity and Hinduism further blurred, and how some Catholic priests have come to challenge the authority of their Church through the cult which has formed around the charismatic presence of Mary's "daughter" and seer, Maryamma.

Keeping in mind the broad canvas of Velanganni Shrine, with its rather open field of discourse in which almost any opinion of the Virgin Mary's nature may be contested and maintained, we shall see how *Velanganni Mada* is an appropriate "symbolic engine", as I like to call her, providing a fluid frame of reference to support and nurture the *Amma* cult's personalistic origin and social growth. Here is just one way in which the universal symbols of a Marian shrine are carried over into, and respond to, the culture of village and town in India.

1.8 Maryamma, Velanganni, and the *Amma* Cult

Against this dual background of local religion, set in a feminine divine *milieu* which local goddesses and the Virgin Mary share, and of the cosmopolitan Catholic apparitional tradition which are conjoined in the enormously popular pilgrimage shrine of *Arokkiya Mada* at Velanganni, our study examines the cult now growing around a young *kallar* woman of Hindu background called Mary [Tamil, *Meri*], who lives in the village of Vadiyakkadu, some sixty-five kilometers southwest of Velanganni. Maryamma, as she is reverently and affectionately addressed by devotees, was known as P. Santi when, in 1985 at the age of fourteen she first saw the Virgin Mary, whom she calls "*Amma*", [or "Mother"]. Maryamma and her followers, whom I have called the "*Amma* cult", unequivocally identify the woman of the apparitions which followed as the Blessed Virgin Mary. This first vision emerged out of Santi's experience of wretched demonic afflictions which had, for the two full years which preceded it, utterly disrupted the life of her family. Maryamma's original visions, and the auditions and

miracles which succeeded them and still continue, have brought her public attention, adulation, notoriety, and, for a person of her social origins, considerable wealth.

In Orattur and Vadiyakkadu, two villages lying in the shadow of *Velanganni Mada's* symbolic protection - fifty-five and sixty-five kilometers, respectively, from Velanganni, and forty-five kilometers apart - and the places in which the major events which we will be examining have taken place, the Virgin has come to be known by the nearly universal designation for the Mother, "*Amma*", through the visions and interpretation of the young Hindu woman, known as Maryamma. The "*Amma* cult", which has been maturing around her charismatic leadership for the past ten years, offers the two characteristics which most appeal to *Mada's* worshippers - power derived through suffering and intimate personalization of contact with the sacred, in this case the divine presence mediated through a living human being.

I have noted how Maryamma's career has followed a similar trajectory to Obeyesekere's female ascetics who attract a clientele similar to hers, and how his subjects move, invariably from a marginal social position in their families to a still marginal, but socially validated, position in the larger world (o.l; Obeyesekere 1981). Maryamma comes from a poor peasant family, and from a disadvantaged position within it. She has risen out of obscurity in the perceptions and approval of a growing number of Hindu and Christian followers.

Maryamma was familiar with the symbols and meanings represented in Velanganni Shrine from early childhood. Each year between the ages of two and twelve, she was taken there by her Hindu pilgrim relatives. She is likely, therefore, to have come to form, at an impressionable age, an ideal image of *Arokkiya Mada* as the reigning monarch of her native region, the most powerful and sacred personage of the coastal portion of the Kaveri River delta. When Santi - Maryamma as she was then - was afflicted, as though

possessed by some demon, Santi was taken by her parents to Velanganni, among other holy places, to seek exorcism (2.4.2) and it was a young woman, very like the Virgin Mary, who came to her in a dream at Papakovil Dargah, a Muslim shrine on the way between her home and Velanganni, to which Santi was taken in her family's search for exorcism. The young woman's visit, and her gifts, gave Santi some temporary relief (2.4.3). Immediately before the end of Santi's sufferings, it was to a picture of the Virgin as *Irudaya Mada*, the Immaculate Heart of Mary, that Santi offered prayers and flower garlands. When the Virgin began appearing to her, she asked Santi to go to Velanganni in order to receive special graces (2.4.8; 3.4.2).

Early in the development of her sacred career, Maryamma made a point of connecting critical events in the life of the cult with Velanganni Shrine and used the iconography of *Arokkiya Mada* to identify the source of her visions and the voice she was hearing for the local people. She did this even though the iconic representation of *Arokkiya Mada* was not that form of Mary which her initial visions took. Maryamma's alertness to the immediate recognition value which this particular Marian image would have is evidence of her sensitivity to its local appeal. When worship of *Amma* became systematized at Santi's home in Orattur, it focussed on a large image of *Arokkiya Mada* at Velanganni, painted on the shrine room wall (2.5.1). When others began to see dark and misty visions of the Virgin Mary with piercing lights in the house at Orattur, it was in the distinctive iconographic form of *Arokkiya Mada* holding the Infant Jesus that *Amma* appeared (2.5.1; 5.2.5; 5.2.6). When, years later, *Amma* corrected the problem in Maryamma's legs which prevented her from walking, it was to Velanganni that the convalescing Maryamma went when she first tried to walk again (2.7.3).

Velanganni has been a signal formative factor in the origin and nurture of the *Amma* cult. It provided a Marian pattern of the sacred which Maryamma could explore more deeply in

modelling her own activities and identity. Velanganni shrine and *Arokkiya Mada* continue to provide a model for prospective adherents of the *Amma* cult concerning the kinds of miracles to expect from a visit to Maryamma at her household shrine at Vadiyakkadu. These miracles include physical and emotional healing, advice in personal crises, and perhaps, if the pilgrims are very fortunate, their own experience of hearing *Amma's* voice. Equally important, the shrine provides recruits for the cult as more and more people coming to Velanganni from distant parts of India have come to hear of Maryamma (3.8).

Because of its highly personalistic features, the *Amma* cult is both idiosyncratic and intimate. For insiders, these traits enhance the sense of belonging it confers while posing obstacles of approach and understanding for outsiders and newcomers. It was not easy for me to get access to the materials which comprise the bulk of this study. Most were obtained without the approbation of cult leaders. I experienced from cult insiders the same cautiousness about myself as a researcher as the priest-administrators in my study of Velanganni Shrine expressed. While the mass phenomena at Velanganni pose quite different methodological challenges from those presented by *Amma's* devotees, the Shrine and the cult represent their symbols of holiness in similar ways and appeal to the same cultural dispositions and aspirations - sacred power gained through suffering and motherly intimacy, combined in a distinctive female symbol of the sacred. Accordingly, the clientele of both the shrine and the cult is drawn from much the same public - villagers from the locality, Hindus and Christians from further afield in south India, a variety of advocates from places such as Bombay, and recently, a growing number of disaffected Catholic nuns and priests.

As the *Amma* cult's seer and leader, Maryamma is for many a flesh-and-blood surrogate of that very Lady who resides at Velanganni in the form of a miracle-working painted wooden statue, dressed in silk brocade, carrying a painted wooden child, and

encased in glass. For Indian Christians it will be more important that Maryamma, unlike *Arokkiya Mada*, has a flesh-and-blood, miraculous holy child of her own, whose safety, and whose messianic promise, are at the heart of *Amma* cult fears and anticipations.

The *Amma* cult, like so many other small, emergent religious groups in India, may be ephemeral or it may endure. Let us now examine the life of Maryamma as her adherents present it.

Chapter 2

Introduction to Maryamma's Life

This chapter introduces Santi, called Maryamma by her followers, the central personality in the *Amma* cult. The account is a composite, drawn mainly from sources sympathetic to her, and from personal observations. It is intentionally naive and represents the sort of account a prospective recruit might receive. Subsequent chapters will examine Maryamma's and the *Amma* cult's history from the perspective of varying degrees of confidence and skepticism which exist among persons currently and previously associated with the cult.

2.1 Images

Vadiyakkadu is a neat and sleepy agricultural village in Tanjavur District of Tamil Nadu. Its people grow coconuts, rice, a few vegetables, and raise dairy cattle and a few chickens. Vadiyakkadu depends on the nearest town, Madukkur, for its markets. Unlike Madukkur, clustered at a junction of two main roads, Vadiyakkadu is comprised of large, neatly fenced plots, one farm home in each, owned by individual families, and has few commercial concerns. Vadiyakkadu, however, is becoming a place of pilgrimage.

2.1.1 At Home

When I arrived at Vadiyakkadu with my Indian wife, Heather, on 26 June, 1993, our motorcycle breaking the peace and quiet of her country home, Maryamma was sitting on the floor of her veranda, in a white printed house dress, cutting vegetables with the *aruvamanai*, the ubiquitous Indian kitchen tool made of a board held firmly by one leg while the cook slices the vegetables against the blade fixed to it. Nearby her child played, naked but for a few gold ornaments. Maryamma greeted us with a smile whose

warmth matched the day's heat. Maryamma got up to offer us seats on the veranda with her, and continued to work as we talked. I played with the child, while Heather apologized to her for our delay in returning since our previous visit on June 17. That day had been the second anniversary of the resurrection, in this very village, at this very house, of a boy called Moses. Maryamma finished her chopping and took the vegetables to a small thatched hut nearby which now serves as her kitchen. The resurrection of Moses and many other miracles had transformed the house into a shrine and the many visitors had made it inconvenient to cook there.

2.1.2 Visitors

While Maryamma was gone, a couple arrived walking, and asked us for "Arul Mary". They seemed confused, not knowing how to correctly ask for Maryamma by name, and then finding other visitors, one being a foreigner. Heather had just invited the couple to sit when Maryamma emerged from the hut, saying, "Vanga, vanga [Come, come]", in formal invitation, although they were already seated. Even as the couple rose to meet her, they began to pour out their problems concerning the unmanageable behaviour of a child. When they finished, she said, "Your problem will be solved. I will pray for your child. When I pray I will learn what to do. So, you can come back." She turned around perfunctorily and walked back toward the hut, leaving the couple a little lost. Ammacchi, the elderly woman of the house, asked if they would like to see the shrine room. After a short while they left as they had come. This obscure farm home in a remote village was becoming accustomed to unexpected guests.

This couple was typical of visitors to Maryamma's farmhouse at Vadiyakkadu with its *Arul Arai* or "Room of Grace" in which so many miracles are believed to have occurred, and its grave, still kept open, from which a child was removed alive nearly a year after he had died.

2.1.3 Blessings

Nine days earlier, on the anniversary of Moses' resurrection, 200 or more people were clustered around the veranda of Maryamma's house, under a *pandal*, or temporary awning. Some nuns had brought a group of two dozen schoolgirls for a day's outing. Maryamma had just emerged from her bath and was walking from the north side of the house to the kitchen hut. Someone caught a glimpse of Maryamma and the entire group descended on her for blessings. She prayed over them under the hot sun one by one, making the sign of the cross on each forehead, until she was perspiring profusely. The exertion began to show on her face as she looked beyond their faces, longing to escape. Finally done, she made her way to the kitchen, and to other duties.

2.1.4 Advice

Devotees approach Maryamma for favours, but sometimes receive advice and warnings they are reluctant to accept. Some months before, a devotee, Francis Regis, came with his family to spend a day with Maryamma. They had travelled all night in their van from Madras, 350 kilometers away, to reach Vadiyakkadu that morning and were planning to return the same evening, again driving all night to reach home. Maryamma insisted that they should wait until the following morning to depart, but Francis insisted that pressing business in the city the next day required them to leave in the night. Maryamma told him, "Okay, leave if you must, but you can only travel safely after 2:00 a.m. But don't go in the van. Take a bus." However, not heeding these warnings, they left the same evening in their own vehicle. Some time before 2:00 a.m., at high speed, the front wheel suddenly came off. The driver lost control. With a shock, they realized that the van was careering uncontrollably toward a roadside electric transformer. The whole family cried out "*Amma!!*" in terror. Francis described to me how the van came to a stop just two inches short of striking the transformer. He still insists that in that distance and at that speed, it was simply impossible for the van to have stopped

on its own. Having learned his lesson, he now does nothing without first asking Maryamma's counsel (Francis Regis 1993.06.17).

2.1.5 Healing

As I sat with Maryamma and Fr. Kulandairaj [pseudonym], a Jesuit priest from Madras, in front of her house one day in March, 1992, a car drove into Maryamma's farmyard and among the family which emerged was a girl of about eight or nine, dressed in a frilly white dress and veil. After greetings, without further ceremony the girl stood for a photograph with Maryamma, and the family returned quickly to their car. I asked if she had stopped for a blessing on the way to her first communion or confirmation. No, I was told, she once had a massive tumour which Maryamma had healed and the girl had asked for such a dress just to go and thank her. The transaction was now complete. Someone hurried to stop the car and the girl's father returned at a run to me, carrying her. He raised her skirt to reveal a massive and complex scar running from high on her hip to half-way down her thigh. Ugly now, it must have been much worse when it was septic. When they had departed, I discretely asked Maryamma if she still had scars from her own ordeal, from the time when she had lost both of her legs. Of course it was out of the question for her to show me, a male, but Maryamma assured me that both her legs were heavily scarred (Maryamma 1992.03.26).

Such are the tales forming around a remarkable young woman who attributes her special powers of to the grace of Mother Mary, who has come to her in visions and calls her "my daughter".

2.2 Beginning Research

I first met Maryamma on the morning of 26 March, 1992. I had hurried to Vadiyakkadu from Tirucchirappalli when I learned that both she and Fr. Kulandairaj were in the village. My arrival coincided with a crisis. The previous day, Bishop P. Arockiasamy of Tanjavur, in whose diocese Vadiyakkadu falls, had sent the local parish priest, Fr. Maria Arokiam of Mandalakkottai, to forbid Fr. Kulandairaj to celebrate Mass at Maryamma's farmhouse.

The Bishop was concerned by the growing popular interest in the unorthodox events surrounding Maryamma. That day I interviewed Fr. Kulandairaj and Maryamma for the first time.

Fr. Kulandairaj and Maryamma introduced me to Mrs. Josephine Thomas, who has scrupulously kept a record of all the important events in the *Anma* cult, and to her son, Thomas Kennedy. I made arrangements to visit their home in Kumbakonam to obtain further details of this history. Kennedy showed a videotape of Moses' 17 June, 1991, disinterrment and resurrection, for the dozen or so people who happened to be at Vadiyakkadu that morning. Fr. Kulandairaj, especially, seemed enthused with the miracle which had restored life to this child. All present regarded it as a miracle, mediated through Maryamma, of Mother Mary whom they call simply "*Anma*".

2.3 Orientation to the Task

One task of this study is to make clear how Maryamma's experience is embedded in a complex of cultural symbols and functions which are either Hindu or Catholic, and sometimes both. What follows, then, is a "critical hagiography" - a description of a self-made religious specialist within the context of the religious movement she has built around herself. It examines the tensions which existed from the beginning within both the person and the movement. My account also examines some of the types of people who have been attracted to Maryamma and her cult and who have influenced the movement's direction. The best place to begin this account is the history of how Santi suffered, received the special grace of visions and other favours from *Anma*, was baptised as Mary by *Anma*, and how the mutual relationship between Maryamma and *Anma* became established and changed between February, 1987 to August, 1993, a period of more than eight years.

Maryamma's story begins with an affliction culturally labeled as a form of demonic possession, but never successfully treated as such through rites of exorcism. This failure to treat a

case unequivocally recognized as requiring exorcism leaves, as an open question, what malign power afflicted her initially (cf. 5.2.2; 5.2.12; 6.5.2).

2.4 Santi's Early Life - The Third Daughter

P. Santi was born on 14 December, 1970, in the *kallar jati*, the third daughter of S. Panjabakesan and his wife, Kanakambujam, at her father's traditional village of Ponnapur. Angry that his third child was not a male, Panjabakesan sent Santi, at the age of two, to live with her maternal uncle, Pakkirisami, in the village of Kattur, near Tiruvarur. Her foster mother, Ramamani describes her as "dull and lazy", speaking little, but with no other problems, and good at studies. Ramamani married Pakkirisami in 1973 when Santi was two and a half years old and was her primary caretaker until Santi reached age twelve and completed fifth Standard at the Panchayat School (Ramamani 1993.07.07).

2.4.1 Religious Exposure

Pakkirisami used to take Santi along with his family on regular visits to Hindu, Muslim, and Christian holy places including Palani, Pillaiyar Kovil, Samaiyapuram, Srirangam and Nagur. They visited Velanganni annually. Aiyandar of Ponnapur is the family god of Panjabakesan's and Pakkirisami's families. Although there had once been a number of older Christians in Kattur, all have since died. Today there are a few Pentcostal Christians, recently arrived, but no church. Ramamani is quite certain that none of the local Christians are aware that Santi, now known as Maryamma, has worked wonders (Ramamani 1993.07.07).

Doing poorly financially in Ponnapur, Panjabakesan moved to Kattur in 1978 with Kanakambujam, their two elder daughters, and the son who had since been born to them after their disappointment with Santi. Panjabakesan hoped to establish himself in farming in Kattur. Santi did not live with her biological family, however, but remained with her foster parents. After four or five years of continuing failure, Panjabakesan managed to

purchase some land in the village of Orattur, just west of Nidamangalam, and moved there with all four of their children in 1982. Santi was reaching the age when it was unsuitable for her to remain in the home of maternal relatives into whose family she might be expected to marry.

2.4.2 Affliction

As Maryamma herself describes the beginning of her affliction, "One day, as I was eating, some shit fell on my food." This event took place in mid-June, 1983, at the family home in Orattur.¹ Maryamma recounts that soon after this event, heavy kitchen grinding-stones were flying at her head and she was bitten by venomous snakes. Sometimes she was whipped by someone invisible and anyone attempting to help her at these times was also stung by the whip (Maryamma 1993.06.14). Witnesses could see the snakebites and whip-weals, but could see neither snakes, nor whip, nor whipper (Baskaran 1993.06.25). Santi herself killed two of the snakes. She was also burnt by torches, but the burns would disappear after a few minutes. She could get no rest. Sometimes she would vomit sharp objects like pieces of glass and nails which cut her throat. Once a wall suddenly collapsed on her without cause or warning. Santi's family thought her affliction must be *sevinai* or *pillisuniyam* [forms of black magic] and took her to many *mandiravadis* to exorcise the evil. The whole family was stigmatized and people were afraid to come near them (Maryamma 1993.06.14). In frantic and costly efforts by the family to rid her of affliction, Santi was taken to a Mariyamman Kovil in Tanjavur, to the Muslim Dargah at Nagur, and to Velanganni Church, and to some other *kanni* [goddess], but she could not remember its name.

2.4.3 Relief, but No Solution

According to Josephine Thomas' account, Santi obtained temporary relief when the family stayed one night at the Papakovil Dargah, a Muslim shrine reputed for the exorcism of demons, located between Velanganni and Nagappattinam. Sleeping the night

there was a therapeutic technique required by the holy man of the shrine. Santi dreamt of a beautiful young woman, standing in a field of flowers, who told her she was putting a rose and seven peppercorns under her pillow. If Santi ate a peppercorn and one rose petal each day, she would be protected for seven days. Santi found these things under her pillow in the morning. She followed the young woman's instructions for seven days, and experienced relief. When the petals and peppercorns were exhausted, the afflictions resumed (Josephine Thomas 1991.12.18). Santi continued to be a great expense and emotional strain to her family, and her mother would say to her, "*Yerandu po*" [Die, and go away] (Maryamma 1992.03.26).

2.4.4 Santi's Anguish

One day early in 1985 a "cousin Raja" hung a picture of *Irudaya Mada*, the Immaculate Heart of Mary, among the many pictures of gods and goddesses in Santi's household shrine.² Santi offered flowers and prayed to the lady of the picture, pleading, "Please save me or let me die" (Maryamma 1993.06.14). Baskaran, Santi's paternal uncle, told me how he did not object when she made a garland for *Amma* and placed it on this new picture, because the family was praying to so many gods. "Since then," he said, "all her troubles ended. Just as one would look after a daughter, so *Amma* began to look after Mary" (Baskaran 1993.06.25).

2.4.5 Amma Comes to Santi

On the morning of February 10, 1985, shortly after her fourteenth birthday, Santi had the chore of washing some clothes, but as there was no soap, she left them on the washing-stone in the back yard and went on another errand to get some *kirai*, a leafy green vegetable, from the next-door neighbour. Returning within five minutes, she recognized the young woman from the picture of *Irudaya Mada*, dressed in a white robe and blue veil, hanging the clothes on the line, wet and freshly washed. Santi ran toward her, shouting "*Amma! Amma!*", but the vision vanished. Everyone marveled at the radiant clothes. Some said they had

actually seen the clothes as they were being hung up to dry, but could not see the person who was doing it.

Later the same day, Santi had a craving for some *paḷ* [milk] and immediately *Amma* appeared again, handed her an empty tumbler, and began pouring milk from a pitcher, which overflowed the tumbler, wetting Santi's dress. Santi drank three full tumblers, but *Amma* did not stop pouring. Again, others claim to have seen the milk pouring and overflowing, but from mid-air, as they could see neither the pitcher nor the person pouring the milk. Out of fear, one of her sisters, Amarajoti, seized the tumbler from Santi. This was the first time Santi saw *Amma* close-up, but still *Amma* did not speak. The same evening, Santi wanted *mor* [buttermilk] and in an empty vessel, she saw *tayir* [yogurt] - richer and more desirable than *mor* - appearing, and she drank it. In these earliest miracles may be heard echoes of the milk-based miracles which comprise the Velanganni Shrine's foundation stories (1.6.2.1-2; cf. 5.2.8).

Similar materializations took place on succeeding days. *Amma* gave Santi fruit the moment she desired it, and when she longed for a sea-bath, *Amma* poured salty water from the sky into her own back yard. Some of this water was collected in a large basin. Hearing of this, people came who had asthma, chest pains and fever, washed in the water, and were healed (Maryamma 1992.03.26).

2.4.6 Banishing Doubt

"Then, only I knew it was *Amma*, not the others. They were afraid it was the devil's work," said Maryamma (Maryamma 1993.06.14). Maryamma recounts that a Hindu man who knew prayers to St. Mary, or *Mada*, wrote one as a test to know whether or not these things came from her, and to test the validity of Santi's relationship with her. The secret condition he placed on this test was that if the slip of paper on which he wrote the prayer went to Santi, all she claimed was true. Sure enough, no sooner had he written "Amen" than the paper was wafted away, as though by a

breeze, to Santi. This miracle also helped her family to believe, and they went with many Hindu villagers from Orattur to the nearest church, in Nidamangalam. They found it locked, but even as they were praying, the prayer slip, which had been kept safely locked away at home, came flying like a kite in the wind, was wafted between the bars of the church doorway, and fell on Our Lady's statue. This event caused everyone's doubts to vanish (Maryamma 1992.03.26).

2.4.7 Amma Obeys Santi

At some point in the two weeks following the first vision, *Amma* began to speak to Santi though, as yet, no one else could hear. Then, after ten or fifteen days, others began to be able to hear *Amma's* voice as well, but still could not see her. Maryamma's uncle recalls that "*Amma's* was a slightly shrill voice, nice and sweet". Santi would go into the room where the household shrine was, while the others remained outside. She would call, "Come, *Amma*". Then *Amma* would come. Santi would offer her sweets and fruit brought by visitors and *Amma* would accept them, saying "Okay, I'll eat, *Tambi*". She always called Santi "*Tambi*", which means little boy or younger brother. As word spread people began coming from further away to ask *Amma* questions through Santi. Sometimes fifty to a hundred people would crowd in and around the house. As often as Santi called, *Amma* would come, explaining, "as it is my duty, God's law, that I should answer the voice of my daughter". During this period *Amma* was known to come as often as ten times in a three hour period (Baskaran 1993.06.25).

2.4.8 A Visit to Velanganni

Around the middle of March, 1985, *Amma* asked the family to go to Velanganni where she would appear to all of them. At midnight, at *Palaya Velanganni* (Our Lady's Tank) *Amma* appeared from clouds, again dressed in a white robe and blue veil (though only Santi saw this), and gave Santi a rose (3.4.2). *Amma* instructed her to give the rose to the parish priest of Velanganni and invite him to return with them the next night, at the same

time, to the same place. At that time, she would give Santi a *jabamalai* [rosary]. "If the rose remains fresh in his hand," *Amma* told Santi, "his heart is likewise, but if it fades there, the condition of his heart will be shown". When the priest accepted the rose, it wilted, and he would not consent to accompany them (Maryamma 1992.03.26).³ The next night, at the eleventh Station of the Cross, the party saw a bright light flash and Santi knew that *Amma* was again present, though she was invisible. Santi approached the platform at *Palaya Velanganni*. A second light flashed, and a shining rosary fell into her hands. Everyone inspected and admired it and its crucifix. However, a problem arose after a "policeman" handled it. When he returned it, the cross was missing, which caused some disturbance. *Amma* told Santi to let the policeman⁴ repent in his own time, and be saved by the cross he stole. But when the party returned to Orattur, the same rosary, now with a new crucifix like the original one, had, miraculously, already found its own way home to Santi's parents' house. Many people were healed thereafter by touching this rosary (Maryamma 1993.06.14; See 3.4.2).

2.4.9 A Shrine for Orattur?

Some of the many visitors and petitioners who began coming to see Santi after these miraculous events were wealthy and offered money - even to purchase land and build a chapel at Orattur. However, Santi's uncle recalls that from the beginning, *Amma* had said to receive nothing except candles and flowers. *Amma* herself told some aspiring donors, "I don't want money. Your love is enough. Tell everyone that you were healed here and thank *Andavar* [the Lord]. I don't want gifts or a shrine. All that will come at the right time, when it should" (Baskaran 1993.06.25).

2.5 Institutionalization

The next period of Santi's life brought her the quasi-liturgical lifestyle of so many people in India regarded as holy. The interest of an ever-widening public became focussed on her personal sanctity. A core group of chosen devotees, many of them

relatives, formed a nucleus of support, some of it ambivalent, for the miracles *Amma* had come to work in, through, and around Santi. Without the aid of clergy or Christian community, Santi became "Mary" and a Christian. A mysterious promise from *Amma* sent Mary into an enigmatic seclusion.

2.5.1 A Widening Circle

Baskaran told me how, during 1985 and 1986, many new people heard of *Amma's* visits and came to Orattur, desiring to stay for several days at a time, and Panjabakesan's home developed into a modest pilgrim shrine. The family shrine room became the center of devotions and regular daily evening worship began, led by Santi and always including a visit from *Amma*. These were Santi's fifteenth and sixteenth years. She became more confident as her relationship with *Amma* developed in intimacy. *Amma* would even comb her hair like a mother (Baskaran 1993.06.25).

A nearly life-size picture of *Arokkiya Mada* - the Virgin dressed in a sari and carrying the Infant Jesus as at Velanganni - was placed in the sanctuary of Panjabakesan's home, below the *Irudaya Mada* picture which catalyzed *Amma's* first appearance to Santi. Visitors liked to have their photographs taken in front of this picture of *Amma*, kneeling before Santi for her blessing. Visitors told stories of unusual lights and of dark, hazy visions of *Amma* in the form of *Arokkiya Mada* which could be seen in the house during her night visits of this period. *Amma* also spoke in strange languages - Hindi, Urdu, English, German - sometimes in a foreigner's voice. Tape recordings were made of these marvels and played for the pilgrim visitors (Balraj 1993.06.21; see 5.2.5-6).

2.5.2 Rajendiran's Hospitality, *Amma's* Gifts

According to Santi's uncle, her eldest sister, Amarajoti, cooked for the many unexpected guests who came to Orattur. Rajendiran of Kalliyur sponsored the meals, and Santi would sometimes give Rajendiran's donations meant for hospitality as cash gifts to the poor. Once she gave away a whole Rs.100 note, saying "*Kadavu* [God] will keep us". Then, one night, when the family had gone to sleep hungry, *Amma* called Santi at midnight,

and told her to bring a vessel. There and then *Amma* filled it with rice and told them, "Please cook and eat it. For my sake, you fed so many people, and now you are starving". *Amma* told them that this was how to live, doing good and no harm to others, even if you dislike them. Many strangers came and ate that rice, because *Amma* had given it.

Amma also gave *pal tirtham* [sanctified milk] and *Velanganni tirtham*, holy water from *Mada Kulam* [Mother's Pond] at Velanganni. *Amma* would order a vessel brought into the shrine room. Then, from outside, everyone would hear the sound of liquid being poured into it. Many people came to test Santi, and her family's truthfulness. Some suspected that a pipe had been installed secretly and looked around the perimeter of the house for evidence. Whatever Santi asked for, *Amma* would bring and pour into this vessel. The people would be astonished, sweating in apprehension. It would sometimes happen that, suddenly, everyone would smell the fragrance of flowers, just as [is said] happens in Velanganni (Baskaran 1993.06.25).

2.5.3 How *Amma* Spoke

Santi gave instructions that no other person was to be allowed to enter the shrine room and see her when she was speaking with *Amma*. Everyone, the family as well as visitors, would sit outside in the living room. From inside Santi would call *Amma* and speak with her. *Amma* herself would sometimes invite small children to be sent in to speak with her. The adults would ask later what *Amma* looked like and the child would say she was wearing a sari and carrying a child. Once a child, ten or twelve years old, who had never been able to speak, was brought from Madras and *Amma* asked her inside and talked with her. No one could hear this conversation from outside. When the girl came out, she still could not speak to her family, though [Santi said] she was able to speak with *Amma* inside the shrine. According to Baskaran, *Amma* said many things, like "If you believe, if you have faith, then anything can

happen". Once a policeman who came had entered the shrine room suddenly and without any permission. He found Santi sitting there alone (Baskaran 1993.06.25). I wondered at the time why Baskaran had told me about this event. Perhaps the story was meant to illustrate how doubt will only come to prove itself.

2.5.4 The "Chosen Families"

Certain of the devotees, in these first two years, came to be *Amma's* "Chosen Families" who were to be specially blessed. If they were not Christians, *Amma* gave Christian names to these people. The families were Santi's own, G. Rajendiran's family of Kalliyur, Sedupati Raja's of Vadiyakkadu, and a *dalit* woman, Angelamma. Somewhat later, Josephine Thomas of Pabanasam also received this special recognition. Rajendiran, called "Elias" and Sedupati Raja, called "Job" [*Yobu* in Tamil] are Santi's relatives, *kallar* like her, who have known her since childhood. Josephine is also a *kallar*, but she is from a more distant town and is related only obliquely by marriage. A nurse, Josephine had heard of Santi's miracles from a patient and first came to Orattur late in 1986. Her daughter, Irene, and Santi became friends and enjoyed singing together on their visits. Josephine recorded Santi's history up to 1986, and began to keep a precise written account of all the later miraculous events, as they occurred (Baskaran 1993.06.25).

2.5.5 Amma's Catechesis

Baskaran relates that in the two years beginning with her first appearance, *Amma* taught Santi and all her family members the Christian faith. *Amma* used to come each night and give instruction, often between 11:00 p.m. and 1:00 a.m., and tell them about her life. She told of how she was born to *Annamma*, and how Satan had told her mother, "You should dump this rubbish". She told how *Amma* had been separated from *Yesu* [Jesus] for a long time. He was lost when he was six years old. Then she met him at a wedding where she asked him to turn water into *drakhsa rasam* [grape juice]. Later, when he was betrayed and crucified, people

came and told her, and she saw her son like that, in agony, after so many years. She said that when she took on human form, sometimes people would complain to her about life's difficulties. Then *Amma* would say, "Have you suffered more than me?" The water just flowed; that is how much she cried.

Amma made them sit. Then she sat there, at a distance, and spoke. Any questions that they had about the Bible, she would answer, and Santi would clarify. *Amma* also spoke of her relationship with Santi, whom she began to call *Meri* [in Tamil; in English, Mary]. "Whenever Mary calls me, I should come and speak to her," she declared. "This is God's command. Mary is my daughter. Putting Mary down, no one has truth." All the family could speak, but when the time came for decision, whatever Mary said should be done. Sometimes they would scold Mary, but *Amma* would insist, "Whatever she says should be done, *Appa*. This world has to go and a new world has to be created. There has to be unity, and Mary is to be the head of that. The word of *Andavar*, who always was and is today, will not change. Some day there will definitely be an *alayam* [shrine] in this place" (Baskaran 1993.06.25).

Most characteristic of *Amma's* visits in Orattur was her promptness and responsiveness whenever Mary called her. Later, and in other places, it would be *Amma* who would summon Mary, and only when she wished to be heard. To do so, *Amma* still calls, "*Tambi!!*"

2.5.6 Santi's Baptism

Santi turned 16 on 14 December, 1986. *Amma* told everyone to prepare for a special event. On 25 March, 1987, *Amma* celebrated a Mass, baptised Santi as Mary [*Meri*], and administered her First Communion. Ever since, she has been known only as Mary, and respectfully, as Maryamma. The baptismal Mass, celebrated in Tamil, was audio-taped (4.1.3). Thomas Kennedy, Josephine's son, made a transcript of it, and an English translation as well.⁵ The preparations were made according to *Amma's* instructions. Josephine took Santi to buy her a proper dress and veil (4.1.1). *Amma* gave

an exhortation in which she declared that it was she who had given apparitions at Lourdes, Fatima and Velanganni.

"Give your heart entirely to me," she said. "I will guide you. Purify your heart. Make it sacred. That is enough. What does God ask of you? Your love and affection. That is wealth to him. Use your free time only for prayer, because the end is nearby. Anti-Christ will torture you. He will cheat you, coming in disguise as myself and God, and will say, 'I am Mary, I am Jesus Christ', so please pray a lot! Pray a lot!! There will be no room for Satan." *Amma* criticised priests and nuns explicitly: "If the fathers and sisters were keeping control of themselves, the world would not be destroyed. They left everything for God. Then why should they have fascination for the world? They should not have come to this spiritual life. They can do service even outside the priesthood. Is there any fault in my words?" (Josephine Thomas 1993.06.27; cf. 3.7.7.3, 4.1.2).

The celebration of this Mass is a very important feature in the history of Mary's followers. Although it has been superceded by several remarkable miracles of healing, the story of the Mass which *Amma* celebrated will be told to all those who express an interest in the history of the *Amma* cult. This narrative is the cult's Christian charter and chief claim to orthodoxy, as well as the seal of *Amma's* grace.

2.5.7 Seclusion, Tapas, and *Amma's* Promise

After her baptism, *Amma* told Mary to go into seclusion and meditate for six months, and on 19 May, 1987, Mary locked herself inside the family's shrine room, along with the family icons and materials for worship. The apparitions and audiences with visitors continued, but Mary did not emerge from the room. As the wall between the rooms was just a partition and did not reach the ceiling, she was fed over the top of it. During this period, Mary passed no bodily wastes at all (Maryamma 1992.03.26; Josephine 1991.12.18). Secretly, *Amma* promised Mary that she would create a grotto in the house in Orattur, with a spring of healing water,

which would appear when her seclusion had been successfully completed (Maryamma 1993.06.14; Josephine 1991.12.18).

2.5.7.1 Irene and Johnny

Barely a month later, on 23 June, Irene Thomas, Josephine's daughter, died (Josephine 1993.06.27). Mary was inconsolable, but still she would not leave her seclusion. It was an unpleasant time, for rain came in through the roof. The room then had an earth floor, and spilled grains sprouted and grew inside to fifty centimeters in height. A small white Pomeranian dog called Johnny was her only regular companion. She would admit him at will, but when *Amma* came, he became noisy and excited, and she would let him out. A snake and lizards also kept her company. When the seclusion was terminated, everyone wondered how she could have tolerated the conditions inside.

2.5.7.2 Mary's Hair

When her seclusion began, Mary had beautiful, long hair reaching to her knees. At some point, perhaps owing to the heat, she cut it off completely. A neighbour girl peeped into the room and discovered what Maryamma had done, and the news upset the whole family. The spongy ball of matted hair has since become a kind of relic, and though it has not been credited with healing anyone, it is kept by Mary's family at Orattur. People sometimes come, touch it, and take photographs (Baskaran 1993.06.25).

2.5.7.3 Resistance

According to Maryamma's reconstruction of events, neighbours eventually began to object to such unusual behaviour on the part of a teenaged girl, and to suspect that Mary was being confined against her will. Indeed, a family might do just this sort of thing with an unmarried girl who has become pregnant. The neighbours did not want their village to get a bad reputation. At the same time, *Amma* had instructed the family to prepare for a big miracle, with a feast, when Maryamma emerged from seclusion. Telegrams were to be sent to devotees to announce the event. Someone had even circulated a claim that, as well as creating a

spring, *Amma* would appear as Mary and resurrect her friend, Irene. Refusing on the grounds that they had no money for many telegrams or to sponsor big social events, family members Amarajoti and Baskaran cursed *Amma* and told her to leave their girl alone and do her miracles elsewhere (Josephine 1991.12.18). Mary claims that her family was always reluctant to have *Amma* performing miracles with her and had objected at almost every point (Maryamma 1992.03.26).

2.6 End of Seclusion, Misery, and Escape from Orattur

Amma's, and Mary's, plans could not be fulfilled as they were intended. In an effort to save Mary from herself - and perhaps from *Amma* - her family disrupted the intimate relationship that had developed between them. *Amma* abandoned Mary in helplessness and disgrace. Mary found her again only when some of the "Chosen" abducted her, in effect, from her family and took her to live elsewhere.

2.6.1 Abandoned

Uncle Baskaran broke down the door to the shrine room on 1 November, 1987, a few days short of the six months, and forcibly removed Mary. With this act of violence, *Amma's* visits immediately ceased and Mary began a period of wretchedness in *Amma's* absence and silence. She could not walk very well when removed from the shrine room, and this condition worsened until she could only crawl (Josephine 1993.06.27). Without *Amma*, she was once again as helpless as she was before her first apparition, although the possession phenomena did not recur. This situation continued throughout most of 1988. That October, Angelamma, one of the "Chosen", dreamt that she and Josephine should find a means to take Mary away from Orattur. On 29 November, Josephine arranged with Sedupati Raja of Vadiyakkadu, who had been named Yobu, to have Maryamma stay with him and his widowed mother, Kamatchiyamma. Mary stayed in Vadiyakkadu for a month, then "for another month" with another uncle (Maryamma 1993.06.14), V. Sivasubramanian of Tanjavur, who had also become one of the "Chosen".

2.6.2 Amma's Return, New Wonders

With Mary in Vadiyakkadu, according to Josephine's account, *Amma* resumed her visits almost at once. However, because of the show of faithlessness in her prior rejection at Orattur, *Amma* would no longer appear to Mary in her own form, but deigned only speak to her as, and when, she herself chose. This development brought to realization *Amma's* imprecation that they would long to see her, and hear her voice, but be unable to do so. On 10 February, 1989, the first Friday in Lent, and the fourth anniversary of *Amma's* first appearance at the clothesline, Mary received explicit instructions from *Amma* that no one should enter Yobu's family shrine room. *Amma* then appeared in the form of Angelamma, one of the "Chosen", and presumed to enter the shrine room to pray. Crawling after her and grasping at her *sari*, Mary called the woman an abusive name which might, at least in part, have been an aspersion on Angelamma's *dalit* status. At this imprecation, "Angelamma" spun on her heel and in a bright flash of light, disappeared, leaving a shiny spot on the floor where she had turned. This was *Amma's* first miracle at Vadiyakkadu, and is understood as a lesson in humility for everyone, including Mary (Josephine 1991.12.18).

Since Angelamma is a *dalit* or "Untouchable", *Amma* chose to test whether she would be chastised honourably or insultingly. The apparition was verified when they learned later that Angelamma had been ill and confined to bed for the previous ten days and had not visited Vadiyakkadu (Josephine 1991.12.18; 4.1.4).

2.6.3 Trapped Again in Orattur, and a New Twist

On the occasion of Baskaran's marriage on 30 March, 1989 Mary returned to her parents' home in Orattur. In her parents' eyes, Mary was living indecently - eighteen years of age, unmarried, and in the house of a bachelor and his widowed mother. While Yobu is an eligible marriage partner for Maryamma in the *kallar* kinship system, neither is the other's first option, which the prospective partners' families must first explore (3.7.7.2-3; 3.7.1; Chapter 3, notes 5, 17). After the wedding, Mary's parents refused

to let her return to Vadiyakkadu. *Amma* called "Tambi!" repeatedly, then told the family to call Josephine, Yobu, Rajendiran, and Sivasubramanian to Orattur. *Amma* informed them that Mary was suffering from a tumour on the breast and had to be removed at once to Sivasubramanian's house in Tanjavur for treatment. Maryamma told how six months previously doctors had suggested she go to the large, well-equipped Vellore Hospital for treatment, but she had refused, saying, "Let Our Lady heal me".

2.7 New Afflictions, New Popularity

Mary finally detached herself, with the help of the "Chosen Families" from the influence of her parental family. Her career entered a new phase in which bodily miracles predominate. Viscerally dramatic events become the "proofs" of Mary's unique relationship with *Amma*.

2.7.1 Amma's Surgery

In Sivasubramanian's house in Tanjavur, during the night of April 8, *Amma* came and performed breast surgery to remove Mary's tumour. No one was allowed into the room. After Josephine had rendered Mary unconscious with an anaesthetic, witnesses outside could hear the clink of instruments. When *Amma* had left, a tumour remained behind in a dish. For five days, local people flocked to see the results of this miracle. Mary next went to Pabanasam, to Josephine's home to recuperate, as she is a nurse. *Amma* visited Mary there, and on that occasion Josephine's plastic three-dimensional laser picture of Jesus crucified also bled from the Five Wounds. The picture is now kept in her home as a relic. The bloody dressings from Mary's surgery are also kept at Vadiyakkadu in a wall cabinet in the shrine room. On April 24, Mary returned to Vadiyakkadu. She was still unable to walk (Josephine 1991.12.18; 3.7.2-3, 5.2.11-12).

2.7.2 Irene Thomas Returns

Josephine was granted a special favour by *Amma* on 26 May, 1989. Advance notice had been given, and that day about a thousand people gathered to witness a *katchi*, or vision, of Irene Thomas in

the Vadiyakkadu shrine room. By *Amma's* instructions, no one was allowed to take photographs or to enter the room. Irene appeared twice - once for the many witnesses who filed past the doorway, and again in a private vision for her family alone. Josephine begged that her child be returned to her and *Amma* promised that at some time in the future she would be brought back to life. The shrine room door was then closed. When it was reopened, the blue *sari* Irene had worn in the private vision was found, folded inside the room (Josephine 1991.12.18). It has been kept as a relic and Irene's photograph is now displayed over the main doorway to the shrine room, which has come to be called *Arul Arai*, "Room of Grace" (4.1.6). But more wonders were yet to come. It is during this time that Mary commonly came to be called *Meriyamma* [Maryamma] as a mark of respect.

2.7.3 *Kal Piracchanai* (the "Leg Question")

- New Wonders in the *Arul Arai*

Amma summoned the people who had come to know her as she had shown her power at Vadiyakkadu. Maryamma had gradually lost the power in her legs to walk and remained lame since her removal by force from seclusion. The believers were invited for the healing of Maryamma's lameness, to take place on 25 September, 1989. Yobu sent telegrams to everyone. About midnight, while she was waiting for *Amma* in the *Arul Arai*, both of Maryamma's legs were found to be severed at the knees. Maryamma describes her experience: "I had prepared for the promised healing. I was waiting in the *Arul Arai* for Our Lady who had healed me before. Suddenly, I heard a tremendous noise and everything went black for a moment. I was in terrible pain and my legs were gone! My blood was everywhere. The pain was so terrible, I was tearing at the stumps where they had been. I felt life going out of me. I thought I would die, and for some time I lost consciousness" (Maryamma 1992.03.26).

Unexpected and frightening as this was, *Amma* assured the worried devotees that a doctor need not be called. She would yet

save the situation and correct not only Maryamma's lameness, but restore her legs as well, despite this unexpected and drastic setback. She told the people to have faith, and wait. After fourteen hours, in the afternoon of the next day, *Amma* returned with Maryamma's legs, reattached them, and dressed them with surgical dressings. There are many witnesses who will swear to the truth of these events, and Yobu took 35mm photographs of Maryamma lying in the shrine room without her legs (Josephine 1991.12.18). These photographs are today kept in an album for anyone who might wish to see them. The shrine room's reputation as a holy place, an *Arul Arai*, was enhanced by each new miracle which took place within it. Maryamma's reputation as a holy person drew more and more people to see her, to receive her blessings and advice (Josephine 1991.12.18; 1992.08.16).

2.7.3.1 A Theological Snag

Unfortunately, the reattached legs festered, causing Maryamma much distress and agony. On October 15, *Amma* removed them again. It seems that they had not been reattached properly, and *Amma* had now to take them away to have them blessed by *Andavar*, an oversight on the first occasion which, it seems, *Amma* acknowledged. People asked afterward why all this had to happen. *Amma* said it was to manifest *Andavar*'s power (Maryamma 1993.06.14). Several weeks later, in November, 1989, Maryamma was taken to visit Velanganni Shrine where she was able to walk a little (Josephine 1991.12.18).

2.8 I First Learn of Maryamma

In the course of the field research for this study, I had opportunities to test the *Amma* cult environment with my own sensibilities. I had first heard from a Tanjavur diocesan priest, on 15 December, 1991, of a young *kallar* woman living somewhere near the town of Pattukkottai who had seen visions of the Virgin Mary and been instrumental in the alleged resurrection of a child. I obtained the help of a *dalit* lay resident of Velanganni, M. A. Arokkiyasami, who accompanied me by motorcycle on several

excursions into Velanganni's hinterland enquiring after this woman. Without knowing either the young woman's name or that of her village, it took me two weeks to locate Vadiyakkadu.

2.8.1 First Experience of the *Arul Arai* - 30 December, 1991

It was with some satisfaction, then, that I arrived in Vadiyakkadu at last. When we drove into Mary and Yobu's farmyard one sunny winter afternoon to find a modest yellow brick and plaster house facing away from the road, we were met by a woman who appeared to be the only person present in the compound. She was perhaps fifty-five to sixty years old. Arokkiyasami approached her very politely, directly, and without affectation, and confirmed that this was, in fact, the place which we sought where a deceased child had been resurrected.

We asked Kamatchiyamma, for this was the woman's name, where the girl who was famous for her part in this resurrection might be. She said that the girl's name was Mary, that she had gone to Tanjavur, and she did not know exactly where she was. Kamatchiyamma led us inside the front room of her house. In its left wall was the door to a closed room. Kamatchiyamma paused at the door, as though listening to see whether she might disturb someone inside, then opened the door and led us in.

I had a most uncanny experience on first entering this room, the *Arul Arai*. The room was about two and a half by four meters in size. Ahead to the right as we entered, in a corner, was a small wooden table on which stood a glazed white bust of St. Mary, two candles partly burnt on a candle stand, a tiny *Arokkiya Mada* in a peaked glass case, and to the right a large framed picture of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, leaning against the wall. At the back, of the table, also leaning against the wall, were framed pictures of Mary as the Immaculate Conception and Jesus in agony, afflicted with the crown of thorns, looking upward. Hanging on the wall behind and above the table were, at left, *Arokkiya Mada* and at right, another Madonna with scepter and child which I did not recognize. Above all these was the Sacred Heart of Jesus,

in a style and frame matching that of Mary, below, to the right. The table top was covered by a folded green and silver-grey patterned plastic sheet. The table top was at most thirty-five by fifty centimeters. In its center was a plastic crucifix and to the right front, next to the candle holder, was a blue beaded, stainless steel rosary.

Arokkiyasami has a deep and exclusive devotion to the Virgin Mary, whom he calls only *Arokkiya Tay*, insisting on the use of the indigenous Tamil term for "Mother". As he paid his respects at this shrine, I stood nearby, next to a locked wooden cabinet built into the plastered masonry wall to its right. I sensed a deep, subsonic thrumming vibration, like a vibration of the earth one might imagine expecting from an earthquake occurring at some very great distance, which seemed to be coming from it. Something very strange was going on here.

The stillness of the air was palpable in the quiet of this country home, in this neat, clean room. Birds were chirping sporadically in the bright sunshine outside, and there was a faint breeze. Everything outside was peaceful, rustic, and idyllic, but for this this deep sense of vibration, just below the level of actual hearing. It seemed to originate from the cabinet, rather than from outside, or from some other part of the room. The sensation got wierder and wierder, the more experience I had of it. I learned later that in this cabinet were kept the *Amma* cult's relics, such as the bloodied dressings from Maryamma's surgical miracles and the *sari* in which Irene Thomas had appeared. The thrumming I felt might have been the vibration of the motorcycle still reverberating through my body after our long ride, but I had never noticed it on our other stops, nor on the short walk to the house, nor while talking outside the house with Kamatchiyamma.

In the center of the floor, between the door and the shrine table, was an overturned brass bowl. I did not notice it until my foot accidentally bumped it. It reminded me of a *bali pitham* [sacrificial stone] which stands before the *dhvajasthambham*

or *kotimaram* [flagpole] in a Hindu temple (Janaki 1988). Arokkiyasami enquired about this bowl. It represents, said Kamatchiyamma, the feet of *Mada*. This response was simply opaque. I later learned that this was the spot where *Anma* appeared as the *dalit* woman, Angelamma, to teach Maryamma and the others a lesson in humility, and left a shining "footprint" ^(2.6.2; 4.1.4). The bowl is kept there so that clumsy newcomers like me might not inadvertantly step on it and efface the mark.

On the window sill to the left of the shrine table, I noticed two cheap photo albums. It was the evidence of Maryamma's leg affliction in one of these, which I was shortly to be shown, that most bothered me in this first encounter with the *Anma* cult. Kamatchiyamma rummaged in the corner opposite the shrine table, and uncovered what we were told was the very box in which the dead child had been buried and dug up alive. Its wood was old and worm-eaten - not the sort of box to bury one in, not even a still-born infant.

Kamatchiyamma was beginning to look tired and annoyed, and appeared unable to tell us any more. I was about ready to leave and began preparing the motorcycle to depart. However, Arokkiyasami continued to press her with some concerns of his own, giving her one of his prayer sheets and obliging her fill it out. He is something of an evangelist for his *Arokkiya Tay* and distributes petitions for people to send to Velanganni wherever he goes.

Just before my intended departure, Arokkiyasami went inside once again to pay his respects at the shrine. At this point a party of three women arrived. Antoniyamma proved to be more voluble than the retiring (and tired) Kamatchiyamma. She is from Kumbakonam and had brought the others, a mother and daughter, to pray in the household shrine so that the younger woman should conceive a child. A spirited discussion followed between Antoniyamma and Arokkiyasami in the shrine room, both standing over but ignoring the younger woman, who had knelt to pray. Her eyes were moist, her face sweaty despite the cool air, and she was

quivering slightly. She was obviously intent on her purpose, disregarding the rather animated conversation going on around and above her.

Arokkiyasami then knelt and prayed with all four women. I stood in the background. When they were done, I went outside the room to wait. Arokkiyasami distributed prayer sheets to the three women and insisted in strident tones that Our Lady must not be addressed or referred to as *Mada*, but only as *Arokkiya Tay*. This was disconcerting to them, but they made no overt objection, deferring to him, perhaps, as a stranger, or as a male, or both.

Meanwhile I had noticed a small full-length portrait of a young woman about twenty years of age above the entrance to the shrine room. I supposed that it must be a family member. Moments later, Arokkiyasami burst out of the shrine room with Antoniyamma and Kamatchiyamma, looked at the picture, and told me excitedly that this was the very girl who had appeared inside the shrine room. She had died, but had been allowed to appear afterward to witnesses. Her name was Irene. Another time, when they opened the room after hearing "the sound", Antoniyamma said, it was found to be a meter deep in flowers and flower garlands placed there by Our Lady. The investigation, which had begun not more than an hour ago, seemed to be broadening.

Arokkiyasami returned to the shrine room, and after a few minutes called me inside. He was radically sobered. With a sense of urgency he took the larger of the two photo albums I had noticed, placed his rosary on top of it, and holding these as an offering before the shrine table, knelt there. The four women also knelt and covered their heads with their saris. Then he began to sing in such an unutterably moving way. His tone was one of appeal and Antoniyamma mouthed the words. I had no idea my friend could sing so sweetly. Gradually his song gathered intensity and he began to slap his right thigh, quite hard, to the its rhythm. Antoniyamma stopped singing (thinking, I supposed, that his fervour tested the bounds of propriety, even here). She,

Arokkiyasami, and the young woman were all weeping. Throughout, I stood by the window to the left of the table, feeling extremely awkward but glad to be a privy witness to such a direct, unmediated "ethnographic" experience. When he ceased singing, Arokkiyasami placed the album and rosary on the floor, touched his forehead to them, stood, and blessed the kneeling women by touching the rosary to each head.

I still had no idea what could have brought on this performance. Neither had I any idea whether it related to my research or to some Marian agenda of Arokkiyasami's own. As we passed through the outer room to the veranda, his eyes were wide as he passed the photo album to me, exclaiming, "Such wonders! You can't believe!" Opening the album, I saw a young woman lying on a mat on the floor, in a room which could have been the one we had just left. Her legs had been severed freshly just above the knees. She was wearing a grey *churidar* and her head was propped up on a pillow. In some of the dozen photos, she appeared to be in physical and emotional distress. In others, she appeared to be sleeping or unconscious, and in some wakefully peaceful and not at all distressed. On the floor was blood, though not the copious quantity which one might expect from such a double amputation. On the wall opposite were some spatters of blood, suggesting that the injury had been inflicted in this place. On the floor the blood was smeared, as though from a rotating motion which could have been centered on the girl's pelvis and thus made by herself before she had been moved back to have her head propped up next to the wall. Alternatively, they could have been made by the now missing limbs in the process of severance.

All were brightly lit flash photos. Other photos showed other persons who were present. Antoniyamma identified Kamatchiyamma and her son, Yobu. The people all seemed very reverent and attentive, one woman offering rose petals where Mary's severed calves ought to have been. This was the girl we had come to find. There followed other pictures of Mary, looking

plump, healthy, and active. In one of these she was dressed in a *churidar*, apparently trying out a cinema dance step. In others she was standing formally in a *sari*.

I asked if these photos had been taken after the first set I had seen. Antoniyamma assured me through Arokkiyasami that they had been. An urbanite, she had had more exposure, I suppose, to English and seemed to get the import of my questions directly, as Kamatchiyamma had not. I felt I had regained some margin of control in this situation. I had looked closely to see if I could detect any age difference between the two sets of pictures. If anything, the "after" pictures depicted a younger girl than the "before" pictures, but I could not be certain. They were, in any case, all taken quite closely together in time. The distressing circumstances of the "before" pictures could have made her appear to be older. I had looked closely at these photos to see whether Mary's legs could have been folded under her somehow. The *churidar* pants were not pulled back to reveal the bloody stumps, but looked as if they had been cut off at just the same level, and so partially concealed the stumps. One photo clearly showed the bone of her right thigh. The wounds were obviously fresh. The blood had only begun to congeal on the stumps, and still looked fresh on the floor. Santi was a plump girl and was lying flat on her back on the concrete floor. The straw mat on which she lay extended from her head only to her hips. It did not seem credible to imagine her legs being bent back beneath her thighs, some freshly killed animal meat, for example, being attached at her knees, and such a deception being concealed by her pant fabric.

I asked Antoniyamma if they had taken her to hospital! No, *Mada* had told them not to. Where were Mary's severed legs? No one knew. The story around the photographs was that Mary had opened the shrine door without first hearing "the sound". Then, that same night a "Shaitan" came and took her legs. "Shaitan" was Arokkiyasami's expression, used as we reviewed the afternoon while returning home to Velanganni, and I could not ascertain from him

if Antoniyamma had used that term. *Mada* assured them that all would be well and that the legs would be restored as they were before. Then the photos were taken and some time before morning *Mada* told them to leave. They closed Mary inside the room. When they next heard the sound, they opened the door and Mary was found inside, her legs restored.

We moved outside, past a Christmas creche without any figures, on the porch. Its backdrop was a blue *sari*. Antoniyamma told us that Irene had appeared in this *sari* in the shrine room. When told to, they had closed the door. When permitted to reopen it, they found the *sari* there, neatly folded, but Irene had vanished (Field Notes 1991.12.30).

2.8.2' Either, Or

After my first, brief visit of 30 December, 1991, in which the rough outlines of Maryamma's life were collected, I began to sort out the immediate possibilities: Either Maryamma's legs had been severed in order to promote a religious cult, with or without her cooperation, or a real miracle had actually occurred. These village people might well take photographs, but they certainly did not have access to the digital technology necessary to alter them to portray what I had seen. Then there were all the witnesses. If the miracle had simply been fabricated and enacted, a huge number of conspirators would have had to be involved. As I drove back to Velanganni, I pondered whether Maryamma was perfectly healthy, and just away for a few days, as Kamatchiyamma assured me, or lying somewhere - perhaps in that thatched hut near the house - exploited and disabled, the victim of a pious but vicious fraud. I wondered whether or not she was still alive.

2.9 Consolidation, Resurrection, and Response to the Church

In the narrative of the *Amma* cult's history, the earliest wonders concern *Amma*'s special care and teaching of Santi. The bodily affliction miracles mark her support of Maryamma's coming of age and independence of decision. From October, 1989 when *Amma* restored Maryamma's ability to walk, until June, 1991 no new,

dramatic public miracle occurred, but events took place quietly and privately which were to have even more dramatic impact in the long run. Maryamma's leg affliction was not to be the greatest of *Amma's* miracles. This period covered Maryamma's nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first years and was a time of consolidation for her reputation. Visitors continued to come seeking her advice and blessings. New people who were to have important roles in the *Amma* cult were drawn to it, and the Roman Catholic Church decided that the time had come to intervene. The relative sophistication of the cult's new clientele and concern for the unorthodox use of what the Church regards as its own symbols demanded fresh approaches to the presentation of *Amma's* miracles and a new rationale for her methods. The cult's earliest clientele had expected and required much less (7.2.2.3).

2.9.1 A Tragedy, and a Promise

"Elias", or Rajendiran, the cousin who had provided funds for visitors' meals at the Orattur shrine, already had, just like Kanakambujam and Panjabakesan nineteen years before, two daughters and hoped that his third child would be a son. His wife, Pirabavati who was christened "Lucia" by *Amma*, became pregnant a third time, but the male child both parents desired died in the womb in her eighth month on 4 June, 1990. Pirabavati was rendered sterile in the process of removing the dead child. *Amma* asked the distraught parents whether they would like to have another child, a different child, promising a miracle in Pirabavati's womb, or have the lost boy restored to them, a miracle of resurrection. Choosing the latter option, they obeyed *Amma's* instructions - to disinter the child's decaying remains and rebury them next to Maryamma's house in Vadiyakkadu (Josephine 1992.08.16).

2.9.2 New Recruits

A Servite nun, Sr. Jacinta of Pabanasam had been introduced to Maryamma by Josephine Thomas. In October, 1990, she heard a talk about the Medugorje apparitions of the Virgin in Bosnia by Fr. Kulandairaj, a Jesuit who was at the time the

National Chairman of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal in India. Sr. Jacinta approached Fr. Kulandairaj after his talk and told him about the apparitions and auditions at Vadiyakkadu, although she had not yet seen any miracles or heard *Amma's* voice herself. At that time, he was not inclined to believe her, and when she wrote requesting him the following February to come and celebrate a Mass at Vadiyakkadu, he neglected to reply until April, and then sent his regrets (Kulandairaj 1992.04.08). Apart from *Amma's* Mass in 1987, the liturgical life of *Amma's* growing cult had received no attention at all and as more Catholics became attracted, this lacuna seems to have been perceived, at least by some, as a growing problem. Sr. Jacinta felt that Fr. Kulandairaj, with his already enthusiastic devotion to the Virgin, was the priest who could correct this deficiency (4.4; 4.7.1; 4.7.3).

2.9.3 "Aiya"

Since Maryamma's leg affliction, a year passed without any major event as the number of her devotees gradually increased. Then, on 13 November, 1990, *Amma* entrusted Maryamma with a "special child".⁶ This male child was not given a name but called simply "*Aiya*" (Kulandairaj 1992.04.08), which means "Sir" in Tamil, and also "Lord". Little is said overtly about *Aiya*, and information about the child is sparse and difficult to come by, but he remains, always, in the care of Maryamma or an immediate relative (4.5.4; 4.6; 5.2.16).

2.9.4 The Miracle of Resurrection

In the early morning hours of 17 June, 1991, *Amma* brought Rajendiran and Pirabavati's child back to life. The wooden box in which the remains had been reburied was exhumed (4.4.4-5; 4.5.2-3). Each step was recorded by a video camera as well as by several still cameras (Josephine 1991.12.18; 4.3.1). The previous day, *Amma* had accepted Sr. Jacinta as one of the "Chosen" (Jacinta 1993.06.17; 4.4.3), and asked that Fr. Kulandairaj be called to perform a baptism for the child on July 2, requesting him specifically by name (Kulandairaj 1992.04.08; 4.7.3). On that

date, Fr. Kulandairaj conducted a Mass - only the second Mass to be celebrated at Vadiyakkadu, after *Amma's* own - and a naming ceremony, perhaps a baptism (3.6.5; 4.7.4). Afterward, Fr. Kulandairaj approached Fr. Maria Arokiam the parish priest at the Mandalakkottai church, about seven kilometers distant, for the baptism of twenty to thirty people (5.1.1), Hindus, who desired to be received into the Roman Catholic Church. He refused. None of the people were previously known to him, nor had they any proper sponsors, god-parents, or preparation (Maria Arokiam 1993.06.18). Fr. Maria Arokiam knew the rules of the ecclesiastical establishment and played by them. For his part, Fr. Kulandairaj knew them just as well.

On *Amma's* instruction, the resurrected child was named "Moses" and taken on a tour of Coimbatore District of Tamil Nadu and Palghat District of Kerala, far to the west. Fr. Kulandairaj celebrated his second Mass at Vadiyakkadu on July 14, attended by 3000 guests. The celebration cost Rs.150,000 (Josephine 1991.12.18). Fr. Kulandairaj had expected to find "a dozen or so people" but instead found a forty to fifty foot high "cutout" of *Annai Velanganni*, the Mother of Velanganni, and two kilometers of fluorescent tube lights leading to and lighting the farmyard, a *pandal* or temporary shelter for the celebration, and live music (Kulandairaj 1992.04.08).

2.9.5 Maryamma's Reputation Spreads

More and more people came to hear by word of mouth about the events surrounding Maryamma of Vadiyakkadu - the breast surgery, Moses' resurrection, the *kal piracchanai*, her ascetic seclusion, her favours from *Amma*, her childhood horrors. Her personal sanctity brought pilgrims journeying long distances in search of her without precise directions or even knowing her name. Today, any stranger passing near the village is directed, hardly having to ask, to her farmhouse shrine.

2.9.5.1 Proselytism

For his part, Fr. Kulandairaj began immediately to use his mobility as a national-level executive in the Charismatic Renewal to travel about the country enthusiastically addressing conferences of nuns and priests, youth groups and retreats about this new Indian apparition of Mary, more intimate and marvelous than Medjugorje, and much closer to home (4.7.2). In each talk, he would present Vadiyakkadu as a uniquely shared secret, insisting that his audience refrain from discussing it outside of each particular group to which he had confided it. This proviso was, indeed, curious. In this way, he spoke to groups in many parts of southern India - in Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Tamil Nadu - and beyond.

2.9.5.2 Two Secrets Meet

When I first met Heather Fernandez in May, 1992, she was Chairperson of the National Youth Pastoral Team of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal in India and knew Fr. Kulandairaj well. Full of my discoveries about Vadiyakkadu, I described much of what I had learned. Surprised that I, an outsider, could have learned so much, she described how Fr. Kulandairaj had recently addressed her group in Hyderabad, revealing much less than I had, and warning them to avoid publicizing Vadiyakkadu. Why this secrecy?

2.9.6 The Bishop Visits Maryamma

With the mass event of Moses' resurrection, and Fr. Kulandairaj's involvement, Maryamma and her followers came inexorably to the attention of the Most Reverend P. Arokiaswamy, Bishop of Tanjavur, which led, perhaps through the indiscretion of one of his priests, to my first knowledge of the *Amma* cult. In early 1992, following my first visit to Vadiyakkadu, the Bishop sent some priests in civil dress to enquire discretely about Maryamma and her claims (3.6.4). He then made a personal, private visit on 14 March, 1992, with his Chancellor and Fr. Maria Arokiam of Mandalakkottai (Kulandairaj 1992.04.08). For the Bishop, whose every act is necessarily a public one, this was a hazardous

initiative which might easily have been construed as a tacit approval of these unorthodox devotions at Vadiyakkadu.

2.9.6.1 Insolence, Challenge, Boundary-setting

Friends of Maryamma recall the Bishop's visit with anger. Kennedy and Josephine tell how the Bishop came unannounced in his car, sat before the house, and demanded to see Mary. "At the time, she was bathing, but the Bishop insisted that she come immediately, just as she was. Yobu became angry with him, but *Amma* had said, 'When the Bishop comes, no matter how he speaks, however badly he behaves, you must show him respect. You must give him a lot of respect'. When Maryamma came to the Bishop, he didn't ask anything; he didn't look at anything. 'Is that all?' he asked, 'If I say that all this is falsehood, what will you do?'"

"'That is for you, and for your church,' Yobu and Mary answered. 'This is not your church. This is our house. You are for yourself, and for your church. You can say whatever you wish'" (Kennedy 1993.06.17). The Bishop went away, and eleven days later, sent Fr. Maria Arokiam to forbid Fr. Kulandairaj, or any other priest, to celebrate Mass at the *Arul Arai* in Vadiyakkadu. On that occasion, Fr. Kulandairaj obeyed, obtaining permission to celebrate Mass at the Mandalakkottai parish church instead.

2.10 Special Times, Specialists, Miraculous Signs

While my initial contact with Vadiyakkadu on 30 December, 1991, piqued my interest and aroused my concern for the welfare of the young woman, portrayed without legs in the photos, March, 1992, marked the beginning of my serious investigation. On March 26, the day after the Bishop prohibited the celebration of Mass at Vadiyakkadu, I arrived there and met for the first time with Fr. Kulandairaj and Maryamma. She was, to my immense relief, quite healthy.

2.10.1 Liturgy and Special Days

Despite the Bishop's prohibition, dozens of Masses have been celebrated at the farmhouse and many priests of religious congregations, seminaries, and other diocesan jurisdictions, in

quiet but persistent defiance of the Bishop, have become actively involved in the liturgy at Vadiyakkadu. The Catholic liturgical calendar's Marian feast-days are favourites at Vadiyakkadu and, in celebrating each of them with a Mass, the *Amma* cult declares its solidarity with the rest of the Universal Church.

In addition, four special anniversaries are celebrated with a Mass each year, and these celebrations constitute temporal boundary markers for the cult. These celebrations mark *Amma's* first appearance on 10 February, 1985, Moses' resurrection on 17 June, 1991, Maryamma's birthday on 14 December, and, for the first time in 1991, *Aiya's* "birthday" on 13 November. It is not strictly a birthday, because *Aiya* did not arrive as a newborn. He appears as a child of almost two years in the video of Moses' resurrection, recorded seven months after *Aiya's* arrival.

2.10.2 Meetings with Fr. Kulandairaj

Fr. Kulandairaj met with me in his room at Dhyana Ashram in Madras for interviews on April 8 and 9, 1992. As we talked, people continually knocked on his door asking for blessings. Between interruptions for him to attend to their needs, Kulandairaj explained what a wonder it was to have been chosen by Our Lady personally for the work she had undertaken for the sake of India. It was a real miracle that, with his busy schedule, he had had open dates permitting his visits for the two Masses he had celebrated the previous July at Vadiyakkadu. To demonstrate the date, he showed me his 1991 diary with July 2 and 14 still blank, and a file containing one letter from Bishop P. Arokiaswamy of Tanjavur, forbidding him to say Mass, and another from a Brother Peter of Walsingham, England, celebrating the phenomena at Vadiyakkadu.

Fr. Kulandairaj explained, in detail, how he had miraculously been able to visit Medjugorje on a side trip from Rome when he thought it would be impossible for him to obtain the necessary Yugoslavian visa (4.7.3; cf. 5.1.3.1). At the time of my visit, he was keeping in his room a meter-high statue of the Rosa

Mystica, replica of a German statue of the Virgin famous for its mysterious weeping. It had been sent to him from Europe to be kept for a few days at a time in the homes of Rosa Mystica's devotees. He asked me to busy myself with a picture book which depicted the statue weeping, along with other statues of Mary and of Crucifixes, such as the Christ of Limpas in Spain, which are reputed to have wept, or moved, or rolled their eyes (cf. Christian 1992).

Upon first seeing *Aiya* in March, 1992, I realized that he receives almost no attention while Moses is showered with public adulation. I observed to Kulandairaj that the more Moses' resurrection story attracts people's notice, the less unwanted prominence *Aiya* will have, and suggested that Moses seems to function as a "smoke screen" diverting attention from *Aiya*. Fr. Kulandairaj agreed in principle with this formulation. He explained that *Amma* had warned that *Aiya* was in danger. She had even recommended that the family have some quick means of escape for him in case of trouble. As Fr. Kulandairaj closed our interview, he confided almost conspiratorially that his was not the first Mass celebrated at Vadiyakkadu, but that Our Lady herself had said a Mass for the people there (4.7.5). What he left unsaid spoke of his allegiance to the Mother of God, and the commission she had given him, over the authority of any bishop (cf. 4.2.4 for a similar statement by another priest).

When I next met Fr. Kulandairaj in June, 1993, he had been removed from the Chairmanship of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal and had been reassigned to his former job teaching English literature at Loyola College, a Jesuit institution in Madras. No longer free to move about as he chose, he still made time for regular visits and a leadership role at Vadiyakkadu. Owing to his efforts, many more priests had become interested, recruited, and actively involved in the *Amma* cult (5.1.3.3).

2.10.3 New Wonders of an Ancient Kind

On 18 June, 1992, the day following the first anniversary of Moses' resurrection, blood flowed for three to four minutes from a framed picture of a crucifix made of straw in the *Aruḷ Arai* shrine room. Fr. Kulandairaj preserved some of the blood on cotton swabs (Lobo 1993.06.17). On 14 November, 1992, as Fr. Kulandairaj, Sr. Jacinta, and others were returning by car at night from the celebration of the second anniversary of *Amma's* giving *Aiya*, which is treated as a "birthday", *Amma* appeared to them, shining brightly on a curve in the road in a patch of roadside darkness, nearly causing them to have an accident. Of the seven passengers, four saw the apparition (Kulandairaj, George Sebastian 1993.06.17). On 17 May, 1993, a month before the second anniversary of Moses' resurrection, blood flowed from the eyes of a plaster statue of Mary, running down the folds of her dress (Kulandairaj, Jacinta 1993.06.17). Some nuns have circulated predictions concerning three days of darkness and great calamities (Savarimuthu 1994.01.21). The style of these newest hierophanies is developing along the lines of European Catholic models (Zimdars-Swartz 1991: 3-21; Christian 1992: 64, 99-100, 161 note 8, 177 note 169).

2.10.4 *Aiya's* Profile Rising

I attended the second anniversary of Moses' resurrection on 17 June, 1993, along with about two hundred other people. The bloody crucifix and statue of Mary were on display in the *Aruḷ Arai*. One Mass was celebrated on the previous evening, the 16th, and two on the anniversary, followed by the presentation of a birthday cake and a public blessing for Moses. The crowd extended their hands toward him or over his head as he was held, to be seen by them all, in his father's arms. The high point came at the moment when *Aiya* was lifted up likewise by Yobu, and he also was asked to bless Moses. Although the day's celebration was ostensibly for Moses, *Aiya* had by now clearly come to be recognized as a very special person. However, the symbolic

discourse about *Aiya* was muted and not verbalized as was that concerning Moses, whose miracle, now two years old, was explained by a devotee, Elsa, with Moses in her arms, again and again in detail before the Mass, for newcomers. As this was going on, *Aiya* played about her feet, ignored.

Aiya's identity is well-known by some, however. One middle-aged woman, arriving in the middle of the day's first Mass, sought furiously for *Aiya*, rushed directly to him and falling to her knees grasped him, burying her head in his tummy, and pleaded for his blessing. To my surprise, the child was not at all disturbed by this invasion of his personal space by a stranger as a display of piety. Discussions with a few core members of the *Amma* cult left no doubt at all that this "special child", *Aiya*, the Lord, is the Christ come again.

2.10.5 Denouement

I left Tamil Nadu in early July, 1993. In September, I received a letter from Miss A. Parameswary, a Sri-Lankan born devotee who lives in Pattukkottai and is an intimate of Maryamma. On July 20, the letter read, Maryamma and Yobu had become engaged, with four priests concelebrating the Mass. On July 27, in a devotee's home in Madras where Parameswary and the family were visiting, blood flowed from a crucifix. Later, the family visited another devotee's house in Bombay. On August 8, back in Madras, *Amma* announced that she would take Maryamma away for a few days and instructed the rest of the group to return to Vadiyakkadu. Two days later, Maryamma was also miraculously transported there. The Feast of the Assumption, August 15, was also concelebrated at Vadiyakkadu by four priests (Parameswary 1993.09.02).

On 3 September, 1994 I had the opportunity for a brief visit to Vadiyakkadu once again. I had heard news that *Amma* had allegedly promised to give Maryamma a holy girl child, as women had been neglected in society and in the Church, and I hoped to confirm this rumour (A. Arockiasamy 1993.08.17). However, Maryamma was not to be found at home when I arrived. I learned only that

she was staying in Madras for some time. Might Maryamma be seeking a wider, urban, constituency, I wondered? Or has she some new reason to stay away from Vadiyakkadu - another seclusion, perhaps?

Before this visit, I had written to Fr. Kulandairaj for any news of Maryamma or any new statements by *Amma*. His 15 September response indicated that, owing to his teaching duties, he could no longer visit Vadiyakkadu as frequently as before. There was no special news. An ingrained skepticism suggests to me that Maryamma could not have been in Madras, Kulandairaj's own city, without his knowledge.

Vadiyakkadu is beginning to lose its quiet, provincial ways as the trickle of outsiders shows indications of becoming an uncontrolled rush. Already pilgrims to Velanganni Shrine are beginning to ask directions to the new place of apparitions and miracles, having heard only hints of Maryamma's reputation, knowing neither her name nor that of the place where she stays. So far, the Velanganni priests are apparently doing their best to avoid giving such directions. It, however, will probably not be long before these pilgrims establish an information network which will bring thousands to Maryamma's little farmhouse, to its *Arul Arai*, and to the quiet, large-eyed child who stays with her there.

Chapter 3

Truth-Claims of Maryamma's Cult

At the outset I described this as a study about about representing and constructing personal, social, and sacred identities through flexible narratives which people generate to alter a vision of sacred reality through time. This account is about editing, repairing and renovating these contested narratives to enhance in fact or style a desired sacred reputation while reconfiguring this identity in strategic respects without undermining its perceived continuity and integrity. The task of this and the two following chapters is to provide a set of voices which present the tensions suffusing people's efforts to create coherence and make religiously ordered social life work. It is to show how the partial view, the reduced and reified image - rather than the whole process of symbol-formation with all its contingencies - becomes the basis of an ambivalent, polyvocal symbol which invites the predication of convincing religious claims. To do this, I open windows on disparate but interconnected worlds of experience of Maryamma, some of which cult adherents will be induced by its leadership to regard as tangential or pejorative to the cult's purpose and meaning, but which are essential to our understanding of it.

3.1 Problems Within and Among the Sources

My task in the previous chapter, in presenting a narrative which represents Maryamma's special status as the favoured medium of *Amma's* grace, was not to provide a definitive reading, even of the so-called "facts" of her afflictions and miracles. It was to present a composite story, full enough to give the reader some bearings in the discussions to follow, rather than a canonical account. I have cautioned the reader that no single source of the

stories I collected would recognize my compilation of fact and opinion as her or his own. I am therefore liable to be taken by any particular source as committing some betrayal of trust. However, it is in the nature of my material that all stories are partial stories. No one's is told exactly and entirely as I received it, though I attempt in what follows to allow personal voices to speak, literally and evocatively, for themselves. The partiality of the stories is not merely in my recording of them, however, but in the perspectives and interests of my sources themselves.¹ In this respect I am, myself, one more participant in the events described, with a personal impact on how others think and feel (cf. 3.7.13; especially 4.2.3-4), and my perceptions constitute yet one more partial source.

Refractory voices both challenge the hegemonic, or "orthodox" claims of the cult as well as enhance its reputation in a manner or direction which its leadership might not desire or approve. Testimonies made by both cult adherents and doubters are often as unsystematically stated as they are strongly and personally felt.² There are also important but subdued undercurrents of controversy among devotees, some concerning the authority of facts and others, claims to precedence among participants.

3.1.1 Maryamma's Control of the Sources

My composite hagiographic account of Maryamma's life and cult origins is not a canonical one, but the *Amma* cult always has for authority the word of its founder, Maryamma. The story she tells is too brief, variable, and lacking in detail to support a scholarly treatment of her biography (Maryamma 1992.03.26; 1993.06.14). Shortly after attaching herself to Maryamma late in 1986, Josephine Thomas assumed the self-appointed task of cult chronologist and began by inscribing the early life of Santi, as she was then still known, and recording those subsequent events which Josephine herself deemed significant. She seems to have taken this task very seriously and with the fullest approbation of

Maryamma. When I asked Maryamma on our first meeting in March, 1992 for more details about her life, Maryamma did not hesitate in referring me to Josephine.

The nine typescript pages, dated 18 December, 1991, which I obtained from Josephine are an English résumé of a much longer diary in Tamil which she would not permit me to photocopy, or even to handle. If I asked for any clarification or elaboration of the English version, or confirmation of any truth-claim or rumour which I had heard elsewhere, Josephine or her son Kennedy would consult the Tamil diary and confirm the precision of the translation, or the correspondence of what I had heard, with her recording of the details. At this stage, Josephine would not offer any new information or discuss any topic not already dealt with in the English version. Later, Josephine became much more open and informative, but I have reason to believe that she had an agenda of her own in revealing what she did to me (5.1).

In effect, Maryamma had authorized Josephine to provide me with a body of information carefully edited to disclose a public, exoteric account, while withholding a much richer and more voluminous private, esoteric version which appeared to run to several dozen manuscript pages. Enquiries in English must have been anticipated, and Maryamma's coming-of-age "eighteenth" birthday in December, 1991, was the occasion chosen to publish a simplified hagiographical document. It later became clear to me that without Maryamma's explicit direction, I might not have been introduced to Josephine at all, and might never have come to know of her historiographical project. I am certain I would have met Josephine in any case, but without Maryamma's explicit instruction to provide me with information, Josephine would have been even less forthright. Josephine's English typescript forms a skeleton chronology for my account of the *Amma* cult's history.³

Another person who might have been a key source of information was Angelamma. Just before leaving India in July, 1993, I called on Fr. Kulandairaj [a pseudonym] in Madras. He

mentioned that Angelamma had been in Vadiyakkadu on 17 June, and calling her a "very wonderful lady" asked whether I had met her. I replied in the negative and expressed my regret at not having been introduced to her as I had been to Josephine. Kulandairaj then opined that Maryamma must not have wanted us to meet, or she most certainly would have introduced us. As Angelamma was instrumental in moving Josephine to have Maryamma brought to Vadiyakkadu, as well as figuring in the "shining footprint" miracle, she would have been a most interesting source of further insight. Maryamma must have had good reasons for not wishing us to meet (cf 4.1.5.3).

3.1.2 Concern for Accurate Transmission

Before turning to a discussion of the construction of Maryamma's story through eyes other than those of the privileged visions, and versions, of Maryamma and Josephine, a note on the cult's concern for an accurate transmission is in order. Maryamma, with half a dozen listeners, was relating to me the story of her first visual encounter with *Amma* on 10 February, 1985 (Maryamma 1992.03.26). As she reached the point where she saw *Amma* from a distance, dressed in a white robes and blue veil, hanging out her washing, the point when she cried out, "*Amma, Amma!*", an older man, Camillus Perambaloth, who was listening intently, interjected for my edification, "Yes! She called, '*Amma, Amma*, you have washed the clothes!'" The other listeners, and Mary too, vehemently denied this gratuitous supplementary exclamation, leaving him to retire, chastened and abashed. This incident, which showed how the cult values detail, assured me that any account of Mary's life and miracles was likely to come to me from conventional sources in a single, consistent, authoritative version. Mary was explicit that Josephine could provide all the details, although Josephine's account emphasizes dates and details which Mary's either glides over or omits entirely, particularly of bleeding pictures and crosses. Irene's appearance, for example, is barely mentioned by

Mary, while Josephine, Irene's mother, relates the episode, and her deep emotional investment in it, in fine detail.

On the celebration of *Aiya's* first birthday, 13 November, 1991, *Amma* had blessed all present and promised additional blessings to those who would return to attend Mary's 18th birthday the next month. So on 14 December, 1991, just one day before I first heard of Maryamma, a special celebration took place in Vadiyakkadu to celebrate Maryamma's coming of age. There is nothing intrinsically odd in this, except that Mary turned twenty-one that day, not eighteen. Right from the outset, Mary's life is wrapped in obscure contradictions. According to Josephine's English account dated 18 December, 1991, Santi was born in 1973 at Orattur and her afflictions began just ten years later when she was in Seventh Standard at school (Josephine 1991.12.18). This detail is dubious even to a casual observer, for in order to have been in Seventh Standard at age ten, Santi would either have had to skip three school years out of six, or to have entered First Standard at the age of three.

3.1.3 Alternative Sources of Information: Contrary Views

Maryamma herself declined to say anything about her life before the beginning of her affliction in 1983, and revealed very little of her relationship with her parents, brushing both topics aside as unimportant. She responded to an enquiry about her infancy with a slow, gliding movement of her right hand, palm downward, as if smoothing over something, which ended in an abrupt, firm, downward chop, saying, "All that is over". The early period of her life was clearly not within the scope of permissible enquiry. Accordingly, to obtain a fuller picture, I sought out Santi's foster mother, Mrs. Ramamani Pakkirisami, with whom she lived from age two to age twelve at Kattur, near Tiruvarur. I also located her natural parents, S. Panjabakesan and Mrs. Kanakambujam, and her paternal uncle, B. Baskaran, at Orattur. As I could get little information apart from wonder stories directly from *Amma* cult sources about the removal of the breast tumour in

Tanjavur in 1989, I located Maryamma's maternal relatives, V. Sivasubramaniyan and his father N. Viraiyan, residents of the house where this miracle is said to have taken place.

In Tanjavur I also encountered people whose testimonies shed quite different light on the nature of my earlier material on Maryamma. These voices witnessed to solicitation of money from gullible visitors, falsified apparitions and miraculous phenomena (3.6.2; 5.2.5), skeptical professional medical assessment of the supposed surgery (3.7.2; 3.7.4), annoyed denial by the local Roman Catholic authorities (3.6.2), threats to Maryamma and her relatives by a gang of local youths (3.7.4), allusions to scandalous sexual episodes (3.7.4; 5.2.9), and allegations of theft and police involvement (3.7.4; 5.2.9). These issues figure in the unfolding of the testimonies of believers whose desire for full participation in the *Amma* cult is denied (3.4), of skeptical, disillusioned believers (3.6.1-5), and of one aggrieved, formerly enthusiastic, patron who lost his faith in Maryamma and her miracles, along with a good part of his personal reputation as a consequence of his sponsorship of her (5.2).

In order to understand critically what is going on in the *Amma* cult today, it was necessary to seek out such independent sources. The search led me to people whom Maryamma had so abruptly dismissed with that firm glide and chop of her hand. The struggle for coherence and religious ordering of life, to believe or not what Maryamma symbolizes, is as much evident in the testimonies of these sources as in those of the most loyal *Amma* cult adherents. The construction of a coherence satisfactory to some sources, however, is less reductive than that required to rationalize and maintain the canonical account of Maryamma's identity. While a fruitful ambivalence remains, religious claims are questioned and qualified in these accounts.

3.2 Kanakambujam's Story

I learned from sources in Tanjavur how to find Maryamma's parents who reside in the village of Orattur, where *Amma's* initial

apparitions and miracles took place (Viraiyan 1993.06.21). Heather and I visited the family at their home in Orattur and spoke about her early life. The unfortunate conditions of Santi's birth seem the best point of departure for an enquiry into her life.

3.2.1 Santi's Birth

Moaning and weeping, Kanakambujam, Maryamma's mother, told us what a traumatic crisis Santi's birth had been for her. The child was a shame to her, a failure, the third consecutive daughter in a society which prizes male offspring (Kanakambujam 1993.06.25).

"The rain was just pouring down. They were all worried that it was yet another girl," said Kanakambujam. "That is when Mary was born. They were all crying. At that time, my father was alive. 'Don't be worried. *Andavar's Amma* [the Lord's Mother] will give you a boy child. Don't worry.' He saw only Mary [ie. Santi]. He died before Madavan was born. This is Mary's brother," she said, indicating her youngest child, Madavan, who stood listening quietly to her story. Kanakambujam began to weep. "I prayed to *Amma*. I had only three girls. I went to *Amma*. I shouted, I cried to her. That is when he was born. Because I wanted to name him after her - 'Madavan', after *Mada*. I had offered a silver cradle and, for ten years I went to Velankanni and fed ten people. Before *Mada-amma* came to our house, this is the *varam* [gift] that she has given to us."

3.2.2 Santi is Taken Away

"She grew at Kattur. At the age of one and a half years, my brother took her there because, he said, 'You are very sad because of this girl.' They brought her up. She stayed there, with her *mama* [maternal uncle]. She grew up and was studying there. We were in Ponnappur, near Tanjavur. That is our *purvamana ur*, our ancient village. From there, we sold everything and came to my mother's house at Kattur.

"We were not happy, so we sold our land, left that place, and bought some land here. We are living here in Orattur for about

ten or twelve years. This is my *ammayi* [mother's father] house. Mary also came to stay here, and then she had many problems."

3.2.3 Santi's Affliction, Kanakambujam's Hopelessness,
and Miracles

"She was vomitting glass pieces and all that for one and a half years. The pain that I endured, I cannot tell you. In the middle of the night, we would have to carry her and run to the doctor. Glass pieces from her mouth, nails from her mouth. She would be whipped with a *satai* [whip] and she would be burned. We reached a point where we couldn't protect her at all, so I said to *Amma* ⁴, 'Take her away. We are not able to look after her.'

"Then *Amma*... *Mada-amma* came (See 5.2.7), and made that 'Satan' [in English] trouble go away. In the month when *Amma* appeared to Mary, there was thunder, lightning, and rain. *Amma* came to this house in *tai masam* and made that 'Satan' trouble go away. Then, *Amma* came and spoke to her. She would give her milk, give her *tirtham* [any holy drink]. She looked after Mary just as she looked after her dead son. Mary grew up here and worked so many wonders, we cannot tell you. People would bring *sitapalam* [custard apple]. People who don't have children would get children. Many people have written their requests and kept them here."

Kanakambujam had been severely stigmatized by giving birth to a third female child who, in terms of her internalized cultural values, ought to have been a boy. The failure she represented must have struck deep roots in Santi. Thus, *Amma's* tender mothering care for her, combing her hair with a golden comb and decorating it with flowers (Baskaran 1993.06.25), may be interpreted as an elaborate compensation for Santi's neglect by her natural mother. *Amma's* calling, "*Tambi!*", when she summons Maryamma may be seen as treating her as the son she was supposed to have been. I suggest that the trauma of rejection was at the core both of Santi's affliction and the patterning of her solution through *Amma*. Returning to her biological family at the age of twelve, Maryamma

would have found her younger brother, Madavan, doted on by both her parents as their only son, a role she ought to have filled, and now found occupied by someone else.

The theme of "the third daughter" has not, to my knowledge, been explored in the social scientific literature on South Asia and offers opportunities for future gender studies.

3.3 Ramamani's Story

Maryamma's early childhood is a time in her life of which Josephine, my main early source, had no personal experience. It is a period about which Maryamma appears to desire that no one come to know. Rather than accepting the authority of either of them concerning the years when Santi had been given up by her natal family, I prefer to follow the account of the foster mother who raised her. Mrs. Ramamani Pakkirisami resides in the village of Kattur, a few kilometers west and north of Tiruvarur. In an interview in her home on 7 July, 1993, Ramamani gave a precise and detailed account of Santi's early childhood which is related in the previous chapter (2.4; 2.4.1).

When Ramamani married Santi's maternal uncle, Pakkirisami in 1973, he and Vasantha, daughter of his elder sister, Padmamavati, had already been caring for Santi for six months (cf. note 26). Santi had been born when her family was living at Ponnapur, the family's ancestral village, before they moved to Kattur, and long before they settled in Orattur. Josephine's "authorized" account contradicts this testimony with regard to both Santi's date and place of birth (Josephine 1991.12.18).

If Maryamma's deferral to Josephine's authority may be taken at face value, Josephine's historical account is to be accepted as *Amma* cult orthodoxy. It appears that Maryamma wishes to project her first apparitional experience back upon herself as a girl of eleven, although according to the chronology offered by Ramamani, the event took place when she was fourteen. This suggests that pre-pubescent purity may be a prerequisite for the onset of *Amma's* visions. Such a rationale was not posed to me

explicitly by any of my sources, but the fact that the official account alters Santi's age at the time of the first apparitions must signify something important, but unspoken. Whether this way of framing the event was Maryamma's own idea, or was suggested by some unknown advisor is an open question. The possibility that Maryamma's sacred career is being managed by another, or others, is an unresolved issue which the reader should bear in mind throughout this study.

As Ramamani recalls Santi's childhood, she studied to Fifth Standard in Kattur before going with her birth family to Orattur in 1983. At Kattur she was quiet, not exceptional in any way, and showed no signs of affliction.

Then, at Orattur, after *Amma* came to her and she got her power, it was "like Velanganni the way people used to go and worship there, especially people from Vadiyakkadu". Baskaran, her father's younger brother, saw to it that every visitor was fed. While Ramamani credits Baskaran with this service, he himself credits Rajendiran and Santi's elder sister, Amarajoti, who did all the cooking and making of coffee (Baskaran 1993.06.25). Sedupati Raja, called Yobu by *Amma*, and his mother, Kamatchiyamma were among those who used to come to Orattur from Vadiyakkadu. Kamatchiyamma is Pakkirisami's "younger aunt", and Amarajoti, Mary's elder sister, is married to a cousin of Yobu, and also lives in Vadiyakkadu. (See genealogical chart in the Appendix.)

Ramamani says that Pakkirisami, who was not present for the interview, is angry with Maryamma. Although he brought her up, when she went away with Yobu to Vadiyakkadu, she neither consulted nor informed him.⁵ The hurtful manner in which Maryamma was abducted from her parental family home had been deceitfully contrived, Ramamani told me (4.1.5.3). "She was taken by Yobu's family to buy saris for someone's wedding," recalls Ramamani. "They said only Mary should come with them. Then they went off to Vadiyakkadu. She cheated us. We wanted Mary to be in Orattur, and that their home should become a shrine, since it was the place

where *Amma* appeared first and healed Mary." In order to get her back, both her parents and Baskaran went to Vadiyakkadu. Although she said no more about this meeting, Ramamani clearly indicated that it was not a pleasant visit (3.7.7.2). Subsequently Pakkirisami, hoping to mediate, also went to Vadiyakkadu in search of her, and Mary is alleged to have asked him, "Who are you?" Her foster father took this as an unanswerable insult. She refused to recognise him or any other relative.

Despite this personal difference, Ramamani is a believer. She was a witness to a gift of fruit by *Amma* in the early days (2.4.5), and visited Vadiyakkadu when Mary's legs were cut off (2.7.3). "People say it is all *mayavelai* [the work of illusion]", Ramamani says, regretting their lack of faith. She did not see Moses' resurrection, but was a witness to the breast surgery at Tanjavur (2.7.1), and vouches that no one but *Amma* and Mary were inside the room at the time (Ramamani 1993.07.07). For Ramamani, the tension between her personal belief in *Amma's* miracles and Mary's special role as *Amma's* mediator on one hand, and Mary's rejection of her family on the other, is grievous. Ramamani's family members are as unwelcome at Vadiyakkadu, as are Maryamma's natural parents.

3.4 The View from Orattur

The sense of loss, as Kanakambujam's distressing testimony expresses (3.2) is much stronger at Orattur, where the shrine of the healing spring was to have been (2.5.7), than it is in Kattur. Maryamma's parents' home is the site of nearly all the apparitional phenomena which preceded *Amma's* withdrawal and refusal to let herself be seen in her own form as the young woman dressed in blue and white.

Panjabakesan, his wife Kanakambujam, their daughter Amarajoti, son Madavan, Kanakambujam's elder sister, Padmamavati, and her daughter Vasantha (who cared for Santi as an infant, before Ramamani married Pakkirisami), as well as Baskaran, Panjabakesan's brother, and their father, were all in or about the

house during our interview, which took place on the morning of 25 June, 1993. Most of them listened to our conversation intermittently. Baskaran was a childhood playmate of Santi's elder sisters, Amarajoti and Piragalata. Although he is their father's younger brother, he is an age-peer and was always treated as such. *Amma* christened Baskaran "Francis" before the crisis which ruptured relations between this family and herself.

Arriving unannounced, Heather and I were greeted with warmth, curiosity, and eventually with breakfast. Baskaran immediately took charge of us. Perhaps this was his accustomed role, well-practised from the time when *Amma* used to draw crowds to their home. Panjabakesan maintained a courteous, stolid silence. His father remain sitting outside on the veranda, and took no part in the interview. Madavan listened with interest, while Kanakambujam's participation followed her own agenda of appealing to us emotionally, and eventually soliciting our help in resolving a family crisis.

The family presumed at the beginning that our interest in visiting their home was devotional. One foreigner, they said, had previously come for that purpose. Baskaran showed us the family's shrine room, in which Yobu's picture of the Immaculate Heart of Mary to which Santi had prayed still hung. This was the room in which she had secluded herself. Baskaran told how individuals and groups occasionally arrive by car, having come to know of Orattur through their faith in Maryamma, to see the place of the early miracles and apparitions, and the relics kept there.

One of these visitors was a priest who asked their permission to say Mass in the home. After celebrating two or three Masses, he asked, "If Mary comes, will you give her a place?" Baskaran could not recall the priests's name, but Fr. Kulandairaj spoke of having celebrated Mass at Orattur. "This is Mary's own place," they had told him. "*Amma* herself said that we should build an *alayam*. Whenever she comes, this place is hers" (Baskaran 1993.06.25).

As with Ramamani's, I found Baskaran's account of Santi's early life both more credible and more detailed than that offered within the circle of the *Amma* cult proper. Baskaran offered such details as how, when Santi was suffering her initial affliction, she used to run away in her sleep. To prevent this, he would tie her leg to one of his toes. Upon waking, he would find the rope cut, and the locked door of the house would have been opened, as though by itself. Santi would sometimes be found, Baskaran said, in the Hindu temple. The local temple is one to Angalamman, a fierce village deity, though I am not certain if this is the temple meant by Baskaran (cf. 5.2.2; 5.2.12).

3.4.1 How *Amma* Taught Christianity to a Hindu Family

Baskaran described how *Amma* taught at Orattur the correct relations between herself and *Andavar* [Jesus]. "*Amma*," he said, "does not step on the ground, though her robes scrape it. Even Maryamma has not seen *Amma*'s feet. It is not for her, but only for her son to set foot on the earth. To the question, 'Isn't *Andavar* greater than *Amma*?' she replied, 'Without the mother, there cannot be a son, but I don't mind it if you don't adore me. You must adore *Andavar*.' Then *Amma* gave these examples: 'If you want to milk a cow, you need a vessel to hold the milk. If not, it will all go to the ground. A fruit needs to have a peel. If anyone comes and asks, "Who is Mary?", give them these examples.'" *Amma* would recite *Revelation* 12: 1-9 to the family.⁶ Only later did someone tell them that this image is in the Christian Bible. Pentecostals came criticizing their devotion to *Amma* and tried to convert the family. "We don't want to change," they answered. "*Amma* has not asked us to hate *Andavar*, but asked us to pray to him. *Amma* is the one we know. We don't know your Christ" (Baskaran 1993.06.25).)

Santi would fast all through Lent, and would instruct the others not to eat fish or meat on those days. On *pudusi nyayiru* [Easter Sunday], Santi had the family and guests walk around the house, say fourteen prayers with beads, and sing songs.

Ordinarily, they would do the *siluvai padai* [Stations of the Cross] at fourteen different places in the large room of the house, getting up, saying the prayer, and then sitting down in a slightly different place to sing. Santi would not let them simply sit in just one place in order to do this. Santi appears to have been attempting to replicate Catholic practice as accurately as she could within the space available to her.

Baskaran told of the family's ignorance of Christianity before *Amma's* coming. When he was in school, children were given "something small, in a plastic cover, like a Bible". They never read these books though, just kept them. Other than this, they had no access to books. "It's only after *Amma* came, that we came to *vivaram* [maturity, knowledge of right and wrong]. Before that, we used to worship all the Hindu *samis*. Then *Amma* changed us step by step. Now we do not go to any Hindu *kovil*, and we don't eat what is offered to the *sami*, over which the [burning] *sambirani* [camphor] has been waved." Baskaran pointed to Madavan, Maryamma's younger brother: "This boy, does not eat it. He has even gotten baptised. He became a Christian." The other family members, however, had not sought baptism. (cf. 3.7.7.1)

It is difficult to know just how much exposure Santi may have had to Christian and Marian models and how her childhood experiences may have differed from Baskaran's and her siblings' experiences. We know that Pakkirisami took Santi with his family to Velanganni Shrine annually, so *Arokkiya Mada* at least must have been a thoroughly familiar symbol to her, though it was not in this form that Santi first saw *Amma*. Santi's relatives on every side are Hindus, or were until her own experiences of *Amma* brought her forcefully into their lives. During Santi's initial affliction, Kanakambujam and Panjabakesan took her to Velanganni, among other *alayams*, in search of healing.

Mada at Velanganni is popularly accredited as the one to whom the utterly hopeless should make their final appeal since, of all the gods and saints, she is the most compassionate. Thus,

Yobu's act of installing the Immaculate Heart picture in Panjabakesan's shrine may be interpreted as an act of desperation to help Santi when all other avenues had been exhausted. Her approach to the icon was not just incidental and its express purpose, of inducing or precipitating an ecstatic reaction in her which might break the affliction, had its desired effect.

3.4.2 Santi's Visit to Velanganni and Baskaran's Suspicions about the Miraculous Watch

Baskaran recounted in detail the story of a visit, made on *Amma's* instructions, to Velanganni Shrine on or about 12 March, 1985. The narrative is also told briefly by Maryamma and Josephine (Maryamma 1992.04.26). On the third day after her first vision, the family had bought a watch for Santi, and she was very pleased with it. One day the watch had been left in its box on the table and, while the family members were all doing chores, *Amma* took it away to Velanganni. This was when Santi alone was able to hear her. "You should wear it in Velanganni," *Amma* told her. So the family agreed to go, and saying, "Hey, we should see this," about a hundred villagers accompanied them. Seeing *Amma* in the sky accompanying their bus, Santi declared, "*Amma* is going ahead of us. *Amma* is going ahead of us!" None of the others could see anything.

At Velanganni, at five minutes past midnight, suddenly, the empty watch-box fell to the ground and the watch was found on Santi's wrist! Baskaran had retained the original receipt and checked the watch's serial number against it to find that it was indeed the same watch. Baskaran himself suspected that Santi had carried the watch-box with her, tucked in her *sari*-waist, and put it on herself, but she insisted it was done by *Amma*. Today, after all that has since happened, he regards the recovery of the watch as a miracle.

Baskaran's story contains no mention of a rose given by *Amma* nor of any condemnation of the Velanganni parish priest (2.4.8). Maryamma herself, in our second major interview,

significantly altered what she had said about Fr. Gabriel in our first interview. In the second version, Maryamma reported that the parish priest accepted *Amma's* gift-rose and said, "I will honour whoever gave you this rose." There was no allusion to the rose wilting as a sign of his moral qualities. Still, Fr. Gabriel refused to accompany them for the apparition. In comparison with Velanganni's charter stories concerning the Hindu and Catholic gentlemen who, in wonder and anticipation, accompanied the poor Milk and Buttermilk Boys to the places of apparition, the parish priest continues to appear in a poor light, and faithless. Was Santi attempting to replicate and rejuvenate the apparitional pattern of the founding stories - and at Velanganni itself? Had she succeeded as a seer, witnessed and validated by a sufficiently charismatic priest, Santi would, in 1985, have become to Velanganni the focus of adulation for thousands - rather like what Bernadette became to Lourdes - or so Maryamma might have hoped. If anything resembling this event occurred at all, it is evidence that Santi did have ambitions of being acknowledged as a Marian apparitional seer by the very priest who was in charge at the cynosure of India's Marian tradition.

Some people in the group begged Santi to ask *Amma* for her own *jabamalai*, the rosary she uses herself. The next midnight, the group of a hundred or so stood at the point where the Stations of the Cross begin. One young man saw a woman with a child in her arms, her head covered, standing at some distance on the processional way. "There! We can see it! The *sami* has come! Mary has come!" he shouted. "*Amma* is standing there."

"`*Amma* is standing there!' we joined in", said Baskaran, "and all of us ran. When we reached the place, there was nothing, no *uruvam* [form, meaning person, from Sanskrit *rupam*] at all. The woman had vanished.⁷ We went on to where the small statue is kept [at Our Lady's Tank]. Santi went up to it, stretched out her hands, and *Amma* put the *jabamalai* into her hands" (Baskaran 1993.06.25). In Maryamma's own account (2.4.8), a bright flash

occurred twice, and *Amma* did not appear to her in human-like form. Was this a result of to her displeasure that the parish priest had not obeyed her?

Then *Amma* said, "I'll take my daughter around and show her the sea, and bring her back". They were all frightened, but *Amma* insisted, and gave Santi a white dress. Her hair was in a *mudi* [bun-shaped knot]. She slipped behind the building where cool drinks are sold in the day, and when she came out two minutes later, her hair was in two neat braids and adorned with flowers. A policeman [probably a security guard] who was there came and fell at her feet, crying, "Forgive me; I could see nothing. To comb your hair neatly into plaits and adorn it with flowers would take a long time. I believe in you," and he followed us. Such was Baskaran's account of the three miracles which *Amma* did for them at Velanganni.

At nearly every stage of Maryamma's career, she is reported to be leaving, going off on her own or being taken away by others. She seems to have a need to escape from people and circumstances. Baskaran noted this point, and the theme recurs regularly. Here, she was impelled, by *Amma* or by her own whim, to leave her companions and go on a tour of Velanganni. Maryamma fled from her situation in Orattur at least twice, as well as from Tanjavur. After leaving the field, I heard how, in August, 1993, she had disappeared from a group of devotees in Madras who were told by *Amma* to go to Vadiyakkadu and await her there (Parameswary 1993.09.02). When I sought her myself in September, 1994, she had gone away to Madras for an indefinite period.

3.4.3 What Baskaran Learned about *Amma*'s Youth

by Her Own Testimony

Baskaran related the story of *Amma* and her mother, *Annamma* [St. Anne], as it had been told to them when Maryamma was still with them. "*Annamma* had been married in a *svayamvaram* [a girl's free choice of husband]. Later, when an angel came to tell Mary that Jesus was to be born in the world, she did not understand

that he was going to be born to her, and the angel had to repeat it. Then she said, 'Let God's will be done'. But Joseph misunderstood her pregnancy and sent her away. Then the angel appeared to him too: 'Think of her as your daughter. The child that is going to be born to her is Jesus, who is the Holy Spirit.' Then he took her back.

"Just as, in the world today they gossip, even in *Amma's* time all the people gossiped. So they decided to leave the village, and as they went, people stoned them from their verandahs. When it came time for her delivery, a holy man showed them a stable. If Jesus wanted to, he could have been born in a palace of gold or silver, but he was born on the hay. Then a comet appeared, and people from different places came to see him. The *raja* wondered where all the people were going. When they told him the saviour of the world is born, he wondered, 'Why don't I know about this? Who is that fellow?'

"Joseph was warned in a dream and when the soldiers came to look for Jesus, *Amma* and he were on their way with the child to another village. Some villagers were sowing wheat. *Amma* said to them, 'If anyone comes in search of us, tell them that you saw us pass by when you were sowing'. When the fugitives reached the far end of the field, the crop was already ripe, and thus their pursuers [thinking they must have passed by months earlier], were confused. Thus they escaped. This was the first miracle *Amma* performed. Then, when Jesus was six years old, he was lost...." Baskaran could remember no more.

3.4.4 Relics of a Sacred Past, and Evidence of a Particular Animosity

We were permitted to handle and take a video of the hair which Santi had cut off while in seclusion, the miraculous rosary which *Amma* had given her at Velanganni, the crucifix of which had been stolen by a policeman [again, probably a security guard]. Baskaran asked us to examine the rosary, explaining how *Amma* had replaced the stolen *siluvai dollar* [crucifix] with an identical

one and asking us to note that the beads were carved from the seeds of the olive tree, which does not grow in India. The beads were obviously cheap black moulded plastic - even the poorly trimmed seams were visible - and the reverse side of the crucifix bore the inscription "Roma", presumably its place of manufacture. He introduced us to Johnny, the Pomeranian dog which, as a pup, was Maryamma's constant companion during her seclusion. Baskaran permitted us to also take a video of a photo album which shows Santi with various family members, playing with a kitten, and in a blue and white *sari*, blessing worshippers kneeling before her in the shrine room of their house. One of the photographs had been torn into bits, then carefully pieced and taped back together, and reinserted in the album. This picture was one of Santi blessing a kneeling Yobu.

3.4.5 Suspicion of the *Undiyal*

It is customary at Indian shrines, large and small, to install an offering box or *undiyal* [*hundi*] so worshippers can deposit their cash gifts anonymously. Baskaran insists that at Orattur there was never any *hundi* and Santi accepted no contributions other than candles and flowers, though people grateful for dramatic healings brought tens of thousands of Rupees, as *Amma* had cautioned the family from the beginning. Thus were corrected, without any expectation of compensation, ailments from malfunctioning heart valves to *sevinai* - the magical implantation of a curse, usually in the form of some physical object like a thread or metal plate. Only after going to Vadiyakkadu, and her connection with Yobu, says Baskaran, has Maryamma begun collecting money. He calls Kamatchiyammal his *attai*, meaning "aunt" or "mother-in-law". It is through this relationship that Santi came to know Yobu, Rajendiran, and that side of their family.

3.4.6 Human Frailty, and Willingness to Suffer

It is to Baskaran that I owe my understanding of the conditions of Maryamma's seclusion (2.5.7). Josephine (1993.06.27)

describes in a very pejorative way how Baskaran forcibly removed her, but says nothing of what went on during the seclusion, apart from Maryamma's distress at Irene's death which occurred a month after the seclusion began. Maryamma herself (1992.03.26) tells only how she passed no wastes, and of *Amma's* promise to create a sacred grotto and healing stream which would emerge in her place of seclusion at its successful completion.

Baskaran says, about forcibly removing Mary from her seclusion, that the whole family had been disturbed by the strain of Maryamma's strange behaviour, especially the removal of her hair. Given all the earlier surprises, I suspect they were concerned that other, more fearsome transformations might yet take place in her if her seclusion were to run its full course. Although *Amma* told them that a few more days were required for her to work her miracle, they did not obey her. Today, he attributes this to the frailty of the human condition [*mandiya janmam*]. Whatever *Amma* had wanted, whatever the guests had needed, they had done without hesitation. Baskaran is regretful about the action he took, but there is little he can do about it now. "'It is your human weakness, but you have blocked me, and stopped me'," Baskaran quotes *Amma's* condemnation of the family. "'One day you will long for, and yearn to hear, my voice.'"

Baskaran insists he and Panjabakesan's family have no quarrel with Yobu or his family. They had helped a lot for *Amma's* sake, and suffered too. In whatever they did, they were only desiring that *Amma's* fame should spread, they and Rajendiran of Kalliyur. They would stay at Orattur, eating *kanji* [porridge made from *ragi*, a buckwheat-like grain and consumed by only the poorest people]. "If only we have *Amma*," they said, "that alone is enough. Her fame should spread." To emphasize the absense of any friction from their side, Baskaran went so far as to say that should Maryamma return to her proper place in Orattur and ask them to go away, they would go. *Amma* had predicted, said Baskaran, that Maryamma would be separated for a time from them. Because the

people at Vadiyakkadu had suffered so much, through Mary's legs being cut off and other things, they are not jealous that a child was given new life at their house, or that *Aiya* was given to them. Although there is no sorrow or jealousy or quarrel, "We are feeling badly," said Baskaran. "That is why we don't go." It was necessary for me to find out why, precisely, they were feeling so badly.

3.4.7 Family Strains, Outsiders' Visits, Notoriety

Baskaran then spoke of the close relationship between Mary and her second sister, Piragalata, and how they no longer saw each other. When Maryamma had been given a car by someone in the Persian Gulf, she came with the donors and talked with Piragalata, but she would not get out of the car nor enter their house. These people took a video of the house. Others, like the priest who came, would come on Maryamma's instructions to look at the house. A European had also come and asked questions. He had said he wanted to publish a book, and they hear from Vadiyakkadu that someone in France had published something about the miracles.⁸

3.4.8 Piragalata's Predicament, and A Request for Help

During our conversation with Baskaran, Maryamma's father remained silent, but her mother had gone out to the kitchen, returned, sat on the floor next to our chairs, and began to moan, mumbling indistinctly, "Oh, what to do? It's all over now. What have we done? So long since we saw her...." She then related the story of Santi's birth recorded above (3.2).

Kanakambujam was also distressed about a more recent incident than about the loss of her daughter's childhood or Maryamma's abandonment of Orattur and her family. Four days earlier, on June 21, Piragalata, Mary's elder sister, had been married to a man she did not like. She had thrown the whole family into crisis yesterday by saying that she so disliked her new husband she was not willing to live. Piragalata was threatening suicide, should she have to stay with him.

Amarajoti, Maryamma's elder sister who long ago married a cousin of Yobu, and now makes her home at Vadiyakkadu, had come with Kanakambujam's elder sister, Padmamavati, and her daughter, Vasantha, at 3:00 a.m. and spent the rest of the night comforting their mother and sister. All three were emotionally and physically exhausted when we arrived in Orattur.

"Mary's *Akka* [elder sister], another girl after me," said Amarajoti, "we got her married. The *mappillai* [bridegroom] seems okay, but she saw him and said, 'I don't like him at all,' and she didn't want to marry him. Among us, once the *muhurttam* [wedding date] has been fixed, the wedding will not be stopped. If we stop it, it'll become a big issue, we thought, and so, we got her married." Kanakambujam was weeping softly. "Now, after she's married, she says she does not wish to live with him. We are all... the whole family is very worried" (Amarajoti 1993.06.25).

"She wanted to marry a man who has a job", wailed Kanakambujam. "He does not have a job. It's a match brought by my son-in-law [that is, Amarajoti's husband], and so we could not stop the wedding (3.7.1, Note 17). 'You have got me married to someone I don't like. I don't want to live,' she's crying. All these people had gone yesterday to see her. I did not go. Ever since they came back and told me, I am very worried. I could not sleep at all. My daughter here, we were talking the whole night. We didn't sleep at all. We are so worried. *Amma* alone has to make her change her mind. We had gone to Velanganni also. Because I was so worried, I went and told *Amma* that I cannot bear it. 'I won't stay alive. I don't like him,' she says. We are very anxious about this *kalyanam* [marriage], so it has become a great *kolappam* [confusion] for all of us."

Maryamma's precipitate departure for Vadiyakkadu to live, unmarried, in the home of a bachelor and his widowed mother had put her whole family in disarray. An indicator of the family's difficulty in finding a good match for Piragalata, is the fact that she must have been in her mid-twenties at the time of her

marriage, which is quite late. In itself her brother-in-law's proposing the groom is not out of keeping with such marriage arrangements, and he was probably doing his best to compensate for the scandalous situation into which Maryamma had brought the family by her actions.⁹

Into this whirl of domestic confusion and regret, I was drawn in a flash. "Ask Mary to go and see Piragalata," Amarajoti enjoined me. "How will it be if you go and tell Mary to go and see her?" Everyone in the room showed interest at this suggestion. They must have thought I had influence enough with Maryamma to at least resolve this single aspect of their long-running family dispute. "Tell her that we are all very worried. We have already sent a message asking her to go... Umm..." Amarajoti hesitated, uncertain how to explain, "But, you see, we did not invite her for the wedding..."

"How it took place is this," Amarajoti continued, apologetically. "If we posted it, they said they would refuse to accept it. They said that my *Tambi*, Madavan, should go and deliver it in person. Earlier, there was a problem, so he refused to go. There is a boy from Pattukkottai, called Vincent, who goes to Vadiyakkadu. So, the card was given to him and he was asked to go and invite them. The day he went there, she had gone to Madras."

Heather and I had unknowingly insinuated ourselves into a family crisis. As many fieldworkers have discovered, helping out informants with small favours, sometimes even with matters of critical importance, is a common ethnographic experience. Our supposed influence with Maryamma was being solicited to help sort out this family impasse and, like it or not, we were returning to Vadiyakkadu.

3.4.9 Is There Any Rancour?

"In Tanjavur", I asked Kanakambujam, "some people told us that Mary's *Appa* and *Amma* are very angry with her (3.7.7.3). They don't speak to her. Is it true?"

"Nothing, nothing," answered Kanakambujam. "If she comes here, it is enough. Nothing else. What anger? I have no anger. Her *Appa* [father] is also not angry with her. All of us believe and have great *bhakti* for *Amma*. If we don't have faith... Our whole family has so much." With this denial of rancour and declaration of faith in the sacredness of their own child whom they had rejected, first because she had not been a boy and secondly because they had not believed in *Amma's* ways and promises strongly enough, Kanakambujam broke down, sobbing.

Panjabakesan came and went several times during our interview, saying nothing and showing no emotional signs by which to judge how our conversation with Baskaran and Kanakambujam might have affected him. He seemed to desire no part whatever in my research nor to communicate a perspective of his own on the events under discussion. The testimony of others suggests that he might not have agreed with the denial of anger, made on his behalf, by his wife (3.7.7.1; 5.2.10).

"What a mother!" Kanakambujam seemed immersed in her guilt. "She left her daughter. As a mother, I cannot bear it.... Will you be going to Vadiyakkadu now?" she asked. "We had no intention of going", I answered, "but now that you're saying all this, we're wondering..."

As we left the family shrine room through the back door of the house, Kanakambujam cautioned me to mind my head, in the low doorway. "*Talai*," she said. "Yah, mind your head", said Heather, and to Kanakambujam, "Your daughter's just like you." "Hmm... Hmm...", moaned the mother. "Gone, my daughter's gone..."

3.4.10 Place of the First Miracles, and Key to a Deeper Past

Baskaran, Panjabakesan and Madavan then showed us the very place in the back of their compound where *Amma* had first appeared, the neighbour's house where Santi had gone to get *kirai*, and where salt water had fallen from the sky for Santi's surrogate "sea-bath".

The family gathered for photographs on the front verandah as we were about to leave. We had learned of how Ramamani and Mr. Pakkirisami had reared Santi for ten years of her childhood and, as we parted with an undertaking to visit Maryamma on their behalf for the sake of Piragalata's life, they kindly gave us directions so that we might find Kattur.

3.4.11 A Reflection on the Importance of Sacred Space for Sacred Identity

What does the paucity of access within the cult to general knowledge about Maryamma mean for new devotees? It is certainly the easiest course of action simply to accept uncritically her own and Josephine's versions her life. Though Maryamma does not speak in public of her family or her past, she cannot discount, in what she treats as a canonically sufficient version, the place where she suffered her afflictions, where the miracles began, where *Amma's* apparitions occurred, and where *Amma* had promised that one day a shrine would come up. These are essential resources for the initial construction of Maryamma's personal sacred identity. They recall the importance of place in the Tamil Hindus' localized notion of deity¹⁰ and point to an inevitable source of tension which is currently played down in the cult.

When Josephine was coming to Orattur before the rejection of *Amma*, she had asked, "*Amma*, when you appeared at Lourdes, you were called '*Lurdu Mada*', and when you appeared at Fatima, you were called '*Patima Mada*'. What should we call you?" *Amma* answered, "You must call me '*Orattur Mada*'." In the beginning, it seems, *Amma* gave a lot of importance to Orattur. Later, when *Amma* began to speak at Vadiyakkadu, Josephine voiced a problem. "*Amma*, now what? Now that you are appearing here, what should we call you?" So she said... "Call me whatever you want" (Josephine 1993.06.27).

If we could imagine this situation from *Amma's* perspective - in the circumstances of her rejection at Orattur, the place she had chosen, and by which she wished to be known - this appears as

a rather jaded response to the tiresome concerns of a devotee about a situation which seems irrelevant at best, and intractable at worst. If *Amma*, as it were, once had plans which gave a central role to Orattur on the pattern of famous Marian pilgrimage shrines in which she is known primarily by her place of apparition, the *Amma* cult's "orthodox" line seems, for the present at least, to have abandoned them. It would not be surprising, however, if Orattur were one day reincorporated as a regular feature of *Amma* cult life, for it remains a potent symbolic resource.

3.5 Forced Solutions, New Contexts

It appears that when Santi was rejoined^{to} her natal family as an adolescent in their move from Kattur to Orattur, the move out of a nurturing home into one which had rejected her as an infant provided the stress and vulnerability into which some supernatural being, understood as a demon, had come, almost by invitation, to possess her. The family's second rejection of Maryamma by breaking her seclusion, after she had found a solution to this malevolent possession through *Amma*, resulted in the loss Maryamma's ability to walk. The family's attempt to control her, as a daughter in her society must be controlled,¹¹ was frustrated by Josephine's personal need for *Amma*'s presence in order to fulfil her promise to give a *katchi* [vision] of her deceased child, Irene. Under false pretenses, then, Josephine along with Yobu's family, and with the collusion of Angelamma, whose dreams initiated such action, took Mary away to Vadiyakkadu (Ramamani 1993.07.07; 4.1.5.3).

When Mary returned home to Orattur for Baskaran's wedding, her parents again attempted to reassert familial authority by constraining her from returning to Vadiyakkadu. This constraint, and the expedients necessary to overcome it, initiated a new phase in the *Amma* cult's development - the period of bodily or "surgical" miracles which had the effect of projecting Maryamma onto a larger, urban, sophisticated public with different ideas of holiness and the sacred. This move generated new kinds of interest

from a wider range of respondents, as well as new forms of suspicion and opposition.

For the first time a community of Christians became aware of Maryamma's activities and the claims of Hindus to a special, intimate relationship with the one whom they call "Our Lady". Believers in the universality of *Mada's* grace could have no objection to her healing a Hindu, for *Mada* is surely capable of doing whatever favour she chooses for anyone. *Mada's* impartiality is amply demonstrated in the "Museum of Offerings" at Velanganni, and her favour to Maryamma was simply one further proof. It was Maryamma's proprietary attitude toward Our Lady, word of her special baptism, and hints that money was being made by exploiting the Blessed Virgin's reputation, which offended these Catholics. In short order, Maryamma came to the attention of the Roman Catholic authorities. She had, after all, been brought to Tanjavur, the Diocesan seat, and her breast-surgery miracle had occurred within walking distance of the Cathedral and the Bishop's House.

3.6 Spreading the Net for Sources in Tanjavur

Once I had realized that Maryamma's breast surgery, and either the divine will for her, or the expedient of escaping from Orattur, had launched her onto a broader stage and into a new phase of her sacred career, my search for others who could give me a wider perspective than committed *Amma* cult members could provide took me, naturally, to Tanjavur. There I met Mr. Sebastian Raj, an active member of the Cathedral parish. He had seen Maryamma in person when she came to Tanjavur and had later been commissioned by Archbishop P. Arockiaswamy in February, 1992, informally to look into the phenomena reputed to be taking place at Vadiyakkadu, to learn what truth there might be in Maryamma's claims to apparitions, auditions, and healing miracles (Sebastian Raj 1993.06.21). Sebastian Raj introduced me to Mrs. Rosemary Packiam who was to take me directly - and quite unexpectedly - to

Maryamma's Tanjavur Hindu relatives' home, the site of *Amma's* first surgical miracle.

Sebastian Raj joined Heather and myself at Rosemary's home in Annanagar, Tanjavur, on the evening of 21 June, 1993 to discuss the circumstances of Maryamma's breast surgery miracle which occurred in the adjoining residential colony, Kamarajanagar, in April, 1989, at the home of her uncle, Mr. V. Sivasubramanian. We were joined by Mrs. Albudha Prakasam, a neighbour who, like Rosemary, had taken a direct devotional interest in the miracle. Sebastian Raj, Rosemary and Albudha shared their experiences and estimation of Maryamma's stay in Tanjavur at that time.

3.6.1 Divergent Testimony

"That girl you're asking about was here in Tanjavur, in Kamarajar Nagar," began Sebastian Raj. "There was a lot of confusion. We heard news that some surgery took place. Where, I do not exactly know. Some people wanted to beat her up and all that... accused her of falsehood and evicted her." A youth from the neighbourhood, Arokkiyadas, had led a gang of Catholic boys, which precipitated Maryamma's abrupt and premature departure from the city by challenging her *bona fides* and intimidating Sivasubramanian's family. Arokkiyadas joined our conversation for some time, and confirmed his role. "I don't know her native place, but she came from Orattur, for one week, and then went to Vadiyakkadu."

"Did any of you request intercession through this Mary?" I asked. All three laughed spontaneously, and Albudha said, "When I went, they did not allow us inside. They said that when *Mada* comes, no one can see her."¹² "I saw her," said Rosemary. "She was just lying there, in a bed. She was in Medical College for some time. She was operated in the breast. After the operation, she came here and stayed with a retired nurse, the one doing the dressing. They kept [the spoiled bandages] and said that *Mada* came and did the dressing. The nurse was present inside the room during the operation, so how can we believe that it was Our Lady?"

"That's what they said," interjected Sebastian Raj, "that the operation was done in the Medical College, but that the daily dressing was given by *Amma*."

This discordant testimony obliges us to question just what sort of agenda Maryamma and her supporters had presented to the public concerning the nature of *Amma's* interventions. The "official" account has it that the nurse, Josephine, administered an anaesthetic, then exited and closed the room, while *Amma* came and performed the surgery. Josephine then changed the dressings periodically. I see these possibilities:

1) These sources simply had not bothered to learn enough to understand what claims had actually been made;

2) Claims were initially made that *Amma* had done the surgery. Cult members then found that the Catholics took offense, and they resorted to the expedient of claiming that the surgery had been done in the local Medical College in order to deflect this criticism (3.7.2);

3) Cult members might never have intended to claim that *Amma* did the surgery itself, but had only changed the dressings after a conventional surgery, which would have been enough of a miracle and continuous with *Amma's* earlier services to Maryamma. Upon finding the public ready to believe that *Amma* had performed the surgery itself, cult members altered the presenting story.

The first possibility can be dismissed, as the richness of my sources' testimony, and their earnestness in attempting to reconstruct the events for me, belies any lack of interest or a desire to misconstrue the event, either at its occurrence, or at the time of our interview. While the third option is possible, and a way of permitting circumstance to ease the cult into more strident claims for *Amma*, none of my sources suggested this possibility. If, indeed, cult members ever claimed that the surgery was performed in a Tanjavur hospital, the second option is the most cogent one. If no such claim ever was made, a rather large number of Tanjavur sources shared the belief that Maryamma's

immediate associates had originated this story. This claim appears to have been an expedient retreat from an initial position which subsequently become too hazardous to maintain.

Albudha was emphatic. "Only dressing was being done by *Amma*. They told us the surgery was being done at the Medical College." Albudha was quite prepared to believe in *Amma's* coming to Maryamma to dress her wound. Rosemary was more skeptical and expressed herself bluntly on the matter. "They were bluffing us. When that nurse is there throughout, how can we say that *Mada* has done the dressing? She was inside and the sounds that could be heard were like a scissors' sound and a patient. They claimed that was *Mada* doing the dressing; so they said. Those people were fooling us and earning money, nothing else. They kept a box there. Our people found her a fraud and threatened her. Arokkiyadas is the one who asked them, 'When does Mada come? Show her to us. If not we'll lodge a police case.' When they were threatened like this they left the place the same night."

3.6.2 Collecting Money, and the Trouble Maryamma Got Into

"They kept an *undiyal* [donation box] and collected cash," Rosemary continued. "There's a girl down the street called Rani who said to her, 'Aren't you the girl from Tiruvarur, who built a hut,¹³ and blessed some water and gave it to people, and did some strange things?' Santi felt bad [*oru madiri ayiducchu*]. After that they became *oru madiri* [literally, "one kind"; became annoyed, suspicious]" (4.4.3, Chapter 4, note 7).

"Did she come to this house?" I asked. "No, no. She never came," answered Rosemary. "We got the news that she was there, and went to Kamarajanagar to meet her. I think she was there one week. She was staying in her relatives' house. They are still there, I think. That Santi and the nurse were afraid and went away. She left quite quickly."

"The parish priest, Fr. Sammanasu also visited her," said Rosemary, "to see if it was true. Now he's in Velanganni." "The

pangut tandai [parish priest] asked them," added Albudha, "'How do you say that *Mada* is doing all this!?' He shouted at them."

"She got into trouble here," said Sebastian Raj, "because she was making false propaganda, gathering crowds, praying over people who came. Generally people who pray over others may see apparitions and all, but this one said *Mada* was operating [on] her, taking a baby out of her stomach.¹⁴ Nothing they said was even slightly believable. There were no 'symptoms' [evidence] for us to believe, so some of our boys troubled her and she left."

Sebastian Raj's allegation that Maryamma had given birth, placed in her own mouth, sounds like an attempt at defamation. It is undermined by his summary comment that none of the cult members' claims were credible. It may be an expression of his loyalty to the Diocesan authorities, or evidence on their part of an effort to undermine Maryamma's moral reputation.

I expressed my desire to understand exactly where and when this miraculous surgery was supposed to have taken place, explaining that my task was to try to build up Maryamma's whole story, incident by incident, from the very beginning, from 1985 when it began at Orattur. "No, no," said Rosemary. "First she was in Tiruvarur, on the way to Velanganni, and then near Nidamangalam, Nagapattinam District." This was my first clue to Maryamma's origins, which led to locating Orattur, her parents' home, near Nidamangalam, and Kattur where she spent her early childhood, near Tiruvarur.

"In her village, these people had caused a lot of trouble," said Sebastian Raj. "That's why she left her own country. Here also they have given a lot of trouble, so they have gone and settled in Vadiyakkadu."

3.6.3 Maryamma Holds Court in Tanjavur

"She would be lying down there, saying anything and everything," Rosemary continued her description of Maryamma's stay in Tanjavur. "Everyone went and bowed before her. Childless couples would go with their requests. She would listen and say,

'Your request will be granted,' and give them some jasmine flowers." "She would give *mallikai pu* [jasmine flowers] and *draksha palam* [grapes]," offered Arokkiyadas, "saying these were brought by *Mada* in the night."

"That girl [Maryamma] only said this," said Rosemary, "not the others. When they claimed that *Mada* was doing the dressing, it seems these boys went there and said, 'We we want to see *Mada* doing the dressing'. 'You cannot see all that,' they told the boys. 'It takes place in her room, and she has to be there alone.'"

Arokkiyadas said, "They were there for one week. There was a girl who was said to have been healed by *Mada*, but none of us were allowed to see *Amma* dressing her. The nurse, was present throughout. We knew that she was doing the dressing and they were bluffing us. Daily that girl would say what she heard from *Mada*. People bowed down before her. Childless couples would go, and she would relay their requests."

I asked Arokkiyadas why there had been a need to threaten Maryamma. "They kept an *undiyal*," he said. "They were collecting money. When I went, they promised, 'Yes, you can speak to her.' Later, they said, 'She's in retreat because it is Lent, so she won't come.' At night my friends and I went and said, 'This is all falsehood'. We threatened her because we couldn't believe what she said - that she was healed, that *Mada* would speak to her through the night, and this and that. We did not think that she heard anything. That is why we threatened her and chased her away."

I asked if any in the group knew whether Maryamma was married. "She didn't look married when she was here," said Sebastian Raj. "She was fat and dark, and wasn't wearing a *tali* [wedding necklace] or any chain. When we went to Vadiyakkadu also, it appeared that she did not have anyone." The reference to her figure and complexion was meant to suggest the unlikelihood of Maryamma's being married.

"They told us about some child," Sebastian Raj continued. "They buried his bones, and then later *Mada* came and asked them to dig up the grave and find him. Even that child, the girl said, was not hers, but somebody else's. I only saw a small boy." In February, 1992, Sebastian Raj and two priests had gone to Vadiyakkadu and seen *Aiya*, but were given no indication of his identity or importance. "When we asked to see that Moses, they said he is in Tirutturaippundi with his parents."

"Since we didn't see everything from the beginning," interjected Rosemary, "we can't say anything about that, but they seem to have taken a video." "I heard that they have taken everything by video camera," joined in Sebastian Raj, "but when I went to Vadiyakkadu they would not show us the tape, saying it was in some other place."

3.6.4 Sebastian Raj Is Sent to Vadiyakkadu

"At that time, they said that *Mada* was used to appearing every three days. I saw her [Maryamma] when she was here. That's why I was sent by the Bishop to Vadiyakkadu, with Fr. Savarimuttu of the Jesuit fathers, and Fr. Kennedy, previously an assistant in the Cathedral. We three went there last year in Lent, around the twelfth or thirteenth of February, [1992] I think, to confirm if it is the same lady or not. We didn't show that we're priest or layman, nothing. 'We just want to see you and what is going on here,' we told her. 'If you want to listen, you can come and stay the night,' they said. 'Everyone can listen.' It was four or five o'clock, so we said, 'We'll stay the night.'

"When we said that, they changed, and said, 'This is Lent. *Mada* won't come or speak. She is praying and fasting.' See the fun! Does *Mada* have to fast? Won't she speak during Lent? Immediately they came up with this...

"There was a priest in Vadiyakkadu," continued Sebastian Raj. "He looked like, maybe, he was a seminarian. He said, 'I saw, and I heard *Mada* speak. I spoke with her. She answered whatever we asked.' This man was tall and dark and lean. [Fr. Peter (pseud.),

perhaps? (See 4.2.1)] I think he's there permanently. He said, 'I'm from Cuddapah Diocese. I would like to talk with your diocese's bishop, but he does not believe.' He's a *Telungu* father, but he speaks Tamil also. From Tanjavur, Cuddapah is not the nearest place. It's at the border of Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh, but whenever someone goes, he's always there. Just last week, somebody went and told me that the Cuddapah father is there. Some nuns, I heard, went yesterday morning from Trichy, and Auxilium sisters from Tanjavur."

Sebastian Raj described the *Aruḷ Arai* at Vadiyakkadu. "We went into the shrine room. One table is there, also some pictures. They showed the box the boy came out of and the grave also." Upon prompting, Sebastian Raj confirmed the presence of an overturned cup on the floor, but he neither asked, nor was he told, its purpose. "Now, they are not taking any money. When we asked that lady if they needed any help, she said, 'No, we don't want money, only that the priests and Bishop should believe. The Bishop should come and see here.' They want only publicity now. They didn't ask any money from us."

"They don't appear to ask money from anyone", I said, "but they must be getting money from somewhere." "Yes," said Sebastian Raj, "somebody is helping them."

"Did you see the photos of Maryamma's leg amputation which are kept in an album in the shrine room?", I asked. "No, no, nothing like that." Aside, to Rosemary, Sebastian Raj said, "The legs were supposed to have been cut." "It's quite shocking," I continued, to Rosemary. "You see her lying on the cement concrete floor. Her legs are gone from the knees down. On both sides, there is raw meat, and blood is spilled everywhere. But now she has her legs, so...." "She's alright now," Sebastian Raj confirmed.

"We came back and informed the Bishop. 'Nothing is happening, My Lord'," Sebastian Raj quoted himself. "'Something is going on, but we saw no evidence.' We cautioned the Bishop to not go there. 'I want only to see whether there is anything in it.' He

said to us, 'Whatever may be, I have to answer to my superiors, so I want to see that place.' The next day, the fourteenth, the Bishop also went to them" (2.9.6.).

3.6.5 The Work of Fr. Kulandairaj

"Their publicity is being done by Jesuit Fr. Kulandairaj," Rosemary continued. "He's the one who told everyone who attended the Poonamalli meeting. In all those places he tells them that she was healed like this, by Mada, and that she was given a child to look after. He tells that the parish priest refused to baptise the child, and that he is the one who baptised the child."^{15, 16}

"The only publicity they have got is by the Jesuit fathers," added Sebastian Raj. "Two fathers are there - Fr. Arokkiyasami and some Kulandairaj, but he was not involved when she was here in Tanjavur. He started to go there, to Vadiyakkadu. Now, whichever meeting Fr. Kulandairaj attends, he tells all the people there."

"That Kulandairaj," said Rosemary, "He only baptised that baby." "How", I asked, "did you learn that he baptised the baby?" "They told us," said Sebastian Raj.

3.6.6 We Go for a Walk with Rosemary

Standing up to signal the end of the interview, Rosemary said, "About her we didn't hear anything recently." Then she invited us to come for a walk. She had something she wanted to show us. Heather and I had no idea where she might be taking us, and were utterly astonished when we arrived at her destination.

A five-minute walk took us into the neighbouring housing colony, Kamarajanagar. Coming to the gate of a house nearly at the end of the lane, Rosemary opened it and ushered us inside. We were met at the veranda by an elderly man who, to our astonishment, was Maryamma's maternal grand-uncle, and the house we entered was the very one in which the miraculous breast surgery had taken place. Sebastian Raj had said he did not know exactly where this was done, and Rosemary had wanted to surprise us. It was not the sort of preparation I prefer for an interview.

3.7 Meeting Viraiyan's Family

In a few moments, the whole family surrounded us on the verandah, and we were asked to sit. A chair was also drawn up for our elderly host, Mr. N. Viraiyan. Only after being seated, were we able to explain our unintended presence and unprepared purpose. In the ensuing conversation our guide, Rosemary, tended initially to interject tangential questions, to satisfy her own curiosity under the protective umbrella of my research. Heather took charge of the situation early by insisting that she be allowed to ask the questions in an orderly way. The interview was conducted entirely in Tamil and recorded by dictaphone.

3.7.1 When Mary Was Young

Viraiyan is the brother of Maryamma's maternal grandmother, Ayiraja. His family is one of the "Chosen Families" through his elder son, Sivasubramaniam, one of Maryamma's favourite *mamas*, or maternal uncles.¹⁷ Viraiyan began by telling how, at Orattur, Santi would be bitten by snakes and scorpions, and how her food would turn to *malam*, shit. Heather asked Viraiyan if he had seen this himself.

"No, I only heard it," said Viraiyan. "But everybody saw it. It really happened. She kept running away. One day she was running away from home through a village near Orattur called Ammapettai and a lady who knows our family asked her, 'Why are you running away?' She just kept running.

"After *Amma* came to her, all kinds of people came to Orattur and many things were done. These are not matters for publicity, but there are many things that I know. If you wish to meet her and know more, she's in a village near Madukkur."

Viraiyan told how, when the family would not let Maryamma go, he brought her from Orattur to Tanjavur even after a local doctor had said there was no urgency. Nevertheless, he had gone, prayed with her, and brought her by bus to his own house (Cf. 2.6.3; 4.1.5.3). Mary's mother[!], Yobu, and "that lady from Pabanasam" [Josephine], Viraiyan said, had come too. He added,

"About this girl, you cannot say.¹⁸ We do whatever *Amma* asks us to."

3.7.2 Witnesses to Mary's Breast Surgery

Immediately after arriving in his house, Mary went into a bedroom and announced that *Amma* had come.¹⁹ "*Amma* asked for a bowl," said Viraiyan. "Water was heard pouring from Mary's hand. She pushed the bowl out through the door. 'Take this water,' said *Amma*, 'and give it to everyone. Keep the remainder in a bottle and use it for everything.' Then, saying, '*Poyttu varen* [literally, 'having gone, I come', the common Tamil equivalent of 'Good-bye']', she left."

"People may think we are telling lies," said Viraiyan. "How can we deny what we have seen with our own eyes? We saw the operation. All of us were present. There was a crowd here - all our relatives, people we know, and people who were going to Orattur. *Amma* had said, 'I am going to do something. Call everyone.' For us this was the first time, but people from all the places *Amma* had visited also came. Her mother and Nurse-amma [Josephine] also came. She should not be called Santi. She should be called Mary. 'That is the name I have given her, and everyone should call her Maryamma, *Amma* has said."

"The doctor said that there is a growth and it has to be operated," Viraiyan continued. "This girl would be in the room. Suddenly, there would be a sound, '*Tambi*'. As soon as the sound was heard, she would close the door. Whatever she said, we could hear and reply to her. If we said something, she would reply. For example, if we said, '*Poyttu varen* [I am going out]', she would say, 'Okay, *poyttu vanga* [Come again]'. We asked for the usual things, 'Bless all of us. Keep us happy.' *Amma* said, 'Yes, I'll bless you.'"

"Was this operation done by a doctor or by *Mada*?" Heather asked. "That is what I'm telling you. Then *Amma* said, 'I'm going to perform the operation on my girl. You don't need to go to the doctor.' We said, 'Okay.' But my son was about to go and fetch the

doctor when suddenly, *Amma* came. My son objected, 'No, I'll go and bring an autorickshaw.' But I said, '*Amma* has already come.'

"*Amma* performed the operation," Viraiyan continued. "She cut the growth, took it out, and left. When we opened the door, Mary's wound had been dressed. She was unconscious and wearing different clothing. She did not know anything, as though she was given this...", Viraiyan struggled for the English word... "'anaesthesia'. So I said, 'What is this, Ma? Where did this clothing come from?' '*Amma* gave it to me,' she said."

Heather inquired, "Who else was in the room?" "Only the two of them. My granddaughter [ie., grand-niece] who was healed and *Amma* only were there. *Amma* means *Velanganni Mada*. All of us were right outside the room. None of us could see anything. After that, when the operation was being performed, *Amma* asked us for a plate. She did the operation and removed three or four tumours and placed them on the plate. It was covered with blood. Then she said, 'I have done the dressing. It should not be opened for three days. Look after her carefully.' Then she went away. A bottle of blood was hanging there, and we saw with our own eyes that the operation was performed, and that is why we believe. Yes... We believe that, yes, there is a *sami* [god]. That is all. Nothing else.

"On the second day after the operation, Mary was wearing a dress with a zip[per].²⁰ '*Amma*,' I myself asked, 'where do you go and buy these things?' 'I go in disguise, so that no one can recognize me.'

"Did you personally see *Amma*?" Heather enquired. "No one can see her," Viraiyan said. "The door is closed. You can't go inside. You have to stay outside and listen. Our girl was inside, but she replied to whatever questions we asked. On the third day, she came and did the dressing."

Heather asked Chandrasegaran, Viraiyan's younger adult son, who was sitting on the floor, listening with interest, "Did you hear her speak?" "Yes, I did", Chandrasegaran answered. "I

heard her when she first spoke. Then I stayed on the terrace. I didn't want to come. Later, they shouted out to me to come and see what was happening. When I came down, I heard her voice, too."

Viraiyan told how many people came to see the miracle. A doctor came from the Tanjavur Medical College Hospital, accused them of secretly using the services of a surgeon, of telling lies and fooling people. Viraiyan challenged him to show who had done the surgery, if it was not *Amma*. "Some other doctors came, saw, and were astonished."

This testimony is consistent with the hypothesis that the story of Maryamma's surgery being done in the Medical College was made up later, to deflect criticism (3.6.1). Such suspicion and hostility coming from a medical professional suggests that the results of the surgery were inspected and appeared to have been competently performed. It seemed, true to Viraiyan's challenge, however, that no doctor could be named who had performed the surgery.

3.7.3 Josephine Thomas' Role in the Surgery

Josephine Thomas is deeply implicated in whatever actually took place in this house in April, 1989. Wanting to know how familiar the family was with her, Heather asked, "Did anyone come from Pabanasam?" "One nurse had come," Viraiyan continued. "She'd stay some days and be gone some days. 'Look after her carefully until I come,' she said. 'Don't treat her carelessly.' Later, when there was trouble, she took Mary in the car with my son [Sivasubramanian] to Pabanasam." "Is that Nurse-*amma* a Christian?" "I don't know what religion she follows," answered Viraiyan. Before preceeding further, an account of the breast surgery miracle from Josephine's perspective is in order. The following account was collected six days later, at her home in Pabanasam.

3.7.3.1 Josephine's Version of *Amma's* Breast Surgery

Josephine's figuring of her personal role in *Amma's* breast surgery, may be seen as idiosyncratic, typifying her own distinctive approach to relations with the supernatural (Josephine

1993.06.27). Josephine began her account with the time she and Yobu removed Maryamma from her parents' custody to Vadiyakkadu on 29 November, 1988, treating Maryamma's presence there as a *fait accompli*. She made no mention of the subsequent family crisis at Baskaran's wedding on 30 March, 1989, which occasioned Maryamma's departure for Tanjavur. Josephine passed, instead, directly to her rationale for the breast surgery.

"In Vadiyakkadu, even though she ceased to appear to Mary," said Josephine, "*Amma* began to speak. 'This thing needs surgery,' *Amma* said. 'Don't worry. I will perform the surgery personally in this uncle's house in Tanjavur. Go there' So Yobu brought her to Tanjavur." This does not tally with Viraiyan's account of how he, himself, brought her to his home for the surgery (3.7.1).

"On that day, in my bag," said Josephine, "I had a syringe, and one ampule of anaesthesia [sic, anaesthetic]." In Viraiyan's house, said Josephine, Kennedy, her son, and Maryamma, were sitting closely together and talking. This proximity, this intimacy of her son and herself with Maryamma seemed to be very important to Josephine. "As they were talking, suddenly Kennedy said, 'Hey, what is this?' There were two more ampules lying between them. *Amma* had brought two more ampules of anaesthesia."

At the time she was to perform the surgery, *Amma* asked all but Josephine to leave the room, leaving her and Maryamma alone. "*Amma* said to me, 'Take out that syringe and ampule of anaesthesia, and give it to Mary.' I gave her the injection. Then I put the syringe back in its box, left it there, and came out of the room. After that, *Amma* performed the surgery."

As Josephine described the experiences of the witnesses to this event, everybody could hear the bandages being torn open, the instruments being used and put down. When the operation was over and *Amma* had left, they opened the door and found that Maryamma was dressed very neatly in a nightgown different from what she wore when she went in. It was a red gown with a front opening and

the dressings were visible on her chest. She was in great pain. Of all the instruments *Amma* had used, only one brand new pair of scissors and a bottle... an empty bottle of blood, remained. Apparently *Amma* had given Mary blood.

Josephine showed us *Amma's* scissors, some blood-stained bandages, a bit of cotton, a small piece of brown paper, apparently a wrapper for surgical cotton. She indicated a brownish smudge on this paper. "See, her blood... her hand was blood-stained. She pulled the cotton, and see how it touched the brown paper?" She placed her own thumb on the mark to show its perfect fit. "That's the blood-stained thumb of Our Lady. Now it's disappearing, for so many people... uh?", implying that so many people had touched the stain, had honoured this relic, that it was fading. *Amma's* refuse is now treated by Josephine as sacred relics. In Vadiyakkadu, also, I was shown similar relics of bloodied cotton kept in the wall cabinet of the *Arul Arai*.

It immediately became obvious to Josephine that *Amma* had used her syringe, as she found the box open and the syringe missing. The next time *Amma* spoke, Josephine asked, "*Amma*, you have given me a great honour by using my syringe. After all, you brought all the [other] instruments. You could very well have brought your own syringe, but you honoured mine with your touch. Thank you for that. But now you've taken away the syringe and I would like to keep it, as a treasure, because it's a syringe that you have used." However, *Amma* responded, "I need it for some more time. I must keep it with me. I'll return it to you some day." Each day *Amma* would come and talk to Mary, and redress her wound. She did this twice in Viraiyan's house. "Then *Amma* instructed me to bring Mary and keep her in my house." Josephine had nothing at all to say about a gang of Catholic boys, in fear of which Maryamma seems to have fled Tanjavur with her.

According to Josephine, *Amma* both performed the surgery and changed the dressings until they had left Tanjavur for Pabanasam where Maryamma stayed with her for nine days. In our

interview, Josephine said first, "I did the dressing." Then, abruptly, she reversed this, saying, "No, no. I didn't do the dressing. *Amma* did the dressing. Even here, in my house also, *Amma* came and she did the dressing. Then, later," she said, "Mary went back to Vadiyakkadu when she was healed."

3.7.3.2 Mr. Thomas Learns Not to Doubt Miracles

Thomas, Josephine's husband, did not believe in the claims about a miraculous operation. He was not pleased with Maryamma coming and staying in their house and would scoff at all of them, which Josephine resented. "After all," she said, "Mary was our guest. How could he not even talk to her?" He resented his home becoming open to the public and would sit with "a very funny face" as people streamed in to see Maryamma. "One day I was going to work," said Josephine, "and I said to my picture of *Sagaya Mada* [Our Lady of Perpetual Help], '*Amma*, this husband of mine doesn't believe. Will you perform some miracle so that he'll believe? Huh? Can you do it?' When I came home in the evening, there was a lot of noise and confusion. From the five wounds of Jesus... the picture of Jesus, blood was coming." Seeing this, Thomas, a Catholic, became terrified and so came to believe in *Amma's* miracles.

Josephine showed us this relic, a plastic laser picture about twenty-five by forty centimeters, which depicted the crucified Christ from one angle and the risen Christ from another. The way the blood was smudged on the laser grooves did not resemble a trickle of blood such as we found to have appeared on other *Amma* cult objects, like the statue of the Virgin and Child at Vadiyakkadu which bled on 17 May, 1993 (Lobo 1993.06.17). Maryamma had stayed home when Josephine went to work. Would it be disingenuous to ask if this was the sort of use for which *Amma* had need of her missing syringe?

Returning, now, to our earlier interview at Tanjavur, Mr. Viraiyan knew surprisingly little about Josephine Thomas, although both had belonged to "Chosen Families" for several years. This

surprised me since, beyond merely collaborating to bring Maryamma to Tanjavur, he had accommodated the very public project of *Amma's* surgery. Both events involved Josephine intimately. Unlike Thomas, Viraiyan seems not to have objected to his home being turned into a public thoroughfare, at least until some of that public turned hostile.

3.7.4 Mary is Accused of Scandal, Which Reaches the Papers

Viraiyan and his family made no suggestion that Maryamma might have been pregnant when she arrived in their house, nor that she was delivered of a child while there, as alleged by Sebastian Raju in his version of the story. This topic was far too sensitive a matter for us, arriving unannounced, to raise on our first visit. Sebastian Raju had described Maryamma as plump, which is still the case. It is quite possible for a plump woman to conceal a pregnancy under the guise of obesity. Maryamma certainly could have done so. Had Josephine actually assisted at the birth of *Aiya*? Was this the chief reason Maryamma's family had insisted she stay in Orattur after Baskaran's wedding - to avoid shame, and possible injury to the child? Might their purpose have been to quietly dispose of the child?²¹

Viraiyan told how his family would gladly have kept Mary for her convalescence, but for the threats. "These boys," said Viraiyan, "were [Christians]. Because Hindus were being healed, about twenty of them came asking, 'Are tokens being given here?'"²² The house was filled with a crowd of people. We couldn't say anything. The crowds just kept coming and going. What a crowd it was! Now these are boys who normally go around beating people for nothing.

"Perhaps they were jealous that Velanganni Mada was coming to heal in a Hindu house. We were scared. We didn't want to be beaten up. We would go out and a boy would taunt us, 'Oh, oh! Has Mada come? Has Mada come? Have you earned a lot keeping Mada?' We didn't say anything. If we reacted, it would end in a physical fight. We are respectable people. These boys could not believe. We

saw it with our own eyes, and so we believe. They said for safety our girl should be taken away, and I agreed.

"One morning after Mary left, I was standing in front of our house. Suddenly someone was taking a photo of me. They disgraced us by saying in the *Junior Post* [a popular Tamil weekly magazine] that we got Rs.15,000 from all the people who came here, when we had spent our money for these visitors. My elder son wanted to write a reply. You should not dignify such things with a reply. Anyway, he wrote. *Amma* may be angry if we say that we have actually spent money. I'll tell you correctly and openly. The last thing *Amma* said to us was this: 'You should not say anything. If people come and put it in the papers, it's all right, but don't you put anything in the papers.' People lie like this, and put in the paper that we are telling lies. How can we deny what we have seen with our own eyes? We saw the operation. When I wake up and go to sleep, I think of *Amma*. Will all this be put in the papers when you go?"

We assured Viraiyan that our work has nothing to do with the popular press, and that he had no need to fear any indiscretion from us.

3.7.5 Viraiyan's Implicit Faith in Amma

"When she was here, did anyone experience healing?, we asked. "No...", said Viraiyan, implying that had there been enough time, healings might have taken place. Viraiyan added that he himself no longer goes to doctors, having faith that *Amma* will look after his health. He also keeps a picture of her.

"In Orattur all kinds of people came," Viraiyan answered. "Many things were done. I'll heal you, I'll heal you, Mary said, but sometimes she was not able to heal. In two cases, one was healed, and one was not. Some of them gave up."

3.7.6 A Priest Comes to Visit

Viraiyan told how a Catholic priest had come from Vadiyakkadu searching for the place of the breast surgery miracle: "A priest came here and asked to see the room in which the

operation was performed. He knelt and prayed for half an hour. Then he called me and said, 'Definitely a healing has taken place here. Do not tell all this outside.'" I immediately recognized this caution is the trademark of Fr. Kulandairaj. Viraiyan affirmed that he was the visitor.²³

3.7.7 All Viraiyan Wants of Maryamma is Family Peace

Viraiyan related the story of Moses' resurrection at Vadiyakkadu, describing Rajendiran's initial distress at losing their child. "Like a madman he went on, 'What is the use of all my property? I have only daughters.' Then *Amma* showed the way. Many days after the burial, they brought [the child's decayed body] and buried it at Mary's home. *Amma* gave instructions, so they came, and poured water on the grave. Then they called all the people..."

"... at night," interjected Chandrasegaran in a cutting, sarcastic tone of voice. He had been watching us intently since we arrived, from his place standing behind his father's chair. Chandrasegaran had been showing a controlled anger throughout the discussion, disconcerting his father. "Have you been there?" Rosemary interjected, quizzing Chandrasegaran. The interview was beginning to unravel. "I did not go there. I have heard," Chandrasegaran answered.

"Hey you!" snapped Viraiyan angrily at his son. Whether this was primarily the result of being neglected in the conversation, or of annoyance at Chandrasegaran's tone of doubt was not clear. "It is the truth, isn't it? That child is there even today, and *Amma* has given another child to bring up. The foster child given by *Amma* is also there."

"Are there two children?" asked Rosemary. "No, no, only one child," volunteered Chandrasegaran. At this, Viraiyan and one of the women of the family protested. "Why, what do you know? The child given by *Amma* is with Mary. The dead child which was taken out, and given back, is with his parents."

It was a good time to change the subject. We asked about the video coverage. Chandrasegaran thought it was done by "Meghala Video", but was not sure.

3.7.7.1 A Lurking Enmity

We had heard that there was a quarrel between Maryamma and Yobu on one side and her family on the other (3.4.4). What, we asked, is this quarrel about? Viraiyan was reluctant to speak. He was struggling with the question of loyalty to caste-fellows and open discussion of such intra-familial issues made him uncomfortable, but Chandrasegaran prompted him to tell us more. "What is there to hide? Tell them, Dad!" There was clearly something he did not want Viraiyan to keep from us. "I simply got angry, that's all," dissembled Viraiyan. "What need is there to talk about it? They may put it in the papers."

"That won't happen," answered Chandrasegaran. "They are doing research. You should tell them. It is *kashtam* [difficult] for her mother," concluded Viraiyan. "We all want her to continue in Orattur", and would say no more about the matter. He was clearly unwilling to reveal anything which might embarrass his niece, Kanakambujam, or her family, and was still unconvinced that we could be trusted not to take what he told us directly to the gutter press.

3.7.7.2 Yobu Lodges a Complaint with the Police

Viraiyan's elder son Sivasubramanian, who lives in the same house, was absent this evening. A few days later he told us about the differences between Yobu and Maryamma's family which were so clear when we visited them in Orattur: "One morning three years ago, Mary's father came to me for help to bring her from Vadiyakkadu, but I could not go with him. He went alone and quarrelled with Mary. *Mada* spoke: 'Mary should not go back. Yobu, take appropriate action.' Yobu manhandled Santi's father. Then he registered a police complaint that they were of age, living as husband and wife, and her parents should not harrass her.

"Mary is more than eighteen and so is Yobu. So I could do nothing about the police complaint. Later we asked Yobu to give it in writing. So an agreement was made..." "Has there been a marriage?", I asked. "No. Yobu has said that there was a marriage ceremony, so now, he is 'married' to Maryamma and she has no relations with her parents" (Sivasubramanian 1993.06.27).

This second interview at Viraiyan's home clarified issues which remained obscure after the initial interview, to which we now return.

3.7.7.3 Family Fracture and Polarization

Chandrasegaran continued for Viraiyan, explaining the family's problem with Maryamma and Yobu:

"We are upset because she is not in her own home. She has gone to Vadiyakkadu, stayed a long time, and is refusing to come back. This refusal is wrong. That is all we are saying. Her parents said to Yobu to let her go back to Orattur. So he made a plan. He promised to marry her according to *kallar* rites. Then, suddenly, without telling anyone, he married her by tying a *tali*. According to Hindu custom, she should have gotten married at her parents' village. These two are married, but not properly. Of course she is his *morapponnu*, the proper girl for a *mama* to marry, but she's dedicated to God, isn't she, so why did she have to go and marry?²⁴ That's our feeling. Now they do not go to Orattur anymore, so we also are not talking to them. When she's working for God, why should she get married?

"Just like that, they have all become Christians. That whole family has completely left Hinduism and gone into Christianity. We have 'faith' [using the English word] but we have not become Christians, nor have her mother and father, although they believe in "*Velanganni Amma*" and have stopped celebrating Divali and Pongal [Hindu festivals]."

Evidently a split occurred between the Chosen Families, which led to the Maryamma's removal by one faction from Orattur to Tanjavur for her miraculous surgery, an action which further

aggravated the rupture. Yobu, Josephine, Angelamma, and Viraiyan's son, Sivasubramaniam, were, it seems, agreed that Mary should leave Orattur, as *Amma* would not come to her there. When Maryamma refused to return to Orattur, Viraiyan's family had no choice but to side reluctantly with her parents. They are *kallar* elders bound to uphold caste traditions. Josephine and Angelamma arrived in the *Amma* cult as Christians, with no vested interest in Hindu marriage customs, and Yobu had everything to gain by keeping Maryamma in Vadiyakkadu.

3.7.8 Versions of the "Leg Problem"

"Tell them about the leg that was cut," Chandrasegaran said to his father. "One day when sleeping," began Viraiyan, a part of her leg was cut and taken away by... what do you call it? *pey*? No, 'Satan'. She was right there, lying down, and a leg was taken away - one leg. When they looked around, they couldn't find it. Then *Amma* came and said, 'Look after her.' Normally if a leg is cut off, life will go. So much blood was everywhere. Someone came to see this from Dubai. They have bought them a car."²⁵

"They didn't buy them a car," cut in Chandrasegaran. "They gave them the money. All this may be put in the papers now." Chandrasegaran seemed to be baiting us, or his father. Viraiyan was alarmed at the suggestion that what we were hearing might be published locally. "Ayyayo!" exclaimed Rosemary, coming immediately to our defence. "These people have come only for research. They have come from Canada to do research about *Mada*."

3.7.9 Ramesh Appears Out of Nowhere

A dog furiously barked in the street, and a youth of about seventeen opened the gate and quietly joined us. He was, as it happened, a native of Vadiyakkadu, studying in a technical institute in Tanjavur. Though he was known to this family, and explained, perhaps a trifle too readily, that he had just dropped by casually, we felt that his presence was more than accidental. It was not the first time we felt we were under surveillance by a widely flung intelligence network.

"When the child was resurrected, were you there?" Rosemary asked the newcomer, whose name was K. Ramesh. "Yes, I was there," he answered. "Were you there the whole night?", Heather asked, aware that she had to take charge of the questions if serious misunderstandings were not to develop. "Yes, the whole night," Ramesh answered, and described how the whole village had come on the night when Moses was resurrected. "Were you right there throughout, or did you go here and there in between?" "No!" Ramesh insisted. "I was there throughout." "Can you tell us in your own words what happened?"

"They dug the soil with spades," said Ramesh. "Inside there was a box. Yobu removed the sand. As soon as the box was seen, the child cried. Then Mary went and took out the child, bathed it and brought it to the house."

"Uh, Mary?... Okay, never mind", said Heather, confused, for this only vaguely resembled the account of Moses' disinterrment which Sr. Jacinta and others had given us earlier.

"Can Maryamma see *Amma*?" Heather asked. Ramesh answered, ambiguously, "She says she can see her [his emphasis]." Ramesh has no personal knowledge and defers to Maryamma's truth-claim. If Maryamma is trustworthy, then she sees *Amma*. If she does not see her...

"If there is anything else, tell them, because you are the one who lives there," Chandrasegaran prompted Ramesh. "What! What?" mumbled Viraiyan with irritation. The blank cheque his son was giving to us disturbed him. It seemed there was much more to tell, about which it might not be discrete for us to know. "Say what you have seen and heard," Heather added, "not what somebody told you."

"Did they tell you about the leg?" he asked. "The leg was cut and the blood was just flowing." Chandrasegaran added, "She got back her leg in two or three days." Ramesh objected, "Not in two, three days! It must have been in about a month."

"After she lost her leg, for how many days was she lying there, when you saw her?" asked Heather. "When I saw her," said Ramesh, "it was about one month." At this, Viraiyan mumbled a nearly inaudible protest and Chandrasegaran returned, "What do we know, Dad? Our connection has been cut. The boy lives there. His *toppu* [agricultural plot] is right next to their *toppu*."

Heather asked Ramesh, "Was the leg restored immediately, or after a month?" "After a month. I saw it." "Did she lose the leg only once?" "Yes, it went only once. That is all I know. If it was gone more than that, I don't know."

These details of the *kal piracchanai* [leg affliction], recounted by believing neighbours and members of a one-time Chosen Family, seem not to accord well with the official version. Whether one or both of Maryamma's legs disappeared, whether she lay in that condition for several days, or a month, whether the legs were taken once or more - all these issues remain contested. What is certain is that, despite the rupture in the family, all these people, except Chandrasegaran perhaps, are believers in Maryamma.

3.7.10 A Witness at Moses' Resurrection

"Can you tell us something about the child that is there?", Heather enquired of Ramesh about *Aiya*. "The child that was resurrected?" Viraiyan interjected. "He has been given away to Kalliyur [Rajendiran's village]." "Yes," said Heather, "that child is in Kalliyur, but in Vadiyakkadu there is a child that *Amma* gave."

Ramesh was clearly alarmed at the turn of the conversation, but answered nonchalantly, "Oh, *that* boy." He was on dangerous, uncertain ground. It was fine for us to know about Moses, but to entertain questions about *Aiya* was clearly not within his mandate. "They call him *Aiya*... *Aiya*," he said, nervously. "They don't call him by name." Rosemary asked, "That child was given when it was very small, wasn't it?" "Yes," Ramesh said, "when it was very small." Ramesh was agitated. *Aiya* is little talked about, and never through probing questions about his

origin. "How long is it since *Aiya* came there?" Heather asked. Ramesh mumbled, "I don't know, maybe one year. I am there only during the school leave. That's why I don't know everything."

3.7.11 Piragalata's Wedding Invitation

It was getting late. We asked about Viraiyan's elder son, Sivasubramanian, whom Rosemary had come here expecting to find, rather than the father. He was attending the wedding in Orattur, that very evening, of Maryamma's second elder sister, Piragalata. We were given a copy of the wedding invitation, which provided all the details we required to locate Maryamma's family.²⁶

3.7.12 Ascertaining Identities

Before leaving, we asked to see the room in which the operation took place. Rosemary confirmed, and pointed out, where the blood transfusion bottle had hung on the light switch box, where Maryamma had lain, and where the *undiyal* had been kept for collecting the offerings which Viraiyan had denied soliciting. As we walked to the gate, the little boy of the house and Ramesh were pushing and pulling each other forward and backward, anxiously whispering. Then the smaller boy mustered enough courage to ask us to write our address for him. Heather asked why he wanted it. His face went blank. She was certain it was for Ramesh to take back to Vadiyakkadu, to confirm the identity of the people who were asking all these sensitive questions.

3.7.13 Reflections Upon Parting

On the walk back, Rosemary probed us for what we thought, and whether we believed it all. Our defence was that while doing fieldwork, we are not supposed to give any opinion since it might affect the judgements of others. Rosemary that certain that we had not heard the whole truth, since in the discussion about the controversy Maryamma's visit generated, no mention was made of keeping an *undiyal*. In fact, Viraiyan had insisted that, far from collecting money, receiving so many visitors had been an expense to his family.

Had Rosemary no better sense, we wondered, than to bring us, unaware of where she was taking us, uninvited and unprepared, into a stranger's home? Our final reflection of the evening was that for some time before Ramesh from Vadiyakkadu had arrived, unexpectedly, in a flurry of protest by a neighbourhood dog and seemingly without any purpose, the small boy who had asked for our address had been nowhere to be seen.

3.8 Summary - Faith, Tensions, Credibility

The *Amma* cult is in the process of constructing its identity as a community, and Maryamma's personal identity which grounds this community as a sacred one. For casual enquirers, approaching Maryamma or one of her close associates, all of whom are accessible, is the only step required to learn what is necessary about the *Amma* cult. When Brother Peter of Walsingham came to Vadiyakkadu in his search for sites of Marian apparitions (Peter 1993.04.09), this process is very likely how he discovered what he needed to learn about cult claims. His less critical, as devotionally motivated, enquiries may well have stimulated redaction of the English account which I obtained from Josephine.²⁷ Searching a little deeper, however, was necessary for my own, non-devotional enquiry.

The need to marginalize significant participants reveals a certain ruthlessness in the cult's editing of the past. Ramamani, Baskaran, Kanakambujam, Amarajoti, Viraiyan, and Sivasubramanian are essential sources who are currently, and involuntarily, uninvolved in the Vadiyakkadu drama. All had participated in unique and irreplaceable ways at some time in Maryamma's life, but have since been excluded. Maryamma firmly and graphically indicated that nothing which had occurred before her initial affliction is a part of her current identity. Discordant artifacts have been left behind in the experience of those who were once involved with Maryamma in the early stages, but have been marginalized by her success in sustaining an ever-new and varied range of supporters. Ramamani tells how Santi was simply an

unexceptional child. Baskaran reveals his suspicions about how Santi could have secreted a watch on her person, dropped it at her own feet in the path at Velanganni, and claimed excitedly that *Amma* had materialized it there (3.4.2). Such discontinuities are hazardous to the contemporary credibility and maintenance of Maryamma's sacred identity. Although Baskaran has suspicions about Maryamma's managing of certain events which have been recorded as miraculous, he believes like the rest of the family in her essential sanctity, and wishes to atone for his lack of patience. He was personally responsible for the disaster which prevented his own home from becoming *Amma*'s shrine (3.4.6).

Owing to the hostility described by Sivasubramanian between Yobu, acting now as Maryamma's protector against her birth-family, and Sivasubramanian's own family (3.7.7.1), her relatives at Orattur, Kattur, and Tanjavur are also prevented from participating in the current hierophanies at Vadiyakkadu. Maryamma came in a new car to demonstrate her prestige to her parents' village, but refused to enter their house (3.4.7). She refuses to console her own sister, Piragalata, who is threatening suicide in an unfortunate marriage which, at least in part, was a result of Maryamma's disrupting the normal sequence of marrying daughters by age order (3.4.8). As the younger daughter, already absent from the home without her parents' permission and living with a man she has not married by *kallar* custom, Maryamma must have made finding a husband for Piragalata extremely difficult. Kanakambujam is a mother grieving over the loss of her daughter, but may not quite be sure herself whether it is to shame or to a glory in which she is denied participation. In either case, Kanakambujam cannot hide from the fact that she rejected Santi as an infant and later cursed her to death. Santi's father, Panjabakesan, figures little in this story, but it was his anger at the birth of a third consecutive daughter which conditioned Kanakambujam's negative feelings toward Santi and precipitated the act of rejection.

Non-relatives like Sebastian Raj, Rosemary, and Albudha Prakasam unlike Maryamma's relatives, are not unique sources. They were willing respondents, but I cannot assess how typical they may have been of the Tanjavur people who took an interest in Maryamma. Sebastian Raj differs because he was summoned to enquire about her on the Bishop's behalf. The views of another person recruited by the Bishop, but more intimately involved in Maryamma's sacred career, A. Balraj, a relative of Josephine Thomas, will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

Many rich and ambivalent shades of controversy colour Maryamma's brief career. One of these themes which persists is an adolescent flightiness, a willingness simply to escape from any uncomfortable circumstances. Baskaran gives an account of *Amma* taking Maryamma away, as though on a whim, for a private tour of Velanganni at the time of the Shining Rosary miracle in March, 1985 (3.4.2). Parameswary tells of Maryamma being spirited away from Madras by *Amma* in August, 1993, and miraculously returned, two days later, to Vadiyakkadu (2.10.5). Maryamma has found ways of escaping from awkward social situations and other embarrassments, always with *Amma* as the rationale. Viraiyan felt constrained to say, in all honesty, that when Santi was young, living at Orattur, he had repeatedly to retrieve her after she had run away from home (3.7.1), and Baskaran tells how he used to tie her leg to his own to prevent her from running away during the night while the family slept. It is suspected by some of my sources that Maryamma has had an illicit pregnancy, and Sebastian Raj believes that this was why she had come to Tanjavur - to give birth under cover of a miraculous "breast cancer" surgery (3.6.2) - but what a public forum she created as a cover if she did, indeed, have a child at that time! Her "*Tata*", Balraj will have more to say on this issue in Chapter 5 (5.2.9; 5.2.11; 5.2.16).

There is evidence of a willingness among the authors of the cult's public identity to respond to suggestions that some aspects of Maryamma's life story may need rectification. It is

remarkable, for example, with what alacrity Mary and Yobu's engagement was announced, on 20 July, 1993, so shortly after our rather pointed questions to Kamatchiyamma (1993.06.19) about Maryamma's marital status (Parameswary 1993.09.02). Kamatchiyamma was reluctant to talk with us at all, and absolutely refused to enter any discussion concerning the relative dating of events. Sensing scandal, she at first insisted that her son and Maryamma had already married. Where? "At some church in Tanjavur" (Kamatchiyamma 1993.06.19). But this could easily be verified by examining parish records. Kamatchiyamma was caught in tension between wanting to do things right, and being unable to do so. Christian marriage is valued in the cult, but impossible without a properly documented baptism, which neither Yobu nor Maryamma has undergone. This problem reemerges in the following chapter through Josephine's account of the unfortunate consequences of Fr. Kulandairaj's undocumented baptism of Hindu converts in emulation, apparently, of *Amma's* baptism of Mary. Yobu apparently "tied a *tali*" on Maryamma, though without proper *kallar* caste rites, to legitimate her cohabitation with him (3.7.7.3) and to obtain civil relief from her father's authority. This would be the rough equivalent, mediated in British or North American cultural terms, of a "common law" marriage, as opposed to a sacramental one. There is opposition, however, to the marriage of a young woman who has chosen, or been chosen for, a sacred career. "She's dedicated to God, isn't she? Why did she have to go and marry?" asked Chandrasegaran (3.7.7.3).

A high value is placed by *Amma* cult principals on the ability to flexibly reconfigure reporting of events and even to reconfigure events themselves. When *Amma* gave a rose to Maryamma at Velanganni in March, 1985, its purpose was to test the virtue of the Shrine's parish priest. It was important for the cult's process of constructing meaning at that time for the rose to wilt, and Maryamma reported exactly that in our first interview (1992.03.26; 2.4.8). By 1993, this element, with its explicit,

even dramatic, critique of the clergy, had been removed from the "official" account given verbally by Maryamma in which, instead, Fr. Gabriel is made to say, "I'll honour whoever gave you this rose", and nothing at all happens to the rose (Maryamma 1993.06.14). In this way, narratives are expeditiously repaired and enhanced, though sometimes at the expense of diluting the impact of the original version. Reconfiguring of the events themselves is considered in the discussion at the end of Chapter 4 in connection with the management of Moses' resurrection.

Maryamma is able to use and maintain a remarkably diverse range of human resources. For example, she was able, even in her weakened condition following seclusion, to summon Viraiyan, Yobu, Josephine, and Rajendiran to remove her from her parents' influence, and so invite *Amma* to return, albeit to a different locality from the one which *Amma* had originally targeted for fame as an *alayam*. Today, with only an elementary education herself, Maryamma has the respect and devotion of well-educated lay people, nuns, and even Jesuit priests. She commands the will of clerical devotees who will defy the authority of their institutional superiors to enact, for her sake, the most holy sacraments of their faith, and lay people who will undertake not even the least of decisions without first consulting *Amma* through her.²⁸ Emerging from poverty, Maryamma commands the purses of Persian Gulf-based believers who are prepared even to buy her a vehicle. It would not surprise me if major capital projects emerge in Yobu's farmyard in the very near future. On my last visit, a ten by twenty meter excavation for the foundation of a visitors' rest house was under way.

Maryamma's self-tailored image is a carefully edited version of the actual events of her life. While she will tell her story personally to important visitors, most must receive it second-hand. Dissemination of detailed information, mostly about her miracles, and for believers, is delegated to cult members such as Josephine Thomas who has kept an "accurate" record. Even

trusted Josephine, as we shall see shortly, can be the source of similarly discordant and discrediting testimony, because she fails to remove predictions from her history which might have suited the cult in an earlier phase (4.1.2), but now call into question either *Amma's* foresight or, alternatively, her truthfulness, in light of the current situation.

Maryamma, or whoever is most influential at any particular time in giving shape and meaning to her story, must keep undesirable features well in the background while responding to current concerns such as, for example, avoiding offence to the bishops while maintaining a critique of *some* of the clergy (which will include bishops). Certain cult claims may be in gestation at this point in time and will only make their way into the public domain as their meaning, internal to the cult, is formalized or reified. To make a solid claim for allegiance, the cult must present itself and its leader to its public as concrete and factual. But as this constituency shifts from rural to urban, from peasants to educated elite, new issues emerge which could not have been imagined, let alone anticipated at the outset, and old assumptions and evidences pale before new concerns. From the skeptic's point of view, the *kal piracchanai*, Moses' resurrection, and *Aiya's* advent simply could not have been imagined when *Amma* was fondly combing her daughter, Santi's hair and weaving flowers into it. From the believer's perspective, these developments are all part of the wondrous unfolding of *Amma's* plan, even if some parts of it must be acknowledged to have gone amiss. This reduced edition of the meaning of Maryamma's life is focussed to amplify the wondrous and to prepare listeners for ever new and more awesome wonders.

How well the founding claims and the precise meanings of those claims which have emerged recently, especially concerning Moses and *Aiya*, are mediated to a future constituency will depend largely on how well older interpretations can be managed. In doctrinal terms, the cult is teetering on the edge of a precipice

if it wishes to maintain any contact with the Catholic Church, and to gain any legitimation through the Church. With the more intensive involvement of Catholic priests, we may expect an increased sensitivity and attention in the *Amma* cult to contemporary issues and concerns within the universal Church, to the elements of existing doctrine, and to the best way to confront the teaching authority of the Church with *Amma's* revelations. If priests find something novel and compelling in *Amma's* messages, rather than denouncing the cult for heterodoxy, they will attempt to direct its public image and self-presentation in such a way as to delay a crisis of orthodoxy while new adherents are attracted from the Catholic population, especially from among devotees to *Annai Velanganni*. Rather than claiming that the center of holiness has now shifted to herself and that there is no longer any need to visit Velanganni Shrine, Maryamma actively encourages her supporters to go there. They will, of course, have something to say about contemporary hierophanies during their visit to Velanganni (2.5.6).

Maryamma and *Amma* are ambivalent religious symbols because they stand in the interstices between Hindu and Christian world views. Each evokes at once a sense of innocence and power. Maryamma's credibility rests on her original innocence as a simple, rustic, uneducated village girl visited by Our Lady. Out of this credibility she speaks to urban professionals and business people, and to the cream of Catholic intellectuals - Jesuits and other religious priests, brothers, and sisters, and secular priests seeking intimacy with their very own, homely Marian hierophany. From the credence which such powerful people confer, Maryamma speaks to rural people, to the class of poor Hindu peasants from which she takes her origin. Maryamma's convincing maintenance of her reputation for innocence, in situations demanding a highly astute and expedient management of persons and symbols, must depend either on her own personal talents and resources or on *Amma's* very special grace.

Chapter 4

Amma Cult Insiders

This chapter describes some of the perspectives which are active within the *Amma* cult's self-interpretation and quest for meaning in events. The actors whose voices make up the chapter - Josephine Thomas, Fr. Peter, Sr. Jacinta, Elsa, and Fr. Kulandairaj - are all committed *Amma* cult adherents for whom the cult is their central devotional focus and concern. My own experiences of *Aiya*, the holy child of Vadiyakkadu, are also described here.

Josephine is a nurse by profession and a Tamil Catholic. Aside from a few of Maryamma's relatives, she is the most senior active cult member. Josephine's earliest contacts with the cult date from late in 1986 at Orattur, two years after Santi's apparitions began. Josephine was one of the earliest among the "Chosen Families" selected by *Amma* early in the cult's development for her favour, and for the special honour of serving her. Beginning with only a few such families, the number has increased over the years. There is no objective form of membership in the *Amma* cult, so selection as one of the "Chosen" both accords a more definite sense of belonging and confers a distinction (4.4.3). Some of the most important events, or symbolic enactments, beginning early in 1987, appear to have taken shape through - one might almost say were engineered by - Josephine's efforts, in response to some rather private concerns. Fr. Peter [pseud.] of Nellore in Andhra Pradesh is a Telugu Catholic priest. He is a recent recruit to the *Amma* cult and appears to take his involvement in it seriously enough to risk his career in the priesthood for its sake. From our brief encounter, to be related shortly, Fr. Peter appeared to see Maryamma as naive and

vulnerable, and his own role as her protector, a bodyguard. As a mediator of the cult to newcomers, he seemed to be carving out a distinctive leadership role for himself in the cult by which he might become indispensable to it.

Sr. Jacinta is a Tamil nun from Pabanasam. She learned of Maryamma through Josephine, was instrumental in recruiting Fr. Kulandairaj [pseud.] beginning in late 1990, but became one of the "Chosen" only on the eve of Moses' resurrection in June, 1991.

Elsamma is a Malayali Catholic who first came to Vadiyakkadu in August, 1990. She is from Palaiyapputtur in Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu's most westerly district, near its border with the state of Kerala. Elsa has been influential in spreading news of *Amma's* miracles, especially the resurrection of Moses, in her home district and in Kerala.

Fr. Kulandairaj, sj, a Tamil *vellalar* and native of Tirucchirappalli. He began contributing his special talents in July, 1991, a mere six months before I myself became aware of the existence of the *Amma* cult. He is one of its more mobile and vocal advocates and was the first priest to celebrate a Mass at Vadiyakkadu's *Aruḷ Arai*. The blanket prohibition against celebrating Mass at Vadiyakkadu issued by Archbishop P. Arokiaswamy of Tanjavur was initially directed at Fr. Kulandairaj.

I attempted in Chapter 3, especially in the discussions of Maryamma's breast surgery and leg affliction, to evoke some of the obscurities and differences, even outright contradictions, which emerge concerning matters of belief in the *Amma* cult. Chapters 4 and 5 deepen that sense of contradiction and competition for what cult associates believe to be a correct understanding. Personal imperatives and priorities, agendas for managing symbolic events, and different ways of perceiving each of these provide the ground for discussion in Chapter 7.

4.1 Josephine Thomas' Tales

Josephine Thomas is a native of Pabanasam, a town located about sixty-five kilometers north of Vadiyakkadu, between Tanjavur

and Kumbakonam on the Kaveri River. She keeps a comprehensive record in Tamil of all *Amma's* predictions and teachings, and all significant actions and events. First having heard of Santi from one of her nursing patients, Josephine began visiting Orattur to talk with *Amma* around the end of 1986 (Baskaran 1993.06.25), nearly two years after the first apparitions. Josephine's daughter, Irene, would often come with her and stay for several days, Santi and she happily entertaining each other. The following account of Josephine's views is drawn from an interview conducted in her home on 27 June, 1993.

4.1.1 Angelamma and the "Chosen Families"

In the early days, there came to be five "Chosen Families" among those the people who first gathered around Maryamma to worship. A special affinity for *Amma* in these people (expressed as affinity in *Amma* for them), and loyalty to her community as embodied in Maryamma, seem to have been the criteria for selection. Moses' father, Rajendiran, Yobu and his mother, Angelamma (a *dalit* woman), and Josephine herself constituted four of the original five. One family had drifted away early in the cult's history. Later, Sivasubramanian of Tanjavur, became one of the "Chosen". During this period, *Amma* was catechising Santi and her family in preparation for her baptismal Mass on 25 March, 1987. Josephine had just had time to become a full member of the little community of regular attenders at the Orattur house when this major event occurred. She was happy, on *Amma's* instructions, to take part in the preparations.

Amma sent Angelamma to summon Josephine to Orattur on the day before Mary was to be baptised. *Amma* said, "Josephine, I want you to take Mary to Tanjavur and buy her a white dress for her baptism. I want a long veil, and you must take her with you. Put it on her head and see... It should flow, you know." Josephine asked, "*Amma*, what about a wreath? Should I take it from this Carmel Convent, where normally people borrow it?" *Amma* said, "I

don't want you to borrow. I want you to buy a new one because all these things have to be kept."

Josephine personally took Mary and did the shopping. She kept the clothes in her house, and sent Mary back to Orattur. The next day, Josephine brought the clothes, dressed and prepared Santi for the Mass at 11:00 o'clock, and was present when *Amma* came and celebrated it.

4.1.2 *Amma's Mass*

At Vadiyakkadu, ten days before this interview with Josephine in her home, Heather and I had asked her son, Kennedy, "What does 'saying mass' in Vadiyakkadu mean? If *Amma* was in the *Aruḷ Arai* behind a closed door, and everyone else was outside in the next room, how did it happen?" "See, it was like this..." said Kennedy. "She said, '*Anda room oy pa ahu* [In that room, the Lord be with you],' and all of us replied, '*Om moda mera padahu* [And also with you]...' like that we participated in the mass" (Kennedy 1993.06.17).

Josephine had more information on Maryamma's baptismal "Mass" and first communion - an audio recording and also a transcript of the recording.¹ Josephine provided me with an English translation of this transcript of *Amma's Mass*. The English text follows none of the rubrics of a Roman Catholic mass. *Amma* begins with "In the Name of the Father..." and at one point recites the Lord's Prayer. Apart from this attempt to introduce a liturgical order, the "mass" is comprised of a rambling invocation to faith and morality, criticism of priests and nuns, calls to remember that the listeners are her children, threatened by the devil, and promises that she will appear everywhere to defeat the Anti-Christ. In her homily, *Amma* identifies herself as the Immaculate Conception affirming, that it was she who appeared at Lourdes, Fatima, and Velanganni, but unlike in those places, at Vadiyakkadu she celebrates Mass. Without the Liturgy of the Word (Bible readings), she announces, "I will conduct the Sermon now itself. Not afterwards."

Amma does not appear, either in the tape or in the text, to baptise Santi as "Mary" at this mass, as claimed by the *Amma* cult, nor does she say any prayer to consecrate the bread and wine. In the middle of the sermon, she says the unconsecrated host is brought to console Mary. Later, she asks [*verbatim*], "May I start giving holy communion to Mary? My sermon is enough?" Then, *Amma* announces, "Now the bread changing as our Lord's flesh. I give this to a child, Mary. Mary stand up. Open your mouth.... Drink this wine. Boy, if anyone of you want to have wine I will give one spoon of it which is not consecrated. If any bit of holy communion has fallen while I was giving to mary, you don't take and eat. It will be eaten only by mary. Because this is the flesh of Jesus Christ." This statement, and the actions which it monitors, would seem to constitute the core of Maryamma's "baptism" and first communion mass.

What ought Josephine, a born Catholic, to think of such a mass? What, moreover, should an ordained priest think? Something more, the sacramental and legitimating participation of Catholic priests, was needed in the ritual life of the *Amma* cult if the less credulous were to come to appreciate *Amma's* presence through Maryamma. Josephine raised the matter with *Amma* of which priest might be the first to say Mass at Orattur on the occasion when *Amma* had asked to be called "*Orattur Amma*" (3.4.11). Josephine asked, "Who will say the first Mass here?" *Amma* asked, "Why do you want a priest? I'll be saying Mass for you." Josephine persisted, "No, but who's the first priest who's going to say a Mass here?" Then *Amma* said that a man from the West would have to come. "It will be a foreigner, because all these people here, the Indians, their hearts are like the colour of their skin. They are black. They are black inside and outside. And the whites, they are white outside and they are white inside. They have pure hearts, so it will be a foreigner who will come and say mass." Then *Amma* said, "But all these things are to be secrets until the time comes."

By the time of our interview, Fr. Kulandairaj, an Indian, had already celebrated Mass for the *Amma* cult, as had several other Indian priests. Yet Josephine did not seem to sense any contradiction in *Amma's* promise that a white foreigner would be the first priest to celebrate Mass for the cult. Josephine affirmed that three masses had already been celebrated at the house in Orattur as well, so locality cannot be a condition of *Amma's* promise. Why did Josephine not edit out this prophecy? Josephine presents herself as a stubborn figure of resistance to new trends in the *Amma* cult. We will elaborate on this and its implications for her role in Chapter 5.

Amma speaks in the "mass" of her mission in Orattur, and Maryamma's place in it [*verbatim*]. "Anybody doing like this in the Churches? The on goings of this place is a spontaneous mission. It will be organised and directed only by me without the hands of fathers and sisters. I will operate the mission individually. The chief is mary." Then there is a suggestion that *Amma* is capable of causing trouble to devotees: "I will keep you in my hand like keeping the flower without spoiling. You don't worry for anything. If I give trouble one time, will give happiness another time."

There lies in this suggestion of *Amma* giving "trouble", an echo of the character of the local village goddess discussed in the first (1.2.4) and sixth chapters (6.1.1), and a hint, in accord with the goddess' ambivalence, that Santi's initial affliction, which was resolved without any rite of exorcism, may never have been demon possession (6.5.2). Rather, the logic of fluid sacrality, the absence of a clear boundary between the positive and negative sacred with a single symbol incorporating both (Bayly 1989: 133), permits Santi's affliction to be understood as *Amma's* own action to prepare her by trial for her seasoned role in service to *Amma's* benign, positive manifestation as comforter, healer, and source of refuge.

4.1.3 Josephine Obtains a Recording of Amma's Sweet Voice

Josephine had obtained a cassette tape of *Amma's* Mass at Orattur. Saying, as *Amma* began to celebrate, "*Amma*, I would like to tape your voice", she slipped a blank cassette under the door. Santi was in prayer, so she was unaware of the cassette being in the room, and denied knowledge of it later. After the mass, Josephine asked, "*Amma*, where is the cassette I gave you?" But her cassette could not be found. Some other cassettes with songs were there, and later, when someone attempted to play songs, one was found to contain the mass. It seems that Maryamma had access to a cassette recorder not long after her visions began, a factor which may figure in some of *Amma's* later miracles (5.2.6).

Devotees never tire of telling how simple Maryamma is, and wonder at how such an uneducated village girl could be so graced and chosen by *Amma* to lead her work. Fr. Kulandairaj, especially, loves to tell what a "simple" girl Maryamma is, and how high-pitched and sweet is *Amma's* voice. Parameswary said, "When *Amma* speaks, she speaks like a simple Tamil woman, not high-flown and all that" (Parameswary 1993.06.16). This is Santi's kind of Tamil.

Francis Regis, whose family had such a narrow escape when their van lost a wheel after *Amma* had cautioned them not to travel (2.1.4), was absolutely convinced of *Amma's* special grace for them by the following experience: Maryamma had come to his home to visit and gone upstairs alone. Suddenly there was a shout and everyone ran upstairs to see what it was. Maryamma was kneeling, covered by a blanket. Had *Amma* come? Francis had been hoping she would grace his home, and his mind was full of petitions he might make to her. His wife had doubts and believed that Maryamma was only fooling them, producing *Amma's* voice herself. Then, as though to disprove their suspicions, Maryamma came out of the room as the voice continued to speak from inside! *Amma* called his name: "Francis, Francis!" Weeping and quivering with emotion, Francis turned this way and that, not knowing what to do. Before he could answer, the voice of *Amma* came again: "You worry too much!" After

just a short pause, she spoke to Yobu: "You go back to Vadiyakkadu." Francis had been planning a family vacation to Singapore, where they had once lived. Instead, as a result of this experience, they made instead a two-week trip to the Holy Land and to Rome (Francis Regis 1993.06.17).

This performance could not have been better designed to convince Francis' skeptical wife and to seal his own commitment with a personal visit in his home. It could also easily be executed by prerecording *Amma's* voice, allowing suitable pauses, knowing the preoccupations of Francis' mind. Had Francis begun voicing his petitions, *Amma's* response as an interruption of them would have been no less apt than it was for his silent confusion. Whatever question Francis might have asked, her response could have been construed as an appropriate answer. *Amma's* order for Yobu would preempt any further questions. Francis gives this believer's testimonial to *Amma's* voice inside a room while Maryamma is outside it visible to everyone. Francis is wealthy, foreign-travelled, with children residing abroad, and is able to make pilgrimages, which confer a certain status on him among Catholics, and from which he can return and yet demonstrate his devotion to Maryamma. To less affluent believers, he is living evidence that Maryamma stands on a par with Rome and Jerusalem in holiness. So is sacred reality constructed and enhanced. It is not, in this instance, demonstrably a product of any special "simplicity".

Josephine demonstrated the tape of *Amma's* sermon for us, but no means were available to make a copy. The voice is characterized by high-pitched keening; the utterances are abrupt, separated by long pauses, without much sense of the discourse being planned. At points *Amma* mispronounces words, then corrects herself. The tonal qualities behind the keening are of Maryamma's voice. At some points the voice sounds hesitant, as though the speaker is trying to recall what to say next. After one long pause, we hear, "*Purincida ungalukku?* [Have you understood?]"² We

listened for some part of the Tamil Mass being said, but heard no single prayer of the liturgy. Not even "In the Name of the Father...", could be heard, though the transcript received from Josephine includes such a prayer. Some semblance of the liturgical order is present, for *Amma* says, "Here is the grape juice, and partake of it... The offertory is not yet, so it's not yet consecrated." Then, it seems, she distributed the juice. After the "consecration" she gave the host to Mary alone, and to the others she gave unconsecrated host, since they were unbaptised.

4.1.4 Angelamma's Miracles

Angela, or Angelamma, seems to have been very important in the early days of the *Amma* cult, being involved both at Orattur and at Vadiyakkadu. She is a very mysterious figure. In our 27 June, 1993 interview, Josephine asked whether we had met Angelamma at Moses' resurrection anniversary ten days earlier. Why, we asked, had Josephine not told us of Angela, or introduced us? "No," said Josephine, denying any personal discretion in the matter, "since Maryamma didn't tell you her name, she did not meet you. It's like that. We do only what *Amma* says and what Maryamma says, and therefore because Maryamma hadn't mentioned her name to you, she stayed in the background." This logic was echoed and reinforced by Fr. Kulandairaj when we next met him in Madras (cf. 3.1.1) and situates Ramesh's predicament at being drawn into probing questions about *Aiya* (3.7.10).

Angela is a member of a "Scheduled Caste", a *dalit*. Caste Hindus and Christians like the *kallars* look down on *dalits* and do not respect them. On one occasion in 1987, while Maryamma was in seclusion, Angela and her son came to Orattur, as usual, to stay for a few days and to hear *Amma*. Angela moved about as she normally did, trying very much to be a part of the family, but was ill-treated by them because she is a *dalit*. After two days, Angela suddenly disappeared. When *Amma* came, she asked, "Where is Angelamma?" They said, "Well... she's... she seems to have gone

away. She's not here. We don't know where she's gone." *Amma* ordered, "I want you to send somebody to her house and find out."

They sent a boy to enquire at Angela's home. When he arrived, the people said, "Angela is in bed. She has been [ill] here right through the last two days." When the boy returned with the message that she had not been to Orattur at all, the whole family was surprised and frightened because all of them had seen her, spoken to her, and some had treated her disrespectfully because she is a *dalit*. Then, *Amma* spoke: "It was not Angela who came, but I sent two saints. One was Mary Magdalene and the small boy was *Santiago* [St. James]." This apparition was to call the family to repentance. One can imagine how they all felt, since they had treated Mary Magdalene so badly.

Later, in Vadiyakkadu, when Mary was still unable to walk, Angelamma came to spend a couple of days, as was her normal practice. The little boy was also with her. She did not speak in her normal "*Wadawadawada*" fashion, loud and talkative. Instead, she was quiet, participating in all the household activities, scrubbing vessels, cooking, and sweeping. But again, in this house too, they treated her badly. Then *Amma's* voice was heard and everyone came to the door of the family shrine room (which was not yet called "*Arul Arai*"). *Amma* shut the door, saying, "I'm going to pray for half an hour." That is her usual way. First she calls out, "*Tambi! Tambi!*", and then she prays. The door is then closed, with Maryamma inside.

This time, *Amma* asked even Mary to go out, and for everyone to wait in the back room - not the entrance hall on which the shrine room door opens. So everyone went into that room, and Mary crawled and sat closest, in the doorway. Before *Amma's* voice was heard, Angelamma had gone to do some chore in an outbuilding, the hut which is now used as a kitchen. After some time she returned, crossed the threshold, opened the door, and entered the shrine. Mary called out to her and said, "Hey, don't go there! *Amma* has asked us not to go inside." But Angelamma didn't care.

She entered the shrine, stood there, looking at the holy pictures, and started praying.

Angelamma stood at just the spot on the floor where they now place an inverted cup. Maryamma became very upset at this. How dare this woman disobey *Amma*? So she crawled up behind Angelamma and pulled at her sari saying, "*E pombelei* [*ponnu pillai*, literally "girl child", which is demeaning when addressing an adult]. As Josephine put it, "Hey woman! How dare you stand here when I'm telling you that *Amma* has asked you to come out?"

Whereupon, "Angelamma" just turned on her heel and vanished in a bright flash. The sari Maryamma clutched vanished also, leaving her hand empty in mid-air. When Mary realised that the woman had been *Amma*, she cried out and fainted, and everyone who had been in the next room, out of sight, came rushing to her. Then *Amma* spoke, saying: "I wanted to teach all of you, including my daughter, Maryamma, a lesson. All of you are treating this lady badly." Josephine said, "*Amma* is like that - '*Tak takku takku - kanakka ordene korekshan kurttevanga*'." She gives any correction that is required. She even corrected Mary, "This was not a way to treat Angelamma." Then they noticed that the boy, also, had disappeared. He was, of course, the Child Jesus. Everyone greatly repented.

Amma's visit and teaching in the form of Angelamma is commemorated by the round, reddish spot in the floor, covered with an overturned brass bowl to protect it from careless feet, which is the luminous mark of *Amma's* heel.

On yet another occasion, tells Josephine, Angelamma had pawned her gold chain because she has a lot of debts. The pawnbroker had cheated her, demanding Rs.1,000 more to reclaim it than had been agreed. As she was weeping and walking down some street in Tanjavur, she saw Yobu with one of his aunts. Yobu asked Angelamma, "What happened? Why are you crying?" She narrated her tale of woe. Yobu took Rs.2,000 from his pocket and said, "Here, take this. Go, clear your debt and bring your chain." Angela was

so happy, after reclaiming her chain, that she had a extra Rs.1,000 in hand. Feeling that she had not thanked them properly, she took the bus and went to Vadiyakkadu. Finding Yobu, she showed him the necklace his help had retrieved and tried to return his Rs.1,000. He was stunned. He said, "What...? How...? I didn't come anywhere near Tanjavur."

In Josephine's personal accounts, apart from the official version which she purveys on Maryamma's and the *Amma* cult's behalf, it is not unusual for anyone to appear as Jesus, or Mary, or the saints to anyone else. Here, Yobu was really Jesus, and the aunt, his Blessed Mother. Only later did they make these connections. Josephine said, "*Eppadi varudu konnekshans parttukongu, uh?* [Just see how the connections are coming, eh?]" Then said Josephine, "When Mother Mary was living there for two days in the form of Angelamma, she came to Maryamma, took a pouch from the waist of her *sari*, and said, 'Count how much money is in this little pouch.' Mary took out the money and counted, and said, 'It's about Rs.2,000.' So she [*Amma*/Angela] told Mary, 'Would you like to keep it and use it?' So, Maryamma said, 'No, no. You have so many problems. Why are you wanting to give me this amount? Keep it for yourself.' Then she gave it back."

This set of stories appears to be meant to show that *Amma* may appear in any shape she chooses, to teach by assuming others' identities and appearances. The stories also depict Angelamma as the ideal devotee, open to an offer of help, scrupulously honest, and profusely generous. The last story also demonstrates Maryamma's own innocence, as she could well have kept Angelamma's offered money. What shall we believe of such testimony, without corroboration from Angelamma whom we were not permitted to meet, and how much is merely the product of Josephine's fertile and idiosyncratic imagination?

4.1.5 How and Why Maryamma was Abducted to Vadiyakkadu

Angelamma and Josephine played an integral role in shifting Mary from Orattur to Vadiyakkadu. About a month into

Maryamma's seclusion, Josephine's daughter, Irene, had died. Irene and Maryamma were great friends, and her death was very disturbing to Mary. *Amma* had insisted that everyone help Maryamma to complete her seclusion, saying, at the outset, "Make sure that she doesn't come out of the room." On hearing the news, Mary wanted to come out, but obeying *Amma*, the family did not permit her. Josephine's distress, since she believed Irene's husband had murdered her, made her more dependent on *Amma*'s presence, advice, and promises than she had been before, and *Amma* was shortly to vanish from her life.

4.1.5.1 Tensions, and the End of Maryamma's Seclusion

Josephine recounted that a time came when the whole of Orattur village began to gossip about this girl being inside a room for six months. They circulated scandalous rumours, and the family became disgusted. Also, Mary had cut off her hair, and no one knew why. They were upset when *Amma* began instructing them to organise a celebration, a feast. They said, "Look, hazardous people are just streaming in, and we are forever cooking for them, and we are spending so much money, so if you want a celebration, then you arrange for the funds. Why don't you work a miracle?" *Amma* said, "Look, I'll work many miracles, but first you must organise this feast."

Thus they argued, and the family insulted *Amma*. "We don't want you in this house," they said. "Because of you all kinds of things are happening. That's the limit... when the village is gossiping about us, and *Amma* is making more and more demands." By breaking open the door of Mary's seclusion they were saying, categorically, "We don't want you in our house." Since then *Amma* has not been heard in Orattur, or seen in her own form by anyone, not even by Maryamma.

Soon after Mary was forcibly removed from her seclusion before its completion, she and the family were disturbed to find that she had lost the use of her legs, and could not walk. Baskaran told us that Mary's seclusion room was very damp for when

it rained, some grains which had fallen out of a sack had sprouted and grown to some height (Baskaran 1993.06.25). Everyone was upset, and Mary lost faith in *Amma*. She ceased to pray. Meanwhile a Pentecostal arrived, and told Mary, "See, it's because you were praying to this *Mada* that all this happened. You must pray only to Jesus. That *Mada* is actually a *pey*, and see what distress she has brought you to, so don't go on so." In effect, Mary was told that her devotion to *Amma* was a form of devil-worship, and it had brought her to this condition.

4.1.5.2 *Amma's* Promise, and Josephine's Service

Josephine herself was afflicted by her loss of Irene, whom she believed had been poisoned, or had herself taken poison to escape her husband. Josephine was continually upset, and cried to *Amma* at Orattur, "I want to see my child again." Before Maryamma was forcibly brought out of seclusion, *Amma* answered her plea, "Don't cry, because your child is with me, and she is happy here. I'll show her to you some day." Then *Amma* added, "Not only will I show her, but she will come back to you. She will come back alive." Josephine lived in the sole hope of seeing Irene again. It was a dire crisis for her, then, when Baskaran forcibly brought Maryamma out of her room, and *Amma* came no more to Orattur. She asked, "How will *Amma's* plans be fulfilled if these people don't listen to *Amma* and do such things?" For this reason she was enraged with the family for having forcibly brought Mary out of her unfinished seclusion which held so much promise of a new shrine, just like at Lourdes. This is also why Josephine got involved in shifting Santi from Orattur to Vadiyakkadu.

Unwilling to give up, Josephine ceased going to Orattur, but undertook nearly a year of prayer for *Amma's* return. She called some Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth Standard Hindu school-children, and began praying to *Amma* with them. One day she took six of them to Orattur where they prayed three rosaries, kneeling continuously. Then they began to pray loudly to the Holy Spirit

with great faith, crying out to the Lord to allow *Amma* to come back to this house. This took place on 26 September, 1988.

Maryamma asked herself, "Why are these people praying like this? Is it because I have stopped praying to *Amma*?" Mary was moved by the faith of these little children, so when Josephine asked her, "How can you forget what *Amma* has done for you? How can you lose your faith in her?", Maryamma said, "Okay, I'll pray to *Amma* once again." In this way Mary's faith was restored, but *Amma* could not return because Mary's family did not want her there. Maryamma had been motivated to do her part, but the problem required yet another solution.

4.1.5.3 Angelamma's Dream

At that time Angelamma had a dream in which *Amma* asked Josephine to give dead Irene's hair-clip to Mary. Mary had cut off her hair, which was now short, and she needed a hair clip. How, Josephine asked herself, could Angelamma know that she was still keeping and treasuring Irene's clip? The practical knowledge of her secret required to give this advice convinced Josephine that *Amma* must really have spoken to Angelamma. This, it seems, was the first time that *Amma* had relayed a message through anyone other than Maryamma. Was this, perhaps, why I was not destined to meet Angelamma? Josephine's own account tells here of an alternative apparitional tradition. Perhaps Angelamma could have told me much more, and perhaps Maryamma would not have been pleased with what she might say.³

Amma went on to tell Angelamma in this dream that she and Josephine must somehow shift Mary from Orattur to Vadiyakkadu. "Only then can I speak, because the family is against my speaking." Mary's parents and all her family had categorically said, "We're fed up with this nonsense. We don't want it any more." So, *Amma* could not appear in that house any more. *Amma* said to Angela, "Somehow you play some trick on them and take Mary out of the place."

This dream left Josephine wondering, "'Now how should I get Mary to Vadiyakkadu?' So I went and I first asked her parents. They said, 'No, no, we will not send her to Vadiyakkadu because she's a grown-up girl and in our family we don't send girls like that to stay in some other house, especially when there's a bachelor there.' So, no chance. Then, it was at that time Mary had begun to complain about this pain in her chest - there was this growth on her breast - and also sometimes she would vomit blood. So I said, 'Why don't I use this as a pretext?' So I told them, 'Look, it's possible that this might be cancer, so why don't I take this child to the hospital? I'll take her in a taxi, and I'll bring her straight back in the same taxi.' They said, 'Okay, why don't you do that?', so that was my chance. I put her in a taxi, and I took her *straight* to Vadiyakkadu. I left her there, and came to my house, and I sat down quietly. Of course the family was very angry with me for some time. They wouldn't talk to me and all, but now they have forgiven me, and now we are kind of all right. But this is how I shifted Mary from Orattur to Vadiyakkadu." Then Josephine said, "So, you see, I played a very important role in shifting Mary.... Then, at Vadiyakkadu, that's when all these miracles began to happen" (Josephine 1993.06.27).

Josephine is not at all modest about her accomplishments, nor ashamed of her expedient deceptions. The move she describes took place on 29 November, 1988, two weeks before Maryamma's eighteenth birthday - not the "eighteenth birthday" so grandly celebrated by the *Amma* cult on 14 December, 1991, but her actual one.

4.1.5.4 Amma Returns to Maryamma at Vadiyakkadu

Amma resumed her visits to Maryamma, by talking with her in the family shrine room at Vadiyakkadu, on 10 February, 1989, the fourth anniversary of her first appearance at the clothesline in Orattur. *Amma* gave her first visible and lasting miracle when she appeared as Angelamma about two weeks later, leaving her shining footprint and teaching everyone humility, Maryamma first of all (4.1.4). This miracle was a good start. However, Maryamma

became embroiled shortly thereafter in the breast surgery at Tanjavur which lasted from 1 to 24 April. It attracted the attention of Roman Catholic Church authorities and allegations that Mary had come there to have a baby. The shining footprint was to be one of the least of *Amma's* miracles to take place in this room, and she had made a promise to show the loyal Josephine her daughter, Irene.

4.1.6 Irene's Katchi

Josephine's persistent involvement in inducing *Amma* to return may be understood in terms of her promise to bring Irene back. Josephine kept visiting Orattur whenever she had time, in the imminent hope that each visit might bring the day when she would see her murdered child. When would Irene return? Josephine had told all her friends, colleagues and neighbours at Pabanasam of *Amma's* promise. Some of them would tease her by saying, "Where is Irene? *Amma* promised, so what's happening?" Josephine was yet to suffer more assaults on her reputation and integrity through her loyalty to the *Amma* cult (5.1.1).

This malicious talk, plus her husband's disbelief and disapproval of Josephine's visits to Orattur, made things more difficult for her. Sometimes she would tell him, of the four hour round trip by bus, "Look, I'll just go for a few minutes to Orattur and come." Sometimes she went without even taking a change of clothes, and found herself remaining for four or five days because *Amma* would tell her to stay. Once, after four days without a bath or change of clothes, she became irritated and left. As she waited for the bus, a boy ran after her and called her back. *Amma* said, "I want you to stay at least until this evening", which meant that she either had to travel by night or stay until the next day.

On one of the occasions when she asked *Amma*, "When are you going to show Irene to me?", *Amma* said, "Go back to your house. There I will perform a miracle, and then you will understand." Josephine went home and waited hopefully, but nothing happened.

Depressed and disappointed she returned to Orattur and cried to *Amma*, "What, *Amma*, you said you'd perform a miracle, but nothing happened in the last two days." So, *Amma* said, "You see, my problem is this... that I haven't got permission from *Andavar*. No one who has died and has gone to the next world has come back again and stepped forth on the earth. Your child will be the first, so it's going to take some time. I must speak to *Andavar* again" (2.7.3.1; cf. 6.6).

Amma had made a promise she had had no authority to grant, and for that reason, its fulfillment was delayed. After Maryamma moved to Vadiyakkadu, the day finally came when *Amma* received permission to show Irene to her family. *Amma* cult members informed their friends, and many people gathered on 27 May, 1989 at Vadiyakkadu for a *katchi* [glimpse, vision] of Irene. There was such a large crowd that they had to arrange a queue for all of them to file past the door. Some thousand witnesses saw Irene standing in the *Arul Arai*, dressed in the very same *sari* in which she had been buried, the brown silk one she is wearing in the picture of her hanging above the door to the *Arul Arai* which I had noticed on my first visit (2.8.1). During the *katchi*, Irene stood facing toward the shrine table in the corner, her back to the door, and her head covered by a large white veil. No one, therefore, saw her face.

Mr. Thomas accompanied Josephine this time, despite his earlier skepticism and irritation, as he had recently been chastised by the miracle of the bleeding picture in his own home. Josephine, unsatisfied asked, "Can we not have a glimpse of her face?" *Amma* said, "Yes, later."⁴ *Amma* eventually asked everyone but Irene's parents to go away. When they were alone inside the house, Irene appeared to them in the *Arul Arai* wearing a blue *sari*, with its *pallu*, or "fall", draped over her head and face so it could still not be seen. Josephine cried to *Amma*, "What about giving us a glimpse of her face?" *Amma* warned, "If you look at her face, you may get frightened," and Irene turned very quickly, so

they had just a glimpse of her face, and turned away again. She was from the dead, after all, and a full view of her face might be more than they could bear. However, Josephine said that she was not frightened. Irene again disappeared, behind the shrine room doors. When the room was opened, the *sari* she wore had been left there, another relic. Nothing and no one else was inside, except Maryamma... who was found sleeping.

4.1.7 Josephine Lives in Hope

Josephine lives in hope, waiting for the fulfillment of the rest of *Amma's* promise. Since the resurrection of Moses for the grieving Rajendiran, Josephine now has even more ample reason to believe that it will be fulfilled, although her promise that Irene will be the first person to return from the dead has been voided. *Amma* had kept her promise to Rajendiran. "Now the rest has yet to be fulfilled, but I believe in *Amma*," Josephine says. "She'll surely keep her promise of sending Irene back to me." As we left Josephine on her doorstep to return in the night to Tanjavur, we could not help but feel sorry for her and sympathize with all the trials and tensions she has suffered, and all her initiatives and efforts to realize her dreams. Her rough and ready spirituality, with its homely applications to life in the world, both amused us and obliged us to respect her persistence in spite of what was so obviously her willingness to twist fact and circumstance to her will.

Josephine expressed dislike for the direction in which the *Amma* cult is moving. She bears animosities against other cult members who appear to her to be infringing on her own domain as a central figure. She will describe some of the reasons for these hostilities in Chapter 5 after the perspectives of a few of the more prominent and influential recent *Amma* cult devotees have been heard.

4.2 Defending Our Ground at Vadiyakkadu

To illustrate the implicit tension between a distanced perspective and wholehearted commitment, we might recall an

incident in which Heather and I were challenged by one of Vadiyakkadu's self-appointed protectors and how the difficulty was mediated.

Heather and I were honoured with a dinner cooked by Maryamma's own hands on 15 June, 1993. After dinner she and Yobu invited us to spend the night at Vadiyakkadu. This took us by surprise, as we had made a commitment to the parish priest, Fr. Maria Arokiam, to spend the night at his house. We asked if we might spend the next night with them instead, the eve of Moses' resurrection anniversary. They expressed regret that we could ~~not~~ stay, but agreed. Perhaps they wanted to show us a special hospitality which would be impossible once other guests had arrived. Perhaps they wished to learn more about us before exposing us to the variety of cult devotees the next day.

4.2.1 Fr. Peter Is Worried

When we arrived at Vadiyakkadu the next evening, June 16, at 6:00 p.m., we learned that Mary, Yobu and Paramaswary, a devotee from Pattukkottai, had gone in the car to do some shopping. While I unpacked the motorcycle, Heather approached a group of four men seated in front of the house who turned out to be priests, in civil dress, from the neighbouring states of Kerala and Andhra Pradesh. When I joined them, they offered me the one remaining seat, though Heather was still standing. One among them was fiercely somber and sharp-eyed, Fr. Peter from Nellore. Heather left us to converse and found one of the girls playing with *Aiya*. The priests were curious about what had brought me, a foreigner, to Vadiyakkadu. I explained that I had come to study Velanganni shrine and the Hindus who attend it, but my interest was shifting to popular devotions such as were about to be celebrated here with the commemoration of Moses' resurrection. We all watched as Heather carried *Aiya* about and talked with him. Fr. Peter observed them most intently. Perhaps he was thinking we did not know who *Aiya* was, and he may have objected to Heather's casual, irreverent treatment of him. Noting how well the two got

along, I commented how sorry it was that the previous day Kamatchiyamma and another older lady had influenced *Aiya* to regard me as a *buchandi*, a "bogey man". I told them that I was still a little hurt by this unwarranted expression of hostility and wondered aloud why these women were putting false fears into the child. Their attribution had stuck, for whenever *Aiya* came across a photo of me in our album, he pointed and said, "*Buchandi, buchandi!*"

Two of the priests moved away, conversing. Fr. Peter sat quietly watching Heather and *Aiya*, his eyes uneasy. Then he asked, "How can you mix up your scientific thing with peoples' faith?" His question seemed to me to betray a strongly empiricist attitude toward science or scholarly work, and I began to explain how my concern is not so much with the truth itself, but how people understand and communicate their beliefs. He expressed his opinion, that I ought either to study Velanganni, or the *Amma* cult, but not both. I might make a Ph.D. study, he told me, of what is going on in Vadiyakkadu. Was he trying to draft me as a cult chronicler with academic credentials, in order to give the cult credibility?

Then Fr. Peter asked me, nodding toward Heather and *Aiya*, "Keeping your research aside then, what do you think of this?" Clearly, he was soliciting, in confidence, a cognitive confession of faith. It was a test. Would I declare my faith, or waffle? Sidestepping his question while trying still to demonstrate my sincere interest, I said that I had come to Vadiyakkadu three times, and was still trying to grasp what was happening here. I had brought my wife to see as well, implying that this should indicate my sincerity. This answer brought him no satisfaction.

4.2.2 A Difference of Opinion

Across the yard, Heather had gotten into a conversation with Kamatchiyamma, or "Ammacchi", she of the *buchandi* cautions, who quizzed Heather about the local parish of Mandalakkottai and whether, since we were guests of the parish priest, if he was

learning all about them from us. She derided Fr. Maria Arokiam with some deprecating remarks, as it was he who had forbidden Fr. Kulandairaj to say Mass at Vadiyakkadu. Heather swallowed Ammacchi's bait and explained to her that all priests are bound by the Canon Law, and that when her friends in the Charismatic Renewal to which Fr. Kulandairaj also belongs, wish to have a Mass celebrated privately, they make it a point of courtesy to ask their Bishop's permission. How, she asked Ammacchi, could Fr. Kulandairaj have "forgetten" to ask for such permission? "So, what do you think?", countered Ammacchi irately. "Do you think we can have a Mass tomorrow? Can we celebrate a birthday without a mass?"

4.2.3 A Turf Struggle

Fr. Peter left just as Heather came to join our small group. When the last remaining priest also left and we were alone, I told Heather that we had trouble, and that Fr. Peter was trouble incarnate. I suggested that he might make it impossible for us to do any scholarly work, forcing us to abandon our interview plans. Moments later, Fr. Peter joined us, and without any preliminaries said to me, abruptly, "You go. I want to talk to your wife." He seemed to have expected unquestioning obedience, and must have been a little taken aback when I did not budge. Perhaps, in part, I was too shocked by his bluntness to move. On the other hand, as a relative newcomer and guest, while not wishing to appear discourteous, I felt that I was entitled to be spared from being rudely bullied. I expected to be treated as a one who had come with a genuine interest, not as one to be suspected and criticised for insincerity, or lack of faith concerning something to which I had not yet been sufficiently exposed to make an informed judgment. Peter could, of course, had he wished, conversed with Heather in Telugu without my understanding a word, or obliging me to go away. His point was purely a show of power, to separate us on the grounds of his *fiat* alone. For her part, Heather had been alerted that trouble was brewing. We had to be together and put up a common front. She signaled me to stay put, which I did.

Fr. Peter asked again, "What do you think about all this?" I explained patiently, in the face of his hostile suspicion aggravated by my disobedience, that my concern was to observe and describe how people express and formulate their beliefs, rather than to affirm or contest the truth of those beliefs. We (including Heather in my doubt) had yet to make up our minds. This answer did not satisfy him at all.

"Yes. Keep your research aside," he said for the second time, insisting on what had to amount to an unambiguous confession of faith. Deciding not to yield him any advantage as a reward for his aggressive attitude, Heather countered with equal firmness, trying partly to mollify Peter and partly to shift to him the onus of answering, saying, "Father, why do you ask?" Perhaps we could understand what he was so anxious to extract from us.

"There's a good reason. I'll tell you afterwards," he said. Clearly, there were not likely to be any explanations until he had gotten what he wanted, which was more than just our protests of trustworthiness. "You're getting aggressive. Your tone is not nice", I told him with some annoyance at his presuming to order us about and to interrogate us as though we were somehow at fault for entering his life.

Faced now with two stubborn opponents, Peter realized that he could not simply bully us with his priestly authority, and his tone changed. He apologized a little, saying, "No, no. It's not. I didn't mean to sound that way." Peter was now in full flight and had to place the onus for his suspicions on another source of authority, Ammacchi. He explained that she had been upset by Heather's mention of Canon Law and failure to condemn Fr. Maria Arokiam, our host at Mandalakkottai. Peter told us that Ammacchi had asked him, "Shall we send them away?", though this expedient could just as well have been a scare tactic of his own. Fr. Peter's implicit message was this: He was the one who could make things right for us in Vadiyakkadu, but only if he were sure of us. Our entry to the group would depend on his patronage and

blessing. To get it we had to seek his protection from Ammacchi's suspicions. This was confusing. How much was he truly offering to facilitate our access under his own carefully circumscribed conditions, and how much was he bluffing to bolster his own authority enhancement and constituency-building within the cult?

4.2.4 Fr. Peter Is Placated

I told Fr. Peter that I had come to Vadiyakkadu long before he himself had heard of the cult, and that on each previous visit I had been received cordially by the family members, who were well aware that my purpose was research. Heather and I had spent the previous three days here, before his own arrival, on good terms with them. Heather added, "Father, we had no problem until you came along." "No, no," he said, "the old lady told me that even though they were friendly, it was because they didn't want to hurt you. They are really very suspicious." Without knowing in advance that we were coming, and in the absence of Maryamma and Yobu, Peter could only have had the opinion of Ammacchi, who had already condemned me as a *buchandi*. "When you accept the parish priest's hospitality you are obliged to him," he concluded, with the confidence of one whose social logic is unassailable.

"But surely, Father, you understand what I'm saying about the Canon Law?" Heather asked him. "Yes, yes," answered Fr. Peter, "but I have my own reasons for not practising that particular Canon. Our Lady is asking me to say mass, and that's why I will do it even though I have been instructed not to. These people are not in a position to understand the Canon Law."

"Don't you think that we who know better should explain?" Heather persisted. Peter's integrity as a conscientious, ordained priest was at stake, and his response required some explanation. "They are not ready to learn anything like that from us now," he answered. "This whole scheme of God does not want interference from His previous scheme of the Catholic Church. This has to be allowed to grow without the Canon Law threatening it." Heather had

made him vulnerable and he now sought at least some suggestion of sympathy, an affective complicity, from us with the unconventional personal position he had just declared. Again he asked, directing the question to Heather this time, "Keeping aside your research and all that, what do you feel?" I felt uneasy for her and interrupted to assure him about the principles of research ethics, the privileged nature of information we gather, and how he had no need to fear being exposed or betrayed to Church authorities. But I had missed the point. Peter was no longer asking us what we thought, but how we felt.

Impatient to express herself, Heather cut in, surprising me with an intensity deeper even than Fr. Peter's: "I have a deep relationship with Our Lady which finds its expression in ways which others may not understand. Before coming here I had prayed to her to lead me to the truth, and I have been praying intensely to the source of all truth, the Holy Spirit, who will lead me to it. I know nothing can go wrong, so I am not afraid. If I am thrown out of here, that will be a sign. So you decide what you want to do, because I know that my God's will is not meaningless and purposeless. His hand is upon me."

"Good, good," said Fr. Peter, placated if not convinced, and much subdued. "If you have prayed to Mary," he conceded, ignoring Heather's testimonial to the Holy Spirit, with Mary only leading her to its truth, "then she will lead you." Fr. Peter could be satisfied with nothing less than such an affective response, and Heather's had been rather more than he had expected, or could digest within the Marian framework of his own thinking. He excused himself and went off toward the kitchen to report to Ammacchi.

4.2.5 Why the Confrontation Mattered

We were glad afterward that this confrontation had taken place because it showed us that members of the cult are fearful and suspicious toward outsiders. The altercation revealed certain things we could not have learned in any other way - that Maryamma

and Yobu might have a concealed suspicion of us, that Ammacchi most certainly did, that Fr. Peter believed *Amma* had called him specially to defy Church authority, and that a new order was believed to be growing within the Catholic Church, unconstrained by its regulations. Fr. Peter seemed interested in involving us in the cult, even in researching it, but only if he could be absolutely sure of us as well as being our mediating patron. We had passed safely through our most critical moment. I could not have passed the test alone.

Around 10:00 p.m., the car returned. The moment Yobu got out, he greeted me with an expansive "Uncle!" and a vigorous handshake, while Maryamma, smiling broadly, wrapped her arms around Heather in a relaxed and affectionate hug. We do not know whether Fr. Peter witnessed this scene, but to imagine him watching in the background was gratifying enough.

Lost in his positivistic notions about "science", and unable to imagine any scientific hermeneutics other than that of a strict suspicion, Fr. Peter was unable to imagine that we might be equipped to understand the *Amma* cult's principles and meaning in its own terms. Lacking the normative expectations of local people, we were incapable of responding within their distinctive cognitive and affective frame of reference. We could be trusted only if we showed ourselves to be capable of an appropriately profound, but more importantly, candid and instantaneous emotional response (cf. Csordas 1990: 18, 33-4).

4.2.6 Perspective

While it is necessary to view any religious phenomenon within the larger ideological and ritual context of its own culture, it must not be forgotten that the culture locates its own meaning within the characteristic phenomena it generates, in a mutually reinforcing spiral of emotional confidence and intellectual credibility.⁵ I was fortunate, indeed, to have in Heather one who could mediate, ingenuously, between the world of Fr. Peter and my own mode of being, my scholarly concerns. Neither

of us, however, proved either desirous or capable of making the epistemological shift which might turn us into *Amma* cult devotees.

In this section, I have attempted to show how difficult it can be to bridge worlds of understanding. To mediate such worlds, one must break through the boundaries and defences, epistemological and personal, between them. Assurances of good faith acceptable in a value context not our own are difficult to give while remaining honest to one's own agenda. We established an uneasy truce with Fr. Peter, who never came to trust me, nor I him.

4.3 A "First-hand" Look at Moses' Resurrection

I had two opportunities to see the video of Moses' resurrection. The first was when I met Maryamma and Fr. Kulandairaj in March, 1992, and the video was shown to about twenty visitors. The next occasion was the second anniversary of the event itself on 17 June, 1993. The video was produced by "Meghala Studio" of Tanjavur and, while their advertisements appear from time to time in red letters on the screen, the more valuable information for my purposes, the recorded time and date, appear only sporadically. I could not help but think that if this video had been meant to document incontestable evidence of an event, the camera should have kept running continuously with its time and date features engaged. Kennedy told me that the video is regarded as one of the primary documentary evidences of *Amma* cult miracles. Regrettably, however, Velanganni devotional music has been dubbed over portions of the original sound track in sections where little action is taking place. The copy I saw is badly degraded and appears to be a multi-generation copy or just a poor one, with a lot of colour smearing and occasional colour inversions. I do not know whether the latter resulted from a copying defect, or was contrived intentionally in the studio by the editors in order to add a little extra visual drama.

Only three copies of the video exist, Kennedy told me, and the one I watched is kept at his home in Pabanasam. The other two

copies, he told me, are kept by Mrs. Elsa of Palaiyaputtur and by another "Chosen Family" residing in the Persian Gulf. The original is kept by someone in Madras, but no one would tell me who has it. I am tempted to think that the original was at one time with Meghala Studio, subsequently re-recorded, and only the edited second-or-greater generation copies exist.⁶ *Amma* had said that no further copies should be made without her explicit permission.

4.3.1 First Showing - What I Saw

During the first showing, Maryamma and Kennedy sat next to me, with Fr. Kulandairaj explaining each step as it took place. The video begins with a brief introduction by Kennedy in Tamil, proving at the outset that the tape is not original and unedited. The action opens with people milling around in the night, illuminated by the video light. The grave is visible, marked by a simple, white wooden cross. The people gathered around look uncertain and apprehensive. Fr. Kulandairaj excitedly identified for me several of the people whom I had just met, and whom I later came to know. Although he did not witness the resurrection himself, this was the event which precipitated Fr. Kulandairaj's initial contact with the *Amma* cult.

As the video progresses, a few men with spades start removing yellowish clay soil from the grave. The earth appears to be firm and hard from the way they are digging. There is a gap in the video sequence while the earth is removed to the point where the top of the wooden coffin is struck. It seems that a board has inadvertently been broken or dislodged. A bit of the dark interior of the coffin is visible, but the video light does not penetrate inside. After another hiatus, Maryamma is seen in the excavation, removing the remaining soil from around the top of the box by hand and attempting to pull up the broken board to widen the gap. She, rather than the excavators, is doing this, Fr. Kulandairaj told me, because "Our Lady had instructed that only Mary was allowed to first touch the child, and to remove it from the box" (Kulandairaj 1993.04.08). This was a common theme - *only* Mary was to do this or

that. Likewise, *only* Mary is to approach the altar to receive communion first when a Mass is celebrated in her presence, and *only* Mary is to use the western-style toilet installed in the Vadiyakkadu farmhouse, though it is the *only* toilet available for miles around.

The door of the *Aruḷ Arai* is shown closed. Overcome with fear as she tried to open the coffin, Maryamma ran into the house and closed herself inside the shrine room, refusing to come out and complete her task. Here Maryamma interjected, her eyes wide and shaking her hands loosely from their wrists, that she was terrified then, and is still terrified whenever she sees the video. In the next scene, the remaining earth and the broken board have been removed from the top of the coffin and a naked male child, who appears to be about ten months old, is visible within. He appears stunned by the brightness of the video light, though he does not appear to be frightened. He is grasping and putting in his mouth some dirty, partly decomposed white cloth on which he is lying. In the next scene, the child has fallen asleep and Yobu is seen kneeling in the grave, attempting to remove the cloth from his mouth. The time-recording which appears sporadically in the video indicates about 4:00 a.m., and the child has been lying, alone and unattended, in the coffin for about one hour. Still, Maryamma has refused to come out of the house.

The excavators proceed to remove all the earth from around the coffin. The scraping noises of the spades wake the child, who now begins to cry. A makeshift stretcher of bamboo poles is brought and, though the video does not show the coffin actually being removed from the grave, it is seen being carried on this stretcher from the gravesite to the veranda of the house. The child is not shown being removed from the coffin, but the next scene shows a woman bathing him. Maryamma, having emerged at last from the shrine room, after all of this has been done, is next seen rather awkwardly holding the child who is now wrapped in

cloth. Finally, the child is shown sleeping in the coffin, which has been cleaned out and cushioned inside with a blanket.

Following this final scene of Moses' resurrection, some still shots made from photographic prints are shown in rapid succession. They are pictures of Maryamma's leg-affliction of September and October, 1989.

4.3.2 Second Showing - the Audience

On the second anniversary showing, the television was set up on the veranda of the house so that a crowd of about two hundred could see it. My attention was focussed primarily on the audience, and I took some video-tape of viewers' reactions. Kennedy was concerned that I might possibly be breaking *Amma's* strict instruction to make no further copies without her permission. I assured him that I would not be pointing my camera at the television screen. My camera did, however, pick up some portions of the sound track.

The audience was comprised of a wide variety of people. The ages ranged from infants to people in their seventies. About one third were young, unmarried Tamil women, presumably members of some training course, escorted by about a dozen nuns. As shown by a variety of habits, the nuns were from several different congregations.

Another third of those present were Malayali families who had come from Kerala by car and minivan. These people had benefited earlier in the day from a lengthy question and answer session conducted by Elsa of Palaiyaputtur, in their own language. Among this group were two priests, dressed as laymen, who asked several pointed questions of fact especially about the relationships of Moses' family to Maryamma and Yobu's family. One of these priests watched the resurrection video with apparently bemused interest, the other with awestruck intensity. Later, when a Mass was concelebrated by five priests, these two stood with the others, but did not dress in vestments and refrained from pronouncing the consecration prayer. This means that they did not

technically concelebrate the mass. If called to account for their presence by their superiors, were it discovered that they had attended a forbidden mass, their honest defence could be that at least they had not taken part in the liturgy in their sacramental capacity. Their presence with the others beside the altar is ambivalent, however, as most of the people in attendance would not have been capable of making such a canonically important distinction. Thus, these priests had, at once, officially made their presence defensible to their superiors, while indisputably appearing at the altar, for their own flock, with the concelebrating priests.

The remainder of the audience was made up of about a dozen people, with their escorts, who had come for the relief of various ailments, and local villagers, who stood at the back, watching curiously. Most of the witnesses to the video appeared to be fascinated with its proceedings. Viewing the video was a ritual performance. The meaning of the events portrayed had been thoroughly discussed and explained before the showing.

4.4 Sr. Jacinta, osm

Sr. Jacinta is a sister of the Servites of Mary, an Indian congregation of religious with its Generalate in Tiruchchirappalli. Sr. Jacinta was one of the people prominently visible in the video who had personally witnessed the resurrection and who attended the second anniversary of Moses' resurrection on 17 June, 1993. At first she refused to speak about her experience when we approached her. Later she relented and sought us out in the crowd, probably having consulted with Maryamma and received instructions to give us an interview.

Sr. Jacinta is a kind of "hinge" in the *Amma* cult. She first learned of Maryamma and *Amma's* visions and miracles through a major figure, Josephine Thomas, and was instrumental in bringing Fr. Kulandairaj into the *Amma* cult. Sr. Jacinta first encountered the Jesuit priest when he spoke to a group of nuns in October, 1990 about his experiences at Medjugorje, the Marian apparition

site in Bosnia-Herzegovina. She was impressed by Kulandairaj's fervid devotion to the Virgin. It was, as he told me himself, an emotional talk he gave that day (Kulandairaj 1993.04.08). Sr. Jacinta invited him by letter in February, 1991, to celebrate the first *Amma* cult Mass at Vadiyakkadu because *Amma* had asked for him by name (Kulandairaj 1992.04.08). He failed to respond in a timely way, sending a letter of apology in April. Jacinta then visited him in person in Madras on June 28, 1991, and asked him to perform Moses' baptism on July 2. It was she who precipitated the miracle which initiated Fr. Kulandairaj into the cult when, contrary to his expectations, he found that the date in his busy diary on which she requested him to come to Vadiyakkadu was available (2.10.2).

4.4.1 Sr. Jacinta's Punishment?

In 1990-91, Sr. Jacinta had been Superior of her religious house in Pabanasam. By the time of our interview in June, 1993, she had been transferred by her Provincial to Karaikal, partly - perhaps entirely - because of the disturbance caused within her house and her congregation by frequent absences from her work while visiting at Vadiyakkadu, and by her enthusiastic involvement with the officially disapproved *Amma* cult. The parish priest of Pabanasam, Fr. M.S. Mariadoss, verified that, as far as he knew from events in their Pabanasam house, Sr. Jacinta had been negligent in her duties, and that the unusual form of her special devotions had caused confusion among the sisters there (M. S. Mariadoss 1993.06.27).

4.4.2 First Meeting with Jacinta at Josephine's Home

The first time I met Sr. Jacinta, at Josephine Thomas' home in August, 1992, she seemed reluctant to talk, wanting only to observe me. Before I left, though, she invited me to return the following week when the Bishop of Tiruccirappalli, S.L. Gabriel, would come to bless their church. I should feel free to come and meet the Bishop but, she cautioned, I must mention nothing to him about the *Amma* cult or her involvement in it (Jacinta 1992.08.16).

This may well have been to test how I might interact with a Bishop. As it turned out, these cautions did not matter, as I was unable to attend the event.

4.4.3 Jacinta is Chosen

When she agreed to an interview, Sr. Jacinta preferred to talk with Heather in Tamil about the resurrection of Moses. Jacinta explained that, at the beginning, she learned nothing directly about the miracles *Amma* was going to work, but only heard about *Amma's* predictions from others. Although she had been involved with the *Amma* cult for several months in 1990 and 1991, until the eve of the resurrection itself, she had never heard *Amma's* voice, nor had she been "Chosen".

"What happened on the 16th of June '91," Jacinta began, "I had an inspiration that I should come here [to Vadiyakkadu]. So, I was thinking that only after these people gave me a telegram, should I go. 'How can I go, now itself?' she asked herself. "But I felt I was being pushed... 'Go. Go.' So I said, 'Okay, I'll go there, just say a rosary, and return.' At that time, *Amma* had not said that I was selected [ie., one of the "Chosen"]. Only the selected people were supposed to come here. So, I said, 'Okay, I'll go and say the rosary.' I planned like that. I brought Sr. Xavier, and came here.

"As soon as I came, everyone looked at me - *oru madiri, oru madiri!*⁷ 'What is this?' I felt as though they were thinking that I came in spite of being told that only selected people were to be here. So, I said to them, '*Ayoyo*. I shouldn't come, is it? Okay, we'll go away.' As soon as I turned around to go, Josephine said, 'That is not why we are looking at you. We just spoke to *Amma*, and *Amma* has sent a person to call you, and here you are. That is why we are looking at you in surprise.'

"Then, I was very happy because I am in a congregation.⁸ So it is not as though I came on my own, now. It is as though *Amma* has called me, and I have come. So, because of that, I was very happy, and they said, 'Stay here, only.' So we said, 'Okay,' and

remained here." So it was that Sr. Jacinta miraculously joined the vigil of the select group invited to witness *Amma's* expected miracle.

4.4.4 Sr. Jacinta Tells of Moses' Resurrection

"It was night," said Jacinta, "and they had arranged a video and all that. I always carry my camera, especially when I know that such miracles are about to take place. I thought, 'Definitely a camera will be useful,' so I loaded mine and kept it ready. Until that time I had not heard *Amma's* voice. I told them that I desired to take photos when the resurrection takes place. '*Amma* has already given permission,' they said, 'so you can take pictures.' That too made me very happy."

Jacinta told how the resurrection was to take place at 10:00 a.m. the next day. The guests had no intention of remaining awake all night, and began to search out comfortable places to sleep in the open. It was the height of summer, hot and sultry, before the onset of the monsoon. "So, at night, at 10:00 o'clock, they kept the video camera ready, and went to sleep. They slept all over here." Jacinta swept her arm to indicate a wide space of bare ground in front of the house where people had slept. "I could not sleep at all, because it was the first time I was staying here. At the same time, like this, something's going to happen. A miracle is going to take place, no? Secondly, *Amma* will also speak so, in different ways, I was feeling happy. I could not sleep, so I put a chair in the middle [of the yard] and I sat all alone. All the others were asleep. It was dark all around. I alone was awake and praying the rosary. As I was saying it, suddenly, '*Gada-gada-gada*' (cf. 5.2.8), it rained. Everyone woke up. All those who were sleeping all over here, got up and stood there [pointing to the shelter of the veranda]. As for me, I fell asleep for about five minutes, as I sat there. I know I was awake until 2:00 o'clock because I was constantly looking at the time.

"*Amma* had said she would work the miracle around 10:00 o'clock. 'So, now it is 2:00 o'clock. That means another eight

hours, I thought.' Like this, I was always calculating the time. I fell asleep, and suddenly I heard everyone, '*Gidu-gidu-gidu*', going around. It had rained just for five minutes. So I said, 'What happened?' They said, '*Amma* has come. *Amma* called.' I didn't hear it, so I joined the others and kept my camera ready. They said that everyone should go to the *kallarai* [grave]. All of us went to the grave, and I was right in the front. Usually, I'm afraid of graves and graveyards. Right from childhood I was, and even though I became a sister, that fear was still within me. But this was a big *karyam* [event, happening]. If I am to take photos, then only if I'm right in the front can I take them correctly. They were digging, and I was right in front." Sr. Jacinta was, indeed, visible in the video, in the foreground taking photographs.

"By 2:15," she continued, "we were by the grave. And *Amma* had told us that we should start digging at 2:30. There were four people ready to dig. As there were another fifteen minutes, they said, 'Say prayers, Sister,' and I started to say the rosary. As we were saying the rosary, at 2:30, they started to dig.

"Then, we heard *Amma's* voice from there." Jacinta gestured to indicate a window of the house which opens just above the grave. "However, because all of us were saying the rosary we could not hear her clearly. They asked us not to say the rosary any more. As they were digging, *Amma's* voice was heard, 'Do it this way, *Appa*. Do it that way, *Appa*. Do not use the *gadapara* [steel digging bar] here.' That was the first time I heard *Amma's* voice, and I heard it very clearly. The people in the crowd had all heard *Amma* previously. 'This is *Amma's* voice,' they said to me. 'Listen, listen.'

"After they dug a little, *Amma* asked them to stop, and called all the four people who were digging inside the house. Then, all of us went inside. In between, Maryamma kept going into the *Arul Arai* to listen to *Amma*. Then she would come out and tell us, '*Amma* is saying this. *Amma* is saying that.'"

4.4.5 Strange Behaviour at the Gravesite

From what follows in Sr. Jacinta's account, Maryamma was highly mobile and active throughout the process of the opening of the grave. She was going in and out of the house to consult with *Amma* in the shrine room. She was speaking to the people gathered for the vigil from the window above the grave, the same window from which *Amma* gave instructions during the digging. Maryamma also came out of the house to stand with the observers. She called the diggers aside several times to give them *Amma's* explicit instructions. However, parts of Jacinta's account are ambivalent with regard to just where Maryamma was and what she was doing at any particular moment in the disinterment. "She kept telling us from that... that place [the window, or the shrine room?]. She was standing with us when *Amma* came, because we couldn't hear clearly. Sometimes *Amma* called these four people [the diggers]. Do you know why she said this? Because beneath the soil, the box was there, no? The box had become *oru madiri* [something wrong]. It had rotted on top, and so, a part of it had broken in, and earth had gone into the box, it seems. Nobody knew that [as the diggers had not yet reached the coffin]. *Amma* told them, 'The earth is going to hit the child, *Appa*. Do not use the *gadapara*, but move the earth carefully.' After that, they came back and removed all that soil carefully."

Had Sr. Jacinta moved from the gravesite when the four people went inside? What were the others doing? "All of us were outside. No, I did not move from there. I stood there only, in the same place. After the four people came and carefully finished removing the earth, we could see a slight crack, an opening on the top of the box. As soon as we saw this, the child suddenly cried out from within the box. I trembled, '*Gudu-gudu-gudu*', I shook. We could not see the child because the crack was very small. That has come very clearly in my camera. Only if it was opened could we see the child. That was when *Amma* had asked us to start praying once again. She asked all of us to say the Holy Spirit Prayer. All of

us shouted, '*Yesuve unakku nandri!* [Thank you Jesus!]' Mostly they were Hindus, a few Muslim ladies. There were about fifty to sixty people, I think. A small crowd. Then everyone kept saying, 'Thank you, Jesus! Thank you, Jesus! Thank you Jesus!' I became *oru madiri* [excited, disturbed], and I was shaking."

An unforeseen problem arose. Maryamma did not have the nerve to do the task which *Amma* had set for her. "*Amma* had said that Mary only should carry the child. They asked her to come and remove the cover, and carry the child, but Mary didn't want to go close to it. And all of us begged her, 'Mary, the poor thing is crying. The mud should not fall on it, Mary.' Each one of us kept saying this to her, but Mary was afraid. 'No, I won't go,' she cried. 'I'm scared. I'm scared.' Two people caught her and sent her inside [the grave]. Then, Mary pulled open the cover. As soon as she pulled it we could see the legs of the child. '*Bada-bada-bada*', the child was kicking. Immediately, Mary fainted right there. As soon as she fell, you know what happened? They carried Mary into the *Arai* and left her there. So now how to take the child? Five o'clock, six o'clock, the child was still inside the grave. The day had dawned, but Mary still hadn't come. She didn't recover at all."

Amma, however, was ready with new instructions. "Then, *Amma* said, 'Lift the child along with the box, and bring it inside, but don't hold the child. Bring the box and keep it on the veranda.' To do it, they had to cut the roots. It was all coconut tree roots, because it was one year after it was put there. They cut the roots, took the box out, and brought the child, along with the box, to the veranda." Everyone was astonished at this miracle which *Amma* had worked. Not knowing what else to do, Yobu lifted the child out of the coffin. "They bathed it, and gave it milk, and all that. There was a great surprise for me. As long as others were carrying it, the child was crying bitterly, but the moment they gave it to its mother, it stopped crying. How did this child

which was under the ground for a whole year, know its own mother? I was very surprised."

Sr. Jacinta was surprised by another feature of these strange events. "One of the diggers was his father [Rajendiran]. He didn't show any feelings on his face. Neither any joy, nor any awe. *Amma* had said that no one should touch the child except Mary, and that was it. Someone else would have said, 'Ayo, my child is crying so much'. Wouldn't he run and carry it? 'Whatever *Amma* says, that I will do,' he says. What discipline he has! That whole family won't do a single thing without consulting *Amma*. I was very happy to see that. It was the first day I really met them." Curiously, the very emotional responses one might expect if such a miracle has been staged, falsified, are the very features which, in a believer's perception, make it the most remarkable.

4.4.6 Jacinta and the Church's Authority

Sr. Jacinta then described her attitude to truth, authority, and her own outspokenness. "I saw it personally, that day. I even carried the child in my arms. My thing is this, that if I see something personally, then I'll speak very strongly. Whatever anyone may do... if I have not seen it or heard it, I will never say it. After that day, *Amma* has spoken many times to me."

Coming with such an orientation, Sr. Jacinta had obviously witnessed the events of the resurrection with great care. She had said that after *Amma* called the diggers into the house the first time, the others had followed. Contradicting this statement, however, she had also said that no one had moved from the gravesite. We asked her again whether, before hearing the child's cry, she had moved away from the gravesite. "I did not leave that place, and move. I was right in front because I wanted to take the photos step by step. I had planned every shot earlier... If there's any event to be covered, I always think in advance, 'How many people will be there? Where will they be positioned? At each given moment, what is going to take place? How much time will I

have?' I note everything. I shouldn't miss anything, because later they'll ask me, because I'm a sister, no? That is why, for any miracle - for all those I have seen - I'll note how many people are there, and I'll write it immediately in my diary. Because if I write it, later it'll be easy to narrate it."

4.4.7 Jacinta's Testimony, and a Strange Dream

Sr. Jacinta's account of the resurrection of Moses was the most complete, and most emotional, that I was able to obtain. She had another interesting story to tell, which for her constituted a rationale for her own intimate involvement with the *Amma* cult, whatever others, inside or outside it, might think of her. "Before I ever came to Vadiyakkadu, one night I had a dream. I saw huge waves and was standing on a beach. Suddenly the waves brought a statue of Our Lady which stood in front of me. Even as I was just looking at the statue, another wave took it away. And then, another huge wave came rolling, and there was this dark, plump girl without legs, holding a baby. And she came to the same place where the statue stood. I was wondering how a girl without legs could stand, but anyway, she stood. And I was in the dream, looking at the lady, and asked, 'Oh my, whatever happened to her legs?' Then people were trying to harm the baby, and snatch it away from the mother, and the mother was struggling. So I thought, 'What is this? Why are they harrassing this lady who is in trouble as it is, without legs?' I thought I should help her. Then she kind of cried out, and with that I woke up. It puzzled me a lot. 'Whatever could this drama mean?' I asked, and then somebody in Pabanasam told me about this and I came to Vadiyakkadu. So, it was like a message that *Amma* gave to me, even before I met Maryamma" (Jacinta 1993.06.17).

I was immediately reminded of what Mr. A.T. Rowe of Velanganni had told me of his own vision of a foreshortened Madonna and Child which seemed to be "buried to the waist in sand" (Rowe 1991.08.21). I am also reminded of a strange vision, about which more will be said in Chapter 6, of a Madonna by a woman

called "Margherita", described to the Italian Inquisition in 1560, and retold from Prosperi's account by Michael P. Carroll. In that vision, Mary had raised her gown to reveal that from the knees up she had neither skin nor flesh, but only bone (Carroll 1992: 58).⁹

4.5 Elsamma of Palaiyapputtur

Elsamma is a native of Palaiyapputtur, in Coimbatore District of western Tamil Nadu. She is in her late forties and is the mother of three children. Elsa assured us that she is not a gullible sort of person. Although none of her family wishes to be involved with the *Amma* cult in any way, yet they cannot reject the whole story outright. She is a Malayalam speaker and it was she who gave the orientation lecture to the group of visitors to Vadiyakkadu on Moses' second resurrection anniversary. Throughout her oration, she held Moses in her arms and pointed out important members of the *Amma* cult - Kamatchiyamma, Yobu, Moses' parents, Rajendiran and Pirabavati - as they came and went, preparing for the celebration. All the while, *Aiya* played close beside her. Later, during the showing of the video, she held *Aiya* continually. He seemed to be very attached to Elsa and most comfortable with her. On her arrival that morning by foot on a shortcut across a field, Elsamma was greeted with great affection by everyone. It was immediately obvious that here was one of the key people of the *Amma* cult.

4.5.1 Elsa's Photographic Shock

Elsa told of her initial experience of the *Amma* cult. She often uses the Malayalam term *Madavu* interchangeably with *Amma*. This is the common Keralite form of the Tamil *Mada* (Elsamma 1993.06.17).

"I first came here the 11th of August, 1990. That day, Maryamma was not here. She was sent to Pattukkottai, so we went there and met her. We took many photos. It may have been a test for me. When we gave the film for developing, it was completely blank. Not a single photo did I get. So, we thought, could it be some mistake that I made? All of us felt doubtful, but later, when

we asked *Madavu*, she said, 'That was the devil's work, my daughter, because you would take these photos and show them to many people. Many will believe, and that is not pleasing to the devil. That is why he ruined your photos. All of you, do not be afraid of anything. Be courageous. Believe that God is always with you, and do all that needs to be done.' After that, I used to come now and then."

Had Elsa known in advance when Moses' resurrection was to take place? "*Mada* had told us that the child would be resurrected, but the date was given to us on [June] 16th at midnight, that is, that it's going to take place, but when, *Amma* had not told us. *Amma* said that she, too, did not know. Only if *Andavar* says, can *Amma* know, isn't it?"

May 16, 1991, a month before the resurrection, was the day *Amma* instructed Maryamma to water the grave daily (Maryamma 1993.06.14). According to Josephine Thomas (1993.06.27), *Amma* had announced the previous January that the child would be resurrected. Josephine also records that *Amma* instructed on June 9 that a video crew be hired. In the light of these preparations, Elsa's statement that until midnight on 16 June, the date was unknown is curious. Elsa's deferral to what *Andavar* alone can know suggests that, as a Roman Catholic, she is more sensitized than *Amma* cult members of Hindu background to the finer points of orthodox understandings of the relationship between Mary and Jesus.

4.5.2 Elsamma's Account of Moses' Resurrection

"Ten days earlier, *Amma* had summoned us here. They informed me in Palaiyapputtur. They either phone up when we are to come, or write a letter. From that day onward, I came here and was conducting prayers. I was here, and until the child was taken out of the grave, I was right by the side for all the function. It took place on Monday morning. So, on Sunday... [16 June, 1991] at midnight, *Amma* came and said that tomorrow, at 2:30 [a.m.] you will start digging. Mary alone should open the box. She alone

should pick up the child first. She alone has the permission to touch it, no one else. That is when Mary... *Amma* told us about the date. Before that, we did not know the date."

Elsamma described the sequence of events. "*Amma* called everyone inside [at midnight]. After that, from inside the *Aruḷ Arai*... after [*Amma's*] speaking everything, [*Maryamma*] came out. After [receiving *Amma's* instructions] everyone went outside and stood there. *Aiya* was sleeping inside. When we came out, *Aiya* began crying, so I brought him along with me. He was with me throughout."

When the pit was being dug, did *Maryamma* go inside the house? Elsa said nothing of the diggers being called inside separately, or of the whole party going into the house before the box was opened completely. "That was because when *Maryamma* moved the plank [from the top of the coffin] we heard the child crying. When she heard the crying, *Maryamma* was afraid to pick it up. Even we would feel afraid, no, when you hear a dead child's cry... it's come back to life. Even we would have a feeling [of trepidation], no? So *Maryamma* couldn't muster the courage to pick up the child. She went to the back of the house. Why? To pray and get courage. All of us prayed. *Maryamma* went that side, and prayed for courage, and came again. It was then she came back and opened the box."

So was it when she heard the child crying that she went away? "Yes, when she first heard the crying from the child inside the box. She was afraid to pick up it up. What might happen? Even we would get such a feeling [if we were in her place]. Then, all of us prayed that *Maryamma* should get God's strength, and have the courage to pick it up. We can't pick it up, *Amma* has said. Then it would go away [die again] as it is, so *Maryamma* had to get the courage. She went away and prayed. Then, when she felt courageous... you saw her kneeling down prayerfully [in the grave, scraping away the last of the earth from the partially opened coffin]. She was still afraid to pick up the

child. Anyone would be. So, when she opened the box and saw the child, she felt giddy and fainted.

"I'll tell you about that child's [Maryamma's] condition. It was more than ten days since she had proper sleep. It was the time after the death of Rajiv Gandhi, and in all these parts over here, the L.T.T.E. [Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, from Sri Lanka] were all over the place between the seashore and here. And so, because of that, will we have some trouble from them? Will this event take place or not? So she was afraid and could not sleep. She prayed always."

From the time they started digging, until you heard the child's cry, were you standing in the same place? "Yes, I was. No one moved, not a single person. Everyone was there." Was it when the plank of wood broke and earth began to fall into the box that everyone was called inside? "No, no. After the box was opened, only then were we called inside. Only after Maryamma opened the box, and had to be carried inside. All of us stood there for some time, and praised God, and prayed, saying, '*Devame nandri* [Thank you, God]'. Then, *Amma* called all of us inside. At that time, the child was alone outside. Until Maryamma regained consciousness, the child remained within the box. It did not move this side or that.

"Now, because Maryamma did not have the strength to walk from [the house to the grave], *Amma* asked us to bring the box to the veranda. But when we took the box, there was a test. One person who dug and sat right near the box was Moses' father. The child was crying bitterly. You can imagine how difficult it would have been for him not to touch the child. It is his own child, isn't it? Wouldn't he feel like picking it up when it cries so bitterly? In spite of that crying, no one had permission to touch the child. *Mada* had said that only Maryamma was to touch the child first. It could be to test us, perhaps, that God was making it cry. No mother could bear to hear any child cry like that. But in spite of the crying, even then the child's father did not touch

it. This is a lesson for us. It shows his trust in God. That's a 'speciality' [charism].

"After the child was taken out of the box, and given a bath, anyone who wanted to could carry it. Then, *Amma* said that the child should be laid inside the box for some more time, after spreading a cloth so that the earth won't stick to it, because it was full of earth. After some time, *Amma* said we could feed it some milk. Until then we hadn't fed it anything. Even so, the child urinated and defecated inside the box. We can see in the video everything that was inside the box. No one gave it any *bhaksanam* [sustenance], yet it did this. All this is God's greatness, no?" Again, the commonest events, if the miracle was contrived, serve the believer as the most remarkable evidence of its factuality.

What happened after that? "Then we brought the box and kept it in the shrine room. Everything has been done according to what *Amma* said. Nothing takes place in this house outside of what *Amma* has said. Even if a small pit has to be dug, they do it only with *Amma*'s permission. That is the thing about this place. Anything has to be only with *Amma*'s permission." Elsa had no more to tell about the events of the resurrection, but she had something to say about *Aiya*, as we shall see shortly.

4.5.3 Questions About the Resurrection

The resurrection of Moses was, at the time of my fieldwork in 1991 to 1993, the most important event by which Maryamma's sacred career was known, the keystone event in the construction of her sacred identity. One of those "quantum leaps" taken by her career, like the breast surgery which first attracted the attention of numbers of Christians to Maryamma, the resurrection projected her upon a wider public and raised issues in minds other than those who had taken interest in her earlier. When I first went in search of Maryamma, I knew neither her name nor that of her village. I could ask only for the girl who had brought a child back from death.

There are gaps and uncertainties in this miracle, and filling them propels one either toward credence or skepticism. One's response constitutes either a validation of cult claims or a deepening suspicion of duplicity. The core story has four men summoned by *Amma* to unearth the coffin. Maryamma is in the grave. She hears the child cry, and sees it. She faints and is carried into the house, not to return. *Amma* continues to direct operations until the child is brought to the veranda of the house. This seems like a simple sequence, but the testimonies of Elsa and Jacinta, two eye-witness believers who are both cult proselytizers through whom many people have heard the details of this miracle, vary wildly at certain points. Let us examine these differences.

Jacinta was very conscious of the precise time. She has everyone but herself asleep at midnight, 16 June. *Amma* had promised the miracle at 10:00 a.m. the next day. By 2:00 a.m., nothing has yet happened but a shower. Then, before 2:15 p.m. Jacinta dozed off and *Amma* called and instructed everyone to stand by the grave and start digging at 2:30. Elsa has no one knowing the time of the resurrection until midnight when *Amma* called, gave detailed instructions about how Maryamma alone should first to touch the child, and had everyone stand outside. When *Amma* came again, Jacinta was leading a rosary as the digging began at 2:30, so *Amma* could not be heard clearly. Maryamma, it seems, was quite mobile at the time and Elsa describes her as going back and forth between the *Arul Arai* and the crowd relaying *Amma's* instructions. Jacinta says *Amma's* voice was coming from the graveside window of the house.

Amma anticipated that the coffin was fragile and might be damaged by the digging tool and instructed them to use it carefully. Jacinta has *Amma* repeatedly summoning the diggers into the house for instructions, and later everyone else. When all but the very last bit of earth had been removed, one of the boards could be seen to be dislodged or broken and a dark space, which Jacinta photographed, was visible, though the child was not.

Maryamma entered the grave to remove the last of the earth and remove the board. She heard the child cry, was frightened, then saw the child's legs inside the coffin, fainted, and was helped into the house. Elsa has Maryamma enter the grave, hear the child, go away to summon courage, return and remove the board, see the child and faint. Jacinta has *Amma* request very emotional prayers of thanks to Jesus shouted. What is least clear, and most critical, is just when *Amma* ordered everyone back into the house after the uncovering of the grave. Elsa has everyone go into the house only after Maryamma collapsed upon seeing, not merely hearing, the child. She says the praise was offered and then *all were called inside, leaving the child alone* [My emphasis]. The video shows Maryamma next to the crack in the top of the coffin which seems to correspond to the time she heard the child's first cry, which she herself could as well have made, so close was she to the box. The next scene shows the board removed and the child visible inside the box.

Two matters, at least, are odd about the climactic point when Maryamma first glimpses the child and faints. First, it is peculiar that the compellingly dramatic scene of Maryamma first seeing the child's legs is not recorded on video. The video cuts in abruptly to show her fainting and a flurry of activity to support her and remove her from the scene to the *Arul Arai*. It is quite possible that in the highly charged emotional atmosphere, the witnesses could have been led to believe solely from the reactions of Maryamma whom they trust, that she *must* have heard and seen the child, then sung their songs of praise, and gone inside on *Amma's* order without ever pausing to verify whether the child was actually inside the coffin or not. Secondly, and perhaps not a detail that *Amma* cult leaders would desire to be a regular part of the story, *Amma* insisted that *all the windows and doors of the house be securely closed after everyone had gone inside* [my emphasis] (Parameswary 1993.06.16), until *Amma* released them to go outside again, dig the earth away from around the coffin, and

bring the child, still inside the box, on the prepared stretcher. Why had *Amma* asked for this stretcher to be made on the previous day, even though she continued to insist right up to the moment of opening the coffin that Maryamma be the first to touch the child, and lift it out of the grave? Her role in bringing the child out of the grave clearly enhances Maryamma's personal sacredness. Might she be marked with a death-pollution if she did? Did *Amma* anticipate Maryamma's inability to act? Was this drama staged to provide a significant number and variety of credible eyewitnesses? If so, those who planned and executed it were taking a big chance and must have been confident of its success.

The equanimity throughout this process of Moses' father, Rajendiran is noted by both Jacinta and Elsa. Both take it as a special charism of faith and obedience. How, they ask, could a father not rush to his crying child, once dead, now found to be alive, but still in the grave? It showed his implicit obedience to *Amma's* instructions. The threat hanging over the event was that if *Amma* were not strictly obeyed, the child might again die. Yet, Yobu had the temerity to act against her instructions and pick up the child when Maryamma could not. Rajendiran's manner and Yobu's action conferred on them a certain sanctity, confirming their natural roles in this miracle, their moral status in the cult, and not a little hagiography of their own.

If a miracle actually occurred, so be it. If it did not, how may we explain these events? Moses shows a striking resemblance to Rajendiran, looking not at all like his wife, Pirabavati, and the infant in the grave is clearly the same child whom I saw in June, 1993. At that time, Moses also looked like a three-year-old, quite consistent with his original birth date in June, 1990. In the resurrection video, he looks like a ten-month-old child, not a newborn, and again, this is consistent with his premature still-birth. It seems, also, that the child defecated before being removed from the coffin. This is taken as a supplementary grace in the miracle - implying that *Amma* had

herself been nurturing him in his return from death which allowed him to mature to the stage of growth he would have attained by the time of his resurrection. By this argument, there should have been a lot more excrement in the box, when it can be seen rationally as the simplest evidence that the child had been fed shortly before the disinterment at the very time that he was supposed to have been sealed under the earth.

Maryamma has shown repeatedly that she is capable of taking advantage of circumstance and people's doubts to construct the image of her own holiness, as when Josephine needed supernatural help in convincing her husband and Mr. Thomas' saw the vision of a bleeding crucifix in his own home (3.7.3.2). If a miracle of this sort were needed, and Pirabavati was in fact in trouble with her pregnancy, it might well have been possible to secrete the living child for those months, leaving her to believe her child had died, until the time was ripe for him to appear again. The child's crying ceases, however, when Pirabavati holds him. While this is perceived as an ancillary miracle of recognition, it might just as well suggest that Pirabavati was a party to deception and had been caring for the infant in secret all along.

With everyone present convinced that Maryamma had seen the living child inside the partially opened coffin, followed by Amma's instruction for everyone to enter the house and close all access, the child could easily have been introduced into the box covertly, without chance of discovery. The word of the pious Rajendiran also is dubious. We tried unsuccessfully to interview him, but A. Balraj of Tanjavur spoke with him as part of the Bishop's enquiry (5.2.15). All Rajendiran would say was that his wife went to Vadiyakkadu that day and brought back this living child, a statement which is patently false from the visual evidence of him, digging the grave in the video along with Yobu and two others. What is the reason for this dissembling?

Rajendiran was the sponsor for the celebration at which two to three thousand people were fed on 16 July, although Fr. Kulandairaj insisted that Yobu had sold family lands to pay its costs (Kulandairaj 1992.04.08), while Yobu's mother, Kamatchiyamma stoutly denied that any of her family's land had been sold (Kamatchiyamma 1993.06.19). Could it be that Rajendiran and Maryamma saw a joint benefit in her raising his child from death and planned it months in advance? Rajendiran, with his financial resources and status as a landowner, may stand as the invisible partner behind any number of the cult's sacred events.

4.5.4 "About Aiya, We Cannot Say Anything"

Continuing our interview with Elsa, we ventured to ask about the "special" child of Vadiyakkadu who is so close to her. "Why is there so much fear for *Aiya*?", Heather asked her. "Has *Madavu* said anything about some danger to him?"

"What!?" Elsa responded, taken entirely by surprise.

"There seems to be a lot of fear that *Aiya* may be kidnapped", said Heather. "*Madavu* has said many things about *Aiya*," Elsa said, regaining her composure. "About *Aiya*, we cannot say anything, because then the whole world will come to know, isn't it? That is why everyone is afraid, even to speak about *Aiya*. If they come to know, *Aiya* will have all types of troubles. So *Amma* has told us not to speak of him as '*Aiya*', but to call him '*Raja*'. Maryamma told us this. Because *Aiya* is small, that is why there are many dangers, why we are afraid. So no one should speak about him. It is not his time as yet.

"It is like when Jesus was a child. There was danger, and fear, and he had to be taken away from one place to another. So in the same way, maybe... Yes, but we are not supposed to speak about it. That is why we try to hide the child and take him about, here and there. Of course, many people may be suspicious about *Aiya*. They ask, 'Does Maryamma have a child?', but we cannot say anything because *Amma* has told us we cannot speak of it. In the beginning, we could speak, and told everybody about *Aiya*. At

first, everyone could come and see him. We had permission for everything. Then, *Amma* said, 'Now for some time, no one should speak about *Aiya* to outsiders.' There are many reasons because of what happened here. Many incidents took place. That is why we're all so afraid. So, because of that fear, nobody speaks."

4.6 A Very Special Child

On 13 November, 1990, *Amma* gave Maryamma a "special child" to nurture and protect. This little boy has no name. "Sir", "Master", or "Lord" are all connoted by the Tamil, "*Aiya*", as he is called. The exoteric discourse of the cult does not make explicit exactly how *Aiya* came to Maryamma as a blessing and an obligation, although I heard one origin story which is related in the next section. *Aiya*'s presence is a sign, and focal point, for the millenialist discourse of the *Amma* cult. For insiders, acknowledgement of *Aiya* as the promised second coming of Christ is an essential tenet of their faith. Coming in their time, to see, feel, and hear him, to share in the secret of his presence, and to watch him grow, appeals to Christian adherents in a way emotionally unmatched by any other appeal to faith.

4.6.1 Dr. Alagappan's Introduction

I first heard of *Aiya*, the holy child of Vadiyakkadu, from Dr. Alagappan, a Hindu physician of the Child Jesus Hospital in Tiruchchirappalli the day before I met Maryamma and Kulandairaj. Alagappan had a curious story to tell: *Ma*, the "Divine Mother", as the Hindu doctor called Our Lady, had told Maryamma that on a certain date, she would give her a child. When the day arrived [13 November, 1990], a red cloth descended in which an infant, crying red tears, was wrapped. A divine voice said, "Do not touch the child". Then some roses fell, and Maryamma was told to wipe away the tears with the rose petals. Later, the child was seen suckling. Its tummy filled up and it was satisfied, yet no one could see the breast from which it had fed. While I have heard no report of Maryamma suckling *Aiya*, since she is neither a goddess nor has pregnancy, officially, ever enabled her to express milk,

this story echos *Amma's* first gift to Santi. When Santi first saw *Amma* closely, *Amma* poured milk for her into a tumbler which overflowed. Others saw the milk pouring, as though from mid-air, but could not see *Amma*. The motif of overflowing milk is reiterated in the *Annai Velanganni* film.

For Tamils steeped in Hindu mythology of powerful but nurturing *ammans*, of child gods like baby *Murugan* (*Balamurugan*) and baby *Krishna* (*Balakrishnan*), and of child saints like *Tirujnanasambandar* (Schulman 1980: 12), this story has as immediate an appeal as it has for Catholics devoted to the Virgin, the Holy Family, and especially for *Kulandai Yesu*, the Infant Jesus of Prague, who has recently become immensely popular in India. The tale fits rather neatly into a Tamil Hindu model of holy childhood in its resemblance to the hagiography of the *Saiva Siddhanta* saint *Tirujnanasambandar*. *Sambandar* received his divine knowledge as an infant when the goddess *Parvati* came upon him hungry, took pity on him, and suckled him.¹⁰ *Alagappan's* account points directly to this antecedent model of a very special kind of childhood, and lays the foundation and expectation for future wonders in this child's life. I heard no such elaborate story from anyone else, and since precise details of *Aiya's* arrival are shrouded in mystery, it is difficult to argue from silence.

The child, who has not been named, *Alagappan* continued, does not look or behave like a child. He is indifferent, does not ask for things, will not weep, and is always quiet and calm. Whereas another child would reach out, expecting to be picked up, this one extends his hands as if to bless people. Once, when a nun attempted to photograph him, the child glared at her and the camera. When the film was developed, all the frames were good except this single exposure, which was completely dark.

Dr. *Alagappan* was quite clear about his own understanding of the sacred; he said he had no motive, as he suggested I might have, to analyze and prove or disprove anything. "We simply want to pray and come away." To Dr. *Alagappan*, the evidence for the

divine presence in Vadiyakkadu was unmistakably clear. Quoting the ancient Saiva saint *Tirumular*, he said, "'Love and Siva are different to foolish people.' Did Jesus not also say, 'God is love'?" Since God is one, Alagappan assured me, the particular form assumed by holiness does not matter. I could not resist probing him for more such theological insights and comparisons and asked how, in his view Mary, a human being even though a Christian saint, can be treated by Hindus as a goddess. "If a stone" [by which he referred to sculpted *murtis* and naturally shaped *svayambhulingas*] can emit god's power, god's grace, why can not a human being?" It became evident in our conversation that Dr. Alagappan was prepared to freely integrate Christian persons and symbols into the Hindu divine vision and let these "imported" symbols represent that vision (Alagappan 1992.04.25).

4.6.2 First Sight of Aiya

I first saw *Aiya* for myself on the day I met Maryamma and Fr. Kulandairaj, 26 March, 1992. *Aiya* was playing about, unattended and apparently unnoticed by the adults, as would be expected of any child of about three years in a rural household like Maryamma's. I noticed him climbing the bars of the outside front window of the *Arul Arai*, and a young man asked me if I would like to see him. I had not yet said that I knew anything about *Aiya*, and the young man may or may not have expected me to know. I declined the invitation, and later watched *Aiya* playing quietly beside a bench near where I sat. I had much more to learn before showing any special interest or raising any suspicions. At this time, *Aiya* looked about three, possibly as much as six months older or younger.

At the end of my first interview that day with Maryamma, I mentioned to V.S. John, who had interpreted for us, "I understand there is another child." He started, and asked with some apprehension in his voice, "You know about that?" I nodded. He quickly called Maryamma back and told her that I knew about the gift-child. Maryamma became grave. "Who told you?" she asked.

Suddenly, both the doctor and I were vulnerable. Had I betrayed a trust; had Alagappan? I answered as casually and innocently as I could that Alagappan had told me. They accepted this information, but would tell me no more.

4.6.3 Honouring and Protecting *Aiya*

When Heather and I arrived 13 June, 1993 in advance of the celebration of Moses' second resurrection anniversary, as we drove into the farmyard unannounced on our motorcycle, I saw Ammacchi running headlong with *Aiya* in her arms for the cookhouse. Neither emerged during this first of several daily visits when we were greeted amiably by Yobu and Maryamma, and spoke for quite some time. When we returned the next day, *Aiya* was to be seen playing, just as I had seen him before, and no one was bothered. Heather had been charged to befriend the family and engage its members in conversation. She met Yobu as he was coming down the steps of the house with *Aiya* in his arms, and asked, "Who is this baby? Your child?" Yobu affirmed this nonverbally. "What is his name?" Yobu answered, "*Raja*". No one addressed the child by this name, however, and when most of the guests arrived two and three days later, everyone spoke to him, and of him, as "*Aiya*". When speaking to him, everyone including Maryamma invariably used very respectful verbal forms, as they would address an elder - "*Vanga* [please come]", "*Ukkarunga* [please sit]". Every request, every statement ended with "*-nga*", the Tamil honourific termination. They handled him physically and verbally as though he were someone very, very special.

Heather seemed to be the only heretic in her speech patterns, saying "*Enna Da*", (for which "What, Hon?" might be the closest translation), and such other familiar forms appropriate for a small child. This difference seems to have endeared her to him, whatever his elders may have thought of it. She persisted in this casual way, introducing him to our album of wedding photos, which he asked to see again and again during our stay. His positive response to this overfamiliar manner and his persistent

interest in our photos seemed to confer a preferred status on Heather, and obliquely on me, in spite of his invariably pointing me out in the photos as "*Buchandi*", a demon, as Kamatchiyamma had taught him to regard me, perhaps to have him err on the side of safety if I were to get close to him. From time to time, *Aiya* would call Heather, show her things he had found or done, and ask again to see our photo album. As people arrived, they were observing him closely, and when they saw that he was familiar with Heather, it was evident that she grew in stature in their eyes. She must be special because the child was doting on her.

Aiya is a friendly, accommodating child. He was almost as comfortable with Elsamma as with Maryamma when she played with him. Wanting to be seen and appreciated for successfully throwing a stone, then a stick, into a cart, *Aiya* persisted in calling Elsa to watch him, quite like any normal child his age. Yet no one but Heather treated him like a child verbally, and this at once endeared her to him and left others feeling that she was one who is especially blessed. Some, like Fr. Peter, suspected her motives.

Unlike the widely publicized Moses and his resurrection, information about *Aiya* comes only through direct inquiry, and what one can learn depends on the level of trust in which the enquirer is held. It is as though information seeps out in the conversation, involuntarily. Kennedy told me quietly, as though moved beyond discretion and self-control, "Jesus took the form of this child. And then, a few days later... Was it four days or seven days...? He was given." This confidence was a direct consequence of Maryamma's permission given to Kennedy and Josephine, to tell me anything I should ask.

We asked Parameswary, a resident of Pattukkottai and a regular participant in *Amma* cult activities, "Why are people so afraid for *Aiya*? Did *Amma* say anything?" "Yes," she answered, "*Amma* has said many things. There are many hardships awaiting him. And so, we must not allow God's plan to get spoiled. Of course,

even if people take him away, it won't be like last time. They won't kill him. Because that is not God's [will, plan]... Now he has entrusted the child to us, so we have to take care. Because of his hardships, God will have to do something. You know," Parameswary continued, lowering her voice, "in Israel they now know... There are these wise men in Israel, who study the stars. They have made an announcement that the Messiah has come, which means now they will start searching. And since they follow the stars, uh?... they can find out where he is and come here. Also certain things have happened which make us very cautious." For me, this narrative was getting too, too weird - Wise Men coming from the West to find the Christ Child with malice in their hearts, intent upon doing him harm.

This concern was echoed by Elsamma, who said nothing about this Messiah and Israel, but said, "Certain things have happened, which have given us reason [for caution]. We know... *Amma* has told us many things... that hardships are awaiting him." Parameswary, Elsa, and Jacinta all gave consistent answers about the danger in which *Aiya* is understood to be. *Amma*'s teachings about him and her cautions have been well inculcated in the key members of the *Amma* cult, exemplified by Ammacchi's alacrity, no questions asked, in rushing with the child in her arms for the shelter of the cookhouse upon our arrival.

4.6.4 *Aiya* Knows *Amma* in All Her Forms

Aiya took a great interest in our photo album which had pictures of Velanganni and other shrines at the front, and of our wedding at the back. As he flipped through it, the only thing he seemed to notice was "*Amma*". He could pick her out of any picture, and recognize a broad range of her iconography. Each time *Amma*'s picture appeared, whether on a flag or in a wrought-iron grill-work, or inside a shrine, dressed in white and blue like *Lurdu Mada* or in gold and crown like *Arokkiya Mada*, holding the Child or not, he was always able to spot *Amma*, even in the form of a tiny statue arranged with those of other saints. His readiness to

recognize female figures as *Amma* was tested when I pointed out a goddess figure in a row of little shrines which resembled so many roadside Marian shrines. I was surprised at his adamance that the figure *could not* be *Amma*.

Often in these pictures, *Amma* was not the main subject of attention, or even in focus. For example, in one of our wedding pictures, there is a statue of Mary, the Immaculate Conception, in the background, facing obliquely away from the camera, and rather obscured by underexposure. For *Aiya*, that statue of *Amma* was the most important element in the photograph, although other images were more central, much bigger and brighter. If *Amma* were anywhere in the background, even in a darkened back corner, *Aiya* could find her. He seemed to have eyes only for her, and would point her out methodically - "*Amma... Amma...*".

Aiya's discernment quite astounded me, and I tried to confuse him by showing him a picture of the god *Madurai Viran*, holding a bloody sacrificial knife, his body all red, with his two wives standing on each side. I asked, "*Amma?*" And he said, "*Nay* [dog]". At first I wondered if he was calling *Amma* "*Nay*", or was he expressing me his opinion of the fierce-faced god?" Then I realised he was pointing to a terra cotta horse which stood beside the god's shrine! I corrected him, "No, *kudirai* [horse]." But I persisted, pointing to *Madurai Viran* and, teasing him by associating him with the red-faced god, asserted, "This is *Aiya*." He became a little stern: "*Illai, illai* [No, no]," he repeated. No wonder he thought me a *buchandi*. At one point I tried to make him tell me who the god in the picture was: "*Chollu, chollu* [Tell me, tell me]". *Aiya* responded, "*Cholla matten* [I won't tell you]". Henceforth, that picture was only a picture of horses and he paid no attention to any of the other figures. I showed him photos of several of other Hindu gods and goddesses, asking each time, "Is this *Amma?*" To each one, *Aiya* said, "*Illai* [No]".

One of the pictures I showed *Aiya*, and which he happily affirmed to be *Amma*, was a photograph of "*Annai Velanganniamman*",

the version of *Arokkiya Mada* set up in roadside shrines by Hindus in Vyasarpadi, a working class suburb in the north of Madras. There I discovered a popular devotional phenomenon which crosses religious boundaries. Perhaps because *Arokkiya Mada* is now assuming the mantle of the most powerful and universal goddess, perhaps because of the proximity and prominence of *Mada's* church in neighbouring Sastri Nagar and in her shrine at Besant Nagar in the south of the city, Vyasarpadi Hindus maintain several streetside shrines which are dedicated to her.

One such shrine was prominently labelled "*Annai Velanganniyamman Alayam*", that is, "holy place of the goddess who is the Mother at Velanganni". This use of *amman* identifies the Blessed Virgin Mary unequivocally as a Tamil goddess. My photographs of this statue and inscription disconcerted the Tamil Catholic priests to whom I showed them. I asked the priest at neighbouring Sastri Nagar parish for his response to such local shrines, all of which use Catholic symbols and include a prominent *undiya*, or donation box.

"Of course they are privately maintained and make a lot of money for their owners," he told me. "For every festival, they come and request us to bless these shrines and officiate by celebrating Mass there, but we refuse. If we were to participate, to recognize them, those shrines would expand out of control. They are not under our diocese's control now, so what would happen?" (N. Arul Deva Doss 1992.07.17). His diocesan colleagues are conscious of the hazards of indiscriminately patronizing such emerging shrines and their cults of worship. While one may be ephemeral, another may take root, appear to confer healing or other graces in the name of the Virgin Mary, conceived as she is as a goddess, attract outsiders' interest, and become in time a pilgrimage shrine with its own festival. Outside the official control of the Church, such shrines which use Catholic symbols can only be seen by the Church as sources of confusion and misunderstanding.

For the Hindu sponsors of these independent shrines, and their patrons, some of whom may also be Catholics, the reticence of Catholic priests to honour their own saints by celebrating Mass at the shrines is simply incomprehensible. One Hindu shrine keeper explained that lay people are, with great effort and devotion, honouring and praying to Catholic saints while the saints' own priests, whom they feel ought to be sympathetic, seem ungrateful and reluctant to appreciate their efforts to promote "*Amma*". Some of this misunderstanding may stem from the practices by which brahman priests become regular officiants in a local non-brahman shrine by honouring it, regardless of the deity represented therein, and eventually assume control of it. In contrast, Catholic hierarchy and authority are obstacles to this flexible and pragmatic recognition of opportunities for sacred specialists in popular, local sacred spaces.

The same incomprehension is tangible at Vadiyakkadu in response to the Bishop of Tanjavur, the ecclesiastical official ultimately responsible for the hugely popular Marian shrine at Velanganni, who refused to let the priests and nuns under his authority to participate in the *Amma* cult liturgy.

I showed *Aiya* another picture, one of Jesus' face, and he responded *Appa* ["daddy"]. This confused me initially because, in the family circle, his *appa* is Yobu, and Yobu did not at all resemble the picture. *Aiya* is being taught his own place in the sacred hierarchy, naming Jesus *Appa*. I left this point for the moment, but when *Aiya* was looking at one of our wedding photos, I pointed out a crucifix in the background and asked "*Yaradu* [Who is this]?" Again he delightedly announced, "*Appa!*" He was a little less consistent in recognizing Jesus than *Amma*, yet each time Jesus appeared as Christ the King, the Sacred Heart, or crucified, *Aiya* recognized him. I asked Parameswary about this identification, and she accepted it as right and proper. But how is the relationship understood between *Aiya* and Jesus - as son to father?

Aiya's surprising familiarity with Catholic devotional icons took a different turn when another visitor produced a picture book of such European statues as the Christ of Limpias (Christian 1992) and the Virgin weeping, bleeding, moving their eyes, and other such miraculous phenomena. As *Aiya* turned the pages of the book, he pointed out each of the various styles of representing Mary as "*Amma, Amma... Amma...*". But when he came to a shocking photograph, a baby Jesus manger figure that had become famous for its bleeding eyes, this child quietly said, "*Aiya*"! He identified himself as this crying... blood-weeping infant. *Aiya's* response unnerved me. It was a truly gruesome photograph, yet this four-year-old boy blithely identified it as a portrait of himself.

4.6.5 *Aiya's* Manners

Dressed in shirt and short pants for such special public occasions as the resurrection anniversary, *Aiya* seemed most happy when wearing nothing but a black cord around his waist, and optionally a gold chain around his neck with a pendant, and a pearl in it, a gold wristlet, and a gold ring - probably gifts - which he is obliged to wear. For a child of three to four years, he seemed remarkably self-possessed, just as Dr. Alagappan had said. His age is difficult to estimate. Officially, *Aiya* was calculated to be two-and-a-half, dating from 13 November, 1990 when he was "given" by Amma. In the resurrection video, taken two years earlier, he looked nearly as old as he did in 1993. There seems to be little change, which many informants noted, perhaps because he is quite plump. On this topic, Parameswary had this to say: "You know, he doesn't eat at all. Did you notice he hardly ate today and people don't bother? And even as a baby when he was six months old - normally you'd feed a child every three hours. This chap may take a cup of milk in the whole day. He doesn't bother to eat, and yet he's so healthy and he's so chubby."

It was owing to grace, said Parameswary, that *Aiya* does not fuss about food, does not need human food, and continues to thrive, but without necessarily growing. This attribution was in

sharp, and amusing, contrast to our own experience of eating lunch with *Aiya* from shallow steel plates on the floor of Vadiyakkadu's cookhouse the day we returned to ask Maryamma, on Kanakambujam and Amarajoti's plea, to intervene in Maryamma's sister Piragalata's threatened suicide crisis. The little fellow sat naked but for his ornaments, innocently eating what were for him copious quantities of rice, vegetables, and fish curry, his tiny genitals resting on the near edge of his plate. When Yobu saw *Aiya*'s inadvertent indiscretion, he scooped him up and carried him away, as the child protested the end of his meal and separation from us, his lunch companions.

Knowing who and what *Aiya* is supposed in the *Amma* cult to be, and expecting to see a lot of deference toward him in word and action, I was once surprised to observe Yobu's sharp reaction to *Aiya* when he and Maryamma were getting in the car to go to town. *Aiya* wanted to go along and people were trying to hold him back, trying to distract him and cajole him out of wanting to go. When the child persisted, Yobu gave him one smart whack, and he started to howl. In a way, I was glad to see Yobu's response because I was wondering what this child would grow up to be if he never gets any response other than adulation. Once, *Aiya*'s "cousin" Priscilla was holding him. She had an eye infection, and the child gave her a sharp poke with his finger in her sore eye, a most un-Godly thing for him to do. Protesting, she put him down, yet neither she nor anyone else chastised him for it.

4.6.6 Public Adulation

Adulation was the commonest public response to *Aiya*. I first noticed that *Aiya* tended to point his finger at people, apparently without being prompted. Once a man came up behind *Aiya* when he was being held by someone else. The man plucked at his arm or his back in the manner of beggars attempting to get one's attention in the street, and *Aiya* swiveled around immediately, raised his hand above the man's head, and then touched his forehead. The man seemed overwhelmed, kissed *Aiya*'s hand lavishly,

and went away. In the middle of the early morning Mass held in the house, some people entered late and one older woman searched out this little boy as he toddled around, grabbed his arm and pulled him to herself. *Aiya* was really quite obliging. In my experience, most children of his age become fearful when strangers approach them in such ways, and seek to escape the attention. The woman doted on him, kissing his hand and putting it on her head to receive his blessing.

Aiya did not, however, respond with total consistency. Late in the day, a woman sought Maryamma's blessing before leaving, and asked for *Aiya*'s blessing as well. "I'm leaving," she said, "so, *Aiya*, please bless me. Let me go. Please bless me. At that moment, *Aiya* was in another mood and not at all interested in blessing anyone. As she continued to plead with him, *Aiya* became annoyed. He pushed her and said rudely, "*Po* [Go]!". From the expression on her face, I could see that she had been crushed. Terrible was it, without recourse, to be so treated by God.

4.6.7 *Aiya* Blesses Moses

Moses - the guest of honour that day - and *Aiya* are nearly age peers, whatever complexities might be in their origins. Both boys' origins are wrapped in mystery, but there are distinct differences in how they are acknowledged and treated. It became evident from the way people sought *Aiya* out and doted on him, that *Aiya* is the single most important figure in the ontological scheme of the *Amma* cult. Following my initial anonymous contact with *Aiya* fifteen months before, when he seemed to be ignored, and my conversation with Fr. Kulandairaj about how *Aiya*'s identity was being underplayed, this adulation was a surprise. The premise on which I had constructed my understanding of the *Amma* cult was that the special favour of *Amma* for her "daughter" as a compensation for failing to be born as the "*Tambi*", or son her parents desired, and for loss of the opportunity to perform that role in her natal family. this premise still seemed credible, but it was clear that a new agenda for the cult was already in effect.

Following the afternoon Mass in celebration of his resurrection, Moses was carried out in view of the crowd in the arms of his father, Rajendiran. The people were asked by Fr. Kulandairaj to bless Moses by stretching their hands over his head, or toward him, as a prayer was said. When this was complete, *Aiya* was brought in Yobu's arms and asked, also, to bless Moses by likewise holding his hand over Moses' head. *Aiya* was smiling broadly with his big wide eyes, and putting his hand over Moses' head when Moses, his "cousin", turned and reciprocated the gesture, putting his own hand over *Aiya's* head. Rajendiran abruptly pulled Moses' arm down. After this glitch in protocol and the singing in English of "Happy Birthday", both boys and all the congregation, enjoyed their shares of Moses' birthday cake.

Nearly everyone present on this occasion appeared to know who *Aiya* is, yet his identity is still supposed to be a closely guarded secret. It would seem odd indeed for an outsider who had come to Vadiyakkadu for the special day of the wonder-child, Moses, to see most of the attention being lavished on this other, little-known, child. There may have been a few in the silent crowd who did not understand *Aiya's* significance, but anyone present would have been prepared to provide some insight into why this little child, *Aiya*, had been called to give Moses a separate, and special, blessing.

4.6.8 Our Impressions of Moses and *Aiya*

Heather and I differed in our impressions of these two boys. Heather perceived Moses as having a disconcertingly cold look in his glance which made her unwilling to touch him - an intuition she had never before had about any child. I had no such explicit discomfort with Moses, but felt that either he may have been uncomfortable with all the attention he received, or been jealous of the deeper affection exhibited toward his "peer", *Aiya*. I was very cautious about establishing any kind of relationship with either boy, and avoided touching them, both because I had been sensitized to the group's suspicion of light-complexioned

people, and because I did not want to be taken as yet another person fawning over them. I agreed, though, that Moses has an intense, even hostile, stare, and is not the warm, endearing, cuddly sort of child which *Aiya* is.

Aiya has big warm eyes, and he *looks* at people, engaging them. Sometimes he smiles; sometimes he pouts; and sometimes he finds ways of being irresistably engaging. Physically and behaviourally, *Aiya* is an intriguing model of Indian sacredness. His features and mannerisms so resemble Maryamma's - his facial expressions of pleasure and revulsion, the way he moves his hands and kicks his feet when his legs are dangling. If one wished to conjure up an ideal, contemporary version of Baby *Krishna* with his butter-ball, *Yasodha* his foster mother, and all the stories of his divine *lilas*, one could not cast better candidates for the roles.

4.6.9 *Aiya's* Future

Though Maryamma herself is yet so young, *Aiya* is being groomed in demeanor and through his visual education for a leadership role, to recognize in himself a Messianic identity for the next generation of what I have so arbitrarily delimited by calling it the "*Amma* cult". With the advent of *Aiya*, this nearly exclusive focus on the Virgin Mary has already begun to change in the attitudes demonstrated by devotees. The cult may go through yet more radical transformations as *Aiya* matures. Whether *Aiya's* putative identity will bring yet greater disapproval from Church authorities than Maryamma has already received will depend on how committed are such renegade priests as Fr. Peter and Fr. Kulandairaj who validate the cult through the sacraments and in their seminary classrooms.

4.7 Fr. Kulandairaj, sj - a Separate Agenda?

Fr. Kulandairaj, sj, was the first Roman Catholic priest to become involved in the *Amma* cult, and the first to celebrate the Mass at the *Arul Arai* shrine at Vadiyakkadu. The date was July 2, 1991, and the occasion was the baptism (3.6.5) - or, perhaps, it was not quite a baptism - of Moses, the child who was restored

from death after being buried for almost a year. The Father had been summoned earlier by Sr. Jacinta, OSM, superior of St. Bastian's convent in Pabanasam. She had told him that the Virgin, whom they called simply *Amma* [Lady, Mother], was calling for him, by name, to celebrate a Mass for her at a remote village, Vadiyakkadu, unknown to Kulandairaj at the time. He had ignored until April a letter she had sent him on February 1, 1991. On the eve of Moses' "resurrection", June 17, *Amma* again requested his presence, and on June 28, Sr. Jacinta went herself to *Dhyana Ashram* in Madras where Fr. Kulandairaj resided to ask him once again to come, this time to baptise the newly resurrected child. Finally, Kulandairaj agreed to go.

4.7.1 Marian Connections

At that time, Fr. Kulandairaj was Chairman of the National Service Team, the governing body of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal of India. This work kept him very busy travelling and speaking in India, and sometimes abroad. He has a strong personal devotion to the Virgin Mary and had taken a sincere interest in her apparitions and transformations in weeping and moving statues. He was especially intrigued by the contemporary messages and manifestations of Our Lady at Medjugorje, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and in October, 1990 had given a talk about his experiences there and in Rome to some nuns from various congregations.¹¹ Among these sisters had been one Sr. Jacinta from Pabanasam, Kumbakonam Diocese. So, it is clear that, even if *Amma* had summoned Kulandairaj by name - a priest unknown to all in Vadiyakkadu - one human being, at least, knew of his particular enthusiasm for the Virgin Mary, and for her apparitions.

4.7.2 The First Priest at Vadiyakkadu

The baptism, or naming if that was all it was, of Moses was the first occasion on which any Catholic priest had shown any positive interest in the *Amma* cult. Once Kulandairaj became convinced of the verity of *Amma's* actual presence in the miracles he heard recounted, he became an active missionary for the cult.

His unique position in the Charismatic Renewal required him to travel and speak to Catholic groups - priests, religious, and lay - in many parts of India. Everywhere he went, Fr. Kulandairaj told of Moses' resurrection and the earlier miracles surrounding Maryamma. To whichever group he told these stories, he also cautioned that what he had told them was a secret, to be shared among themselves alone, and not to be discussed with others.

I first met Fr. Kulandairaj at Vadiyakkadu on March 26, 1992, nine months after his first direct contact with the *Amma* cult, and nearly three months after my own initial visit to Vadiyakkadu. He had communicated his enthusiasm for these new and local Marian developments and had related his "miraculous" arrival at Medjugorje to me on this first meeting (Kulandairaj 1992.03.26). We arranged a time to meet at his home in Madras two weeks later to discuss these hierophanies and his role in the cult.

I arrived at Fr. Kulandairaj's bed-sitting room and office at *Dhyana Ashram*, Mylapore, Madras, according to our agreement, at 5:00 p.m. on April 8, 1992. He first asked me to wait while he blessed several people who had been waiting some time to see him. Throughout our discussion, and that on the following day, a continuous stream of people came knocking on his door for blessings from the head of the Charismatic Renewal. Kulandairaj was most certainly perceived to be a man of exceptional personal holiness.

While he was performing these blessings, I had plenty of time to look about his room. The first thing I noticed, apart from the modesty of his accommodations was a filing card tacked to a wall, surrounded by colourful clippings of cherubic children taken from advertisements in popular magazines, which read:

"Dear Lord, forgive my little jokes on Thee;
then I will forgive thy great big one on me."

Standing on the floor, wrapped in plastic which he later removed in order to show me, was an eighty-five centimeter high statue of the Virgin from Germany, a replica of the "Rosa Mystica" the

original of which is reputed to weep. He showed me postcards of the statue with tears flowing from her open eyes. The statue had just arrived and it would spend, he told me, several days in each of the homes of some Legion of Mary members in Madras. These homes would become temporary shrines where others would come to show their respects and bring their petitions to Our Lady.

4.7.3 How Kulandairaj Came to Vadiyakkadu

I asked Fr. Kulandairaj to describe how his interest in Vadiyakkadu and the *Amma* cult began, the pattern and nature of his involvement, and how he understands his own role in these phenomena.

"In October, 1990, I was giving a talk to some sisters, on Our Lady at Medjugorje (cf. 5.1.3.1). My talk was an emotional one. A sister came up to me and told me Our Lady is appearing in Tamil Nadu." Fr. Kulandairaj took out his file of correspondence about Vadiyakkadu in order to check a date. He referred to this file continually as we talked, pulling out letters at need, among them one from a Brother Peter of Walsingham, an old and famous Marian pilgrimage shrine in England, and another from Archbishop P. Arockiaswamy of Tanjavur. "This same sister, Jacinta of Pabanasam, wrote me again on 1 February, 1991. Sr. Jacinta wrote that the community at Vadiyakkadu had asked Our Lady if Mass could be said for them. It was so wonderful! Our Lady mentioned me by name and asked them to call me." Sr. Jacinta's letter was in Tamil and he translated, "In a few days' time Our Lady has promised to resurrect a boy." He put off responding but on April 3 wrote to excuse himself. "Then, on June 28, 1991, Sr. Jacinta came to see me here and called me for the baptism of the 'resurrected' boy on July 2. I wanted to oblige, but my schedule is hectic. So I told her it was most likely not possible, and looked in my diary. I couldn't believe what I saw. That date, July 2, was completely free. The coincidence was like a miracle. Our Lady was making it possible for me to oblige the sister. This was my first visit to Vadiyakkadu. It took me from 4:30 a.m. until 7:00 p.m. to reach

the place." Kulandairaj showed me the diary, which was indeed a very busy one. It still showed a space on July 2. Why, I reflected afterward, if he had made this appointment with Sr. Jacinta for July 2, had it not been recorded in the diary?

Much later, in June, 1993, Ammacchi told how, when Fr. Kulandairaj came to their house that first time on 2 July, 1991, he took off his slippers near the steps, walked up, straight into the shrine, and remained there praying for some time. When he came out, he said he believed all that he had heard from Sr. Jacinta about Maryamma's miracles and visions because, as he climbed up the steps, his heart did not beat rapidly. If it had, that would have been a sign that something was amiss. Instead, he had felt a deep sense of peace, and knew thereby that everything was all right about this place (Kamatchiyamma 1993.06.19).

4.7.4 "I Did Not Baptise the Child"

Fr. Kulandairaj told me he did not baptise the child on this first visit. Twenty or thirty people were present who wanted to be baptised. This was problematic because there are even now no Christians in Vadiyakkadu, at the edge of Mandalakkottai parish, and none of these aspirants seems to have had any Catholic sponsor or godparent. "I contacted the parish priest, who 'poo-pooed' the story of the resuscitated child. He did not know any of them, and would not baptise them."

Fr. Maria Arokiam, Mandalakkottai's parish priest, told me how Sr. Jacinta, Fr. Kulandairaj, and a layman approached him to baptise "a group of people". The number was not specified. He asked them, "Who are those people? Where do they stay? If they are going to continue to live in my parish, I must know the details. Who has prepared them?" Maria Arokiam quoted Jacinta as saying that she had been preparing them for a year. "If it is a group," responded the priest, "then I have to take the Bishop's permission for conversion." Later, when he met Fr. Kulandairaj, Maria Arokiam asked him what had happened since that time concerning the conversions. Kulandairaj responded, in Maria Arokiam's opinion,

defensively: "'There were no baptisms. I did not baptise the child'."

Why did Fr. Kulandairaj encourage these people's hopes by taking them to see the parish priest? He had to have known that the parish priest would refuse to baptise these strangers who approached him without having had proper catechetical instruction. Group conversion of Hindus to either Christianity or Islam is also a difficult political issue in India today. It is actively resisted by militant Hindus, can be hazardous to the lives of those engaged in promoting it, and is against official Roman Catholic Church policy (5.1.1; 5.2.6; Mosse 1994: 96f., citing G. Mathew 1982: 1069).

"Our Lady had told them not to take communion without baptism," said Fr. Kulandairaj, "so they had requested it from the local parish priest. All were sad when he refused them. Our Lady told them that even without baptism, they are at heart Christians and she would make way for this. On July 1 night, Our Lady appeared to them, the evening before I arrived there, telling them not to compel me to baptise the boy. 'Are you happy he is coming?' she asked. 'I will give fifteen days' time to prepare.'"

Fr. Kulandairaj was requested to return to Vadiyakkadu two weeks later, on July 14, and it happened that that day, in his busy schedule was also, miraculously, uncommitted. When he arrived, Kulandairaj found a crowd of about three thousand people gathered for the event, called a "*peyar suttu vila*", or name-bestowing feast. To feed all these people Rs. 125,000 was expended. "Who", I asked him, "paid for all this? These people do not appear to be very wealthy." "Yobu is selling small parcels of land, a bit at a time, to finance the feeding and other expenses," Kulandairaj assured me, confidently and without hesitation.¹² Two kilometers of fluorescent tube lights and a ten to twelve meter high "cutout" of *Annai Velankanni*, a *pandal*, and live music had been arranged for the event.¹³ Fr. Kulandairaj said he had anticipated that just a dozen or so people would be present.

4.7.5 Father Shares Secrets

Fr. Kulandairaj helped me to go over the Tamil names of *Amma* cult members, to be sure I had gotten them all correctly, as well as some of the Biblical names given to them by *Amma* - Mary [*Meri*], Job [*Yobu*], Elias, Lucia, Priscilla. He told me that one Brother Peter, a Medjugorje devotee from Walsingham, England had preceded me in enquiring of him about Vadiyakkadu.¹⁴

He told me that, although they would not admit it for political reasons, Archbishop Arokiaswamy, the diocesan Chancellor, and the parish priest of Mandalakkottai went to Vadiyakkadu on 14 March, 1992, to meet with Maryamma and see the place of alleged miracles for themselves. It was a private visit, and they went by car. Until Josephine Thomas and her son, Kennedy, revealed details of the Archbishop's visit to me on 17 June, 1993, none of my other informants had told me of this visit, and when they did so, it was to attack the character of the Bishop. A public visit could have been read by many as a tacit approval of the unusual, irregular, and officially unapproved devotions at Vadiyakkadu.

In a tone and body language suggestive of conspiracy which belied the fact that we were alone, Fr. Kulandairaj, glanced aside, leaned over close to me and confided very softly that he was not the first to celebrate a Mass at Vadiyakkadu. Our Lady had said a Mass for the people there four years earlier. At the time, I had heard of Maryamma's baptismal mass, but had yet to learn of its details from Josephine Thomas. Then it was time for Kulandairaj to go to his dinner and time for our interview to end. We agreed to meet again at the same time next day.

4.7.6 A Woman Celebrating Mass?

I pondered the implications of the Blessed Virgin Mary celebrating mass. What does this mean? At the theological and institutional level of Roman Catholic Church authority, it implies that a priest need not be male. At the sociological level, it means that the members of the *Amma* cult will proceed with their

own style of Christian worship without hierarchical approval or direction and will attempt to circumvent the canonical rules regarding community sponsorship or godparenthood for baptism.

4.7.7 Conversion, Cult Claims, and Expert Advice

The Catholic Church in India is very sensitive at present to conversions among Hindus, especially if such conversions might turn into what has come to be called "mass conversion". Mass conversion has emerged as a volatile political issue in Tamil Nadu and other parts of India. Unlike in former times, and especially since Vatican II, it is no longer easy to become a Catholic. Entering the Catholic community is a graded and tested process involving a demanding catechesis, baptism and first communion, and eventually, confirmation. Why, I wondered, does the parish priest responsible for Vadiyakkadu not undertake a systematic catechesis if some people are willing to receive it?

When I later met Fr. Maria Arokiam, I realized that he is not evangelistic by temperament, and that Vadiyakkadu is inconveniently located in an extensive parish. Also, in this case, with the involvement of only a few non-resident Catholics and no priest to guide them, enough factors, controversy and suspicion, have already surfaced that it would be almost impossible for such a task of catechesis to be initiated by the parish priest alone. To complicate matters further, there are the alleged local apparitions, healing miracles, criticism of priests, nuns, and bishops by the Blessed Virgin herself, as well as what is shaping up to be an incipient anticlerical social movement. Most importantly, however, there are indications that these are continuing phenomena with permutations yet unknown.

What would the appearance on this scene of a sympathetic, duly ordained Roman Catholic priest, a member of the venerable and esteemed Society of Jesus, and a national leader in his own right, mean for the direction and development of cult ideas, anticipations about, and responses, to the Catholic Church? Where, I wondered, would the implicit conflict between the charismatic

Jesuit from Madras and the Tanjavur Diocesan hierarchy lead, and what influence could Fr. Kulandairaj have within the cult itself?

4.8 Summing Up

Josephine, Fr. Peter, Jacinta, Elsa, and Fr. Kulandairaj are some of the *Amma* cult's central and most influential figures, with a commanding presence at any event in Vadiyakkadu. Their proximity to Maryamma and to *Aiya* is respected anywhere that *Amma* cult members are encountered. In this chapter, we have seen that the cult is supported by strong individual personalities, among whom there is competition for personal status. They have differences of opinion with regard to the "facts" of the *Amma* cult, and the meaning of those "facts", is sometimes in dispute. Each one whose testimony I have examined provides an example of differing values, priorities and imperatives, as well as an agenda for managing his or her personal relationship with the *Amma* cult's highly idiosyncratic symbols.

Each of the persons portrayed has a deep loyalty to Maryamma and to the the *Amma* cult, but their reasons for this loyalty vary widely. Josephine has a long-standing investment in the truth of *Amma's* promise to her about the resurrection of Irene. Fr. Peter is still somewhat of an outsider seeking, through his highly visible service and alacrity in protecting cult secrets, to become an acknowledged insider. Jacinta is something of a "loose gun" and will probably suffer more in future for the sake of the cult because of her lack of prudence. Elsa is loved by *Aiya* and assumes a natural and comfortably situated leadership. *Aiya* himself is the key to understanding the current phase of *Amma* cult self-understanding. Much is expected of him, but only in the esoteric discourse at the center of the cult is there any certainty about how his role will develop. *Amma's* public, or exoteric, pronouncements always come in graduated installments, as devotees become ready to receive them, and as circumstance requires. Kulandairaj has a perpetual place of honour in the cult as the first priest to celebrate Mass for its sake and to be

rebuked for his service to it. He is probably its most widely travelled and widely known exponent in Catholic circles. All my other sources were familiar with his name. If the Church chooses to suppress the cult, he will bear the brunt. How much Kulandairaj has influenced the *Amma* cult's "official" perspective on the Roman Catholic Church and informed, and may further influence, its self-perception and millennial understanding of *Aiya*, is an open question.

Interpersonal rivalries for prominence and leadership appear to be a compelling characteristic of the *Amma* cult. This theme, and the ways in which authority is challenged by ideological snipers at the margins of the cult, are the substance of the next chapter. The implications of this rivalry for the cult's acknowledged charismatic leader, Maryamma, who must now cope with devotees from cultures alien to her own, speaking different languages, and also with ordained priests - religious specialists in their own right - who want to bring their own forms of expertise and their own criteria for truth within the ambit of the *Amma* cult, will be discussed in Chapter 7.

Chapter 5

Disaffection

I suggested in Chapter 4 that there is competition among *Amma* cult devotees for personal status, as well as differences of opinion among them with regard to truth-claims concerning events, and the meaning of the claimed "facts", within the *Amma* cult. In this chapter, I examine more deeply how these claims remain in dispute, as do the roles and images of leading cult members, including Maryamma. Accordingly, some rivalries for influence and leadership in the cult are uncovered and examined. Surprisingly, this compelling tendency toward interpersonal competition for leadership, prominence and influence within the cult seems not to touch Maryamma herself. However, an exploration of her past through the testimony of one disaffected former devotee also raises questions concerning Maryamma's personal morality, an issue carefully edited out of her sacred persona and indicative of far more cunning than the image of the "simple village girl" which Fr. Kulandairaj favours and promotes.

Josephine Thomas was introduced in Chapter 4. In the following account, her personal perceptions and experiences of the *Amma* cult are recounted, and her frustrations with certain of its "newcomers" are vented. Reasons why continuing in the *Amma* cult may be difficult for certain devotees are examined through her experience and that of Fr. Francis, sj [pseudonym], a seminary instructor in Madras. Josephine referred us to Fr. Francis as a friend with whom we would strike an immediate rapport if we introduced ourselves as her acquaintances and *Amma* cult enquirers. Francis is a shadowy figure on the margin of the cult, who gives the impression of being very vulnerable to its internal dynamics and contests. In sharp contrast to Francis' relations

with the *Amma* cult, I present the case of Fr. Prakash [pseudonym], also a seminary instructor and recent *Amma* cult convert, whose experience of the cult and the inspiration he draws from it infuse his academic and pastoral work with a new and poignant meaning.

The most negative account of Maryamma and the *Amma* cult I encountered came from Mr. A. Balraj, a Tamil Catholic of Tanjavur. He offers a perspective which differs radically from those of *Amma* cult members who have arrived recently, and he provides an opportunity for retrospection on the meaning and process of constructing sacred personhood in the cult. Balraj's involvement in the cult began at about the same time as Josephine's, antedating Maryamma's seclusion which began in May, 1987, when she was sixteen years of age. Balraj struggled hard to believe Maryamma's truth-claims despite his natural skepticism, but then had his hard-won faith broken, and today is an outspoken critic of Maryamma. He is *anathema* to all the cult members discussed in Chapters 4 and 5. Balraj insists on calling the cult's leader by her birth name, Santi, and refuses, as an express denial of the seer's sanctity, to use her baptismal name, Mary, much less the honourific Maryamma.

5.1 Josephine Thomas - Hope, and a Sense of Broken Trust

Josephine Thomas had not told us much on the day of Moses' anniversary when Maryamma had given her permission to speak with us about the cult's history. We had agreed to come to her home, about seventy kilometers distant, a few days later to talk further. In the interim, she and her son Kennedy agreed to tell us "everything". Josephine explained, "See, we don't want to tell all these outsiders, but people like you, we'll tell." To Josephine, we were insiders, even if not yet publicly among the "Chosen". Whom she considered "outsiders" we quickly learned. When we arrived on the afternoon of 27 June, Josephine wasted no time in telling us how perturbed she had become by the way things were going in Vadiyakkadu (Josephine Thomas 1993.06.27).

Josephine began, "These days I'm not going very frequently to Vadiyakkadu as I used to. I'm not speaking there. Ever since these priests have come, all sorts of things are going wrong, and I'm not very happy about it. See, these people who are coming are all new. Some of them don't even know the language [Tamil], but they come, and they're getting so much prominence. Some are now beginning to narrate stories as though they were there from the beginning, and it's not nice, so I'm keeping quiet. I'm the only one who was there right from the beginning." ¹

5.1.1 Problems with Fr. Kulandairaj

How had things begun to go awry? Josephine spoke of Fr. Kulandairaj's imprudence and how it has compromised everyone in the *Amma* cult. "You know what this Kulandairaj did? He baptised twenty-four people on that day, along with Moses." She explained that many of those people were actually converted because of what Josephine had shared with them. "Over the years I had been telling them all that's happening, and they were convinced and wanted to be converted. They were all my neighbours, my friends, my colleagues.... We have plenty of converts.

"Of course Sr. Jacinta helped by catechising them, and she was one of those very eager to have them baptised on that particular day. So she took them, and Fr. Kulandairaj very eagerly baptised them" (cf. 4.7.4). None of the twenty-four have baptismal certificates as Fr. Kulandairaj had no authority to issue them, and when one woman in Josephine's parish went for communion, others said, "Hey, this one is a Hindu! No, no. You can't receive communion. You're a Hindu", and they prevented her. This lady came to Josephine very upset and asked, "What is this? Did I not join your *sabai* [religious society]? Am I not one of you? Why are they pushing me off?"

Attempting to resolve this impasse, Josephine had said, "It's because you don't have a certificate. Wait, let's get a certificate." She spoke to Fr. Kulandairaj, who responded, "I cannot give you any certificate". Josephine was angry: "Now, if

you cannot give her a certificate, then why the hell did you baptise her? Who asked you to be so eager? You should have thought of this, and refused to give them baptism. Now you are saying you can't give a certificate." According to Josephine, Kulandairaj proposed, "Okay. Don't worry. Just go back to your parish and take another baptism from your parish priest". Josephine asked Heather, "Tell me, is it possible to take two baptisms? Is it right?" "No", she answered, "only one baptism should be given." "What is this," she went on, "two and three baptisms? I'm going to ask *Amma*." Then Josephine pressed us for an even more committed opinion. We were walking on eggshells. We would have to talk again with Fr. Kulandairaj and did not want our names and opinions to enter her struggles with him. So Heather affirmed, "We think this is now really something which you can ask only *Amma*."

On account of this embarrassment before those who trusted her, Josephine is upset with Kulandairaj. She knows that he has Maryamma's confidence and is unwilling to force a showdown with him. In her own parish community, Josephine had been teased for her interest in Maryamma, and now through the impetuous action of Kulandairaj, she had brought an aberration right into their local church in Pabanasam. "This is how my friends are being insulted when they go for communion. What face do I have? It's because of me, first of all, that they were converted. This sister," Josephine said, speaking of Kulandairaj's ally, Sr. Jacinta, "comes and tries to take some credit in between, and all that."

That Josephine has long-standing relationships with Hindu friends in Pabanasam is shown as early as 1988 when she took a group of Hindu schoolchildren to Orattur to restore Maryamma's commitment to *Amma*. Josephine was aware that the children's devotion to *Amma* could be just as valid and sincere while remaining Hindus as if they would convert to Christianity. While Josephine could not object to Sr. Jacinta's catechizing the twenty-four, Kulandairaj's impetuous act of baptising them in far away Vadiyakkadu produced unmanageable repercussions, and

unnecessary and destructive embarrassment and conflict, within her own parish church whose members must have associated the Hindu woman who tried to take communion with Josephine. These parishioners may, at least in part, have been expressing their hostility toward the Hindu woman as a surrogate for Josephine herself, whose long, obsessive concern with the *Amma* cult, bleeding statues and pictures, and the promise of her dead daughter's resurrection must have been well known to them. With the ejection of her Hindu "convert" friend, Josephine was converted from a mere curiosity into a pointed challenge to the boundaries of Catholicism in Pabanasam. If local Hindus were to accompany Josephine to Vadiyakkadu, get baptised there without any of the canonical formalities, then come home without even a baptismal certificate and expect to be treated as Catholics, the parish would face an uncontrollable situation.

5.1.2 Problems with Sr. Jacinta

Josephine narrated other similar incidents, and then came to "This Jacinta, she came yesterday, ah? She doesn't know and she goes around talking as though she saw and heard everything that she heard from me. She narrates it first-hand. Does she say that Josephine told me this? No! She tells all the newcomers that *she* saw, *she* heard, as if she was involved right from the beginning. What nonsense! I don't like people who tell lies. In fact, I heard her narrating certain things which only I know, and she says, 'I heard it.' I overheard her talking to somebody like that, and then I said, 'I must be far away from this sister.' She's bad.

"For a long time Jacinta had not heard *Amma's* voice at all. She used to come to my house often and ask with great anxiety, 'When will I hear *Amma*? When will I hear *Amma*?' One day, Maryamma had come to my house. She often comes and spends seven or eight days, you know. She called out '*Tambi! Tambi!*' and *Amma* came. ² So you see, *Amma's* voice was heard. Then she usually closes the door and prays for half an hour. I told Kennedy, 'Go and call that sister. She's so eager to hear *Amma's* voice.' He ran

barefoot through the street in his dirty clothes, just as he was, to the convent, and asked the doorkeeper to tell Sister to come immediately. Do you know what was happening there? She was sitting in her office with some parents, collecting money. [It is a common practice in India to offer large sums to obtain seats for children in good schools, a means of private enrichment for administrators.] It was admission time... Do you know what she said? 'Ah! I can hear *Amma*'s voice any time. These parents I cannot catch later.'" Josephine continued, "I stopped talking to her from that day because of how she insulted *Amma*. Um?"

5.1.2.1 Maryamma Tries to Make Peace

Some time later, *Amma* tried to heal the breach between Josephine and Jacinta. "*Amma* spoke to me, 'Josephine, you must talk to Sister. It's not nice to not talk like that.' So I said, 'But *Amma*, when I sent for her, she did not want to hear your voice. She insulted you.' *Amma* said, 'That doesn't matter. I have forgiven her so you must also forgive her. Don't be angry. Please talk.' So that's when I started talking. But still, anyway I keep my distance."

When I had first met Jacinta at Josephine's house in August, 1992, they seemed to be the best of friends, which now appears to have been deceptive.

5.1.2.2 Marginalizing the Old Guard

This discussion led me to understand that as newcomers rise to prominence in the *Amma* cult, people with organizational resources like nuns, intellectual resources like priests, or financial resources like the new urban and Persian Gulf-based devotees, the early, loyal, provincial grass-roots supporters are being excluded from positions of influence as spokespeople and witnesses. Perhaps that process explains why Josephine and Kennedy had decided to tell us "everything". As they were being marginalized, they needed to express their distress and seek new resources in ways which might regenerate their influence with Maryamma. In our case, this route to renewed influence was

associated with the prospects of attracting new, foreign based, and therefore presumably wealthy, converts who might broaden Maryamma's web of resources. Otherwise, Josephine and Kennedy would not likely have opened up to us. We could be allies in helping them to gain the upper hand once more.

5.1.3 Championing Fr. Francis, sj

In a hushed, secretive tone, Josephine began, entirely on her own initiative, "When you go to Madras, you must meet a very close friend of mine, Fr. Francis." Heather said, "I've heard his name. He is the leader of the Charismatic Renewal for Tamil Nadu." Satisfied, Josephine continued, "We are very close." "Does he come here?", I asked. "Yes. He comes to Vadiyakkadu. Mary is very, very fond of him, but she won't tell anyone that." "Does he believe?" "Yes, he believes, but he's staying out of all this because of Fr. Kulandairaj. In fact," Josephine continued, "when you go and meet him in that *Satya Nilayam*, don't mention my name to anybody else there. When you get him alone, say that I am the one who sent you and he'll be very happy with you." She said, "You see, he and Fr. Thambu are like this...", crossing her fingers in a typical schoolyard sign denoting enmity, "They can't get along. What happened was that Francis was the one that actually went to Medjugorje.

5.1.3.1 Plagiarism

Fr. Kulandairaj had enthusiastically described for me in detail how he had been invited to accompany some other priests to Medjugorje, in what was then Yugoslavia, just before he was to leave Italy for India. Time was short, he had no Yugoslav visa, and it was unlikely that he could get one before the others had to depart. Then, miraculously, the visa arrived just in time and he was able to visit this newest of popular and controversial European Marian shrines (Kulandairaj 1992.04.09). Josephine called this story a sham: "Now this man, Kulandairaj, didn't go there or anything. He's going around telling everyone what he heard from Fr. Francis, but he's giving it as a first-hand report."

It was in October, 1990, when he was delivering a highly personalized and emotional account of his experiences in Medjugorje to some nuns that Sr. Jacinta had first encountered Fr. Kulandairaj, seen his intense Marian piety, and imagined that he might become a key contributor to the legitimation of the *Amma* cult. Jacinta told him about *Amma's* apparitions right at home in India, and persisted in her attempt to recruit him. Prepared to believe that Sr. Jacinta's foreknowledge about him from October, 1990, could have had nothing to do with *Amma's* summoning him *by name* to service in Vadiyakkadu in February and June, 1991, Kulandairaj speaks of this call in the same emotional and personalistic terms as he speaks of his own Medjugorje miracle (4.7.3).

5.1.3.2 Fr. Francis' Suspicion

Some time later, in Madras, following Josephine's stipulation that I not specify my concerns at *Satya Nilayam* until I met Fr. Francis, sj, face to face, I had arranged an interview with him by telephone through a third party. As it was to turn out, I regret not identifying myself to him in advance. We met at 8:30 p.m. on 11 July, 1993, in his quarters at the Tamil Nadu Jesuit Philosophate in Madras. Francis is a psychologist by profession and a seminary instructor. He is also a colleague of my own research guide in India, Fr. Anand Amaladass, who also teaches and resides at *Satya Nilayam*.

Our interview lasted, in large part involuntarily, until midnight. It ended in embarrassment and annoyance to me, with recriminations and accusations of my acting in bad faith on his part, and inestimable damage to my relationship with my friend, Amaladass.

I had planned to first ask some general questions about Francis' understanding of prayer, intercession, and the nature of miracles - all of which pertain to the *Amma* cult - then introduce Josephine Thomas' referral, and finally discuss the history of his involvement and role in the *Amma* cult. However, Fr. Francis

assumed me to be a recently arrived research student, just beginning, rather than completing, my fieldwork on Marian phenomena. He pedantically presumed on my part a facile ignorance of things Indian and Catholic, in spite of Heather's presence, and proceeded to expound some commonplace basics, developing an agenda entirely his own. Out of courtesy, I allowed him to proceed. The problem became clear to me moments into our discussion. He, a professor, was not prepared to let me, a petitioner and mere student, direct the interview.

I attempted to steer his offerings about his counselling career toward issues of religious leadership and discipleship and understandings of possession states. Learning that I had once been a Madras University philosophy student sent Francis off on a long digression about *Vedanta*. I hoped that pursuing these diversions might be a way of familiarizing him with me, and of building trust. Eventually I was able to steer the discussion toward Marian devotion and goddesses but was unsuccessful in learning any more about the *Amma* cult from him than that discussion of it agitated him. Here are some extracts which provide a sense of the religious understanding of one of Maryamma's more intellectual supporters (Francis 1993.07.11).

Francis told of the Hindus and Muslims who come to the Psycho-Spiritual Center he operates, and what a simple faith they have. This characterization of "faith" as "simple", or non-intellectual, is a perennial theme in Tamil priests' descriptions of their followers, Catholics and especially Hindus. Our discussion was held in English, but the Tamil term *visuvasam* ["faith"] predicates this kind of simplicity upon it. This "faith" seems to be understood as an attitude, even an aptitude for devotional response, *saranagati* [going for "refuge"], directed toward any of a variety of sacred objects and persons. Priests speak of "simple faith" nostalgically, as though it is something they, themselves, have lost beyond recovery. I heard this logic expressed countless times at Velanganni as an explanation for why

Hindus are attracted to the shrine and experience the presence of *Arokkiya Mada*. It is not at all important to Hindu pilgrims that she is a Christian "deity". "Everyone knows that", I was told again and again by both Hindus and Catholics, speaking of Hindus. "Simple faith" seems capable of being directed toward absolutely any sacred object, but while Catholics also are described by their priests as having such "simple faith", Christians are not expected to settle their faith upon Hindu symbols.

Francis spoke of ritual: "Being a sacristy priest is not enough. Ritualism creates dependency. Rituals require specialists. I speak from what I believe; there is no need for baptism. If you believe in God, his love and forgiveness, and that he heals, that is enough."

Does he ever work with "wandering spirits"? "I know of such things, based on personal experience. 'Deliver us from evil' means not only social evil. Resistance to God is evil, and resistance is an absence of something. Resistance comes from freedom, from deliberate choice. The structure of resistance begins from childhood and can become a network for somebody else to influence me.

"Do you mean by 'influence' possession, *sevinai*, and such?", I asked Francis, still trying to steer the discussion toward an opening for discussing the *Amma* cult. "Possession first has to be broken at the resistance level. There are two stages in removing possession. Breaking down the psychological layers of resistance and separating [the person] from influence by another, either man, or God, or Devil." Francis had learned well the lessons of the founder of the Jesuit order, St. Ignatius of Loyola. It is very difficult, taught Ignatius, to discern whether the sensations we receive are divinely or demonically inspired. Consolation and desolation of spirit may result from either, and may lead into each other. Simple feelings are always suspect.³ "I always find mixed cases of psychological problems and evil spirits" said Francis. "There are boundaries, but they always

overlap. Some psychological disposition opens the way for the evil spirit."

Francis told of his experiences with the Marian seers at Medjugorje. He distinguished carefully between "vision" or "hallucination" as subjective phenomena, and "apparition" as an objective phenomenon. The stories he told were substantially the same as Fr. Kulandairaj had told both Heather and myself, separately, about experiences he had claimed as his own. Perhaps embarrassment at what he took to be my patronizing him was what so annoyed Francis later. I had sat, silently listening, while he told me stories which I already knew, and from someone else. Presuming, wrongly, as he did that I was newly arrived and innocent, I would not yet have met Fr. Kulandairaj, nor have heard these accounts. Multiple hearings, however, are the stuff of ethnography and I appreciated his slight variations of the tale.

It was past 11:00 p.m. I had grown very tired, and anxious to get on with the concerns for which I had come, when I managed, at last, to wrest control of the interview from Fr. Francis. Summoning the moment of truth, I mentioned Josephine Thomas as the person who had referred me to him. Francis seemed pleased, and confirmed that Josephine's accusation against Kulandairaj was correct. He had, indeed, visited Medjugorje while Fr. Kulandairaj had not. Moments later, realization came to him that I had been studying the *Amma* cult. He was profoundly shocked.

Reflecting on the possible meaning of the evening's talk as he spoke, Francis' openness visibly withered and he suddenly turned to resist, attributing malice to my motives. He accused me - railing for more than half an hour - of obtaining the interview through false pretenses and false representation, though it was he who had decided on his own initiative whom he thought me to be, and what we would talk about, leaving me no way of initiating the topic which I had come to discuss. He construed all our preceding hours of talk as some deceit, a way of appraising him pejoratively. Why had I not been direct? He would then have known

what to do with me. My only defence was that, though I had tried with some introductory questions to introduce my research concerns gradually, I had listened respectfully while he hijacked the interview and led us off into issues I had not at all intended to explore. It was a very strange interview.

I have since come to appreciate his suspicions. At the time, I had not yet estimated the stakes involved. On one hand, I might have been an agent of the Catholic Bishops' Conference, investigating his association with an heretical cult. On the other, I could have been an agent of his brother Jesuit, Fr. Kulandairaj, attempting to draw some useful, unguarded comment from him.

While he was still able to proselytize freely for the *Amma* cult throughout southern India, Fr. Kulandairaj continued to relate the accounts he had heard from Francis in the first person to Catholics, swearing his listeners to a suspicious secrecy. Fr. Francis is reluctant to be involved with the *Amma* cult as long as Fr. Kulandairaj is, he believes, plagiarizing his stories in order to construct a prominent role for himself in the cult. Francis believes in the truth of the *Amma* cult while feeling, like Josephine, that its leadership, Maryamma's intimates, are leading her astray. Stiffly, Francis dismissed us, suitably chastened though innocent, at midnight.

5.1.3.3 Fr. Prakash Finds New Life

In stark contrast to Fr. Francis' ambivalent relations with the *Amma* cult, another seminary instructor whom I met at Vadiyakkadu during preparations for Moses' 1993 resurrection anniversary presents an uncomplicated case of a young priest who has dedicated himself to the cult and is incorporating its symbolism into his vision of his sacramental and teaching duties.

Fr. Prakash teaches philosophy to candidates for the priesthood at Sacred Heart Seminary, of the Madras-Mylapore Diocese, located in Punamalli, west of Madras. We quickly recognized each other, although we had little time to talk as he

had to leave just as Heather and I arrived. Prakash had been a student in the first year of the Madras University M.A. program in Indian Philosophy in 1984-85 when I was studying for the second year of the same program (Prakash 1993.06.13).

A few weeks later, as guests at his seminary, Heather and I discussed with him his involvement with the *Amma* cult. Fr. Prakash was frank. Since his ordination, he had become bored with the routine of sacramental duties. The Eucharist, the central symbol and ritual enactment of Christian faith, seemed to hold no life for him anymore. However, after spending a day or two at Vadiyakkadu, his emotional resources for engaging in these otherwise tedious duties were renewed, and he found new meaning in them (Prakash 1993.07.10).

Fr. Prakash has become one among a network of priests who work "underground" in the Catholic church for the dissemination of information about *Amma*, *Aiya*, and Maryamma's miracles. He, like Fr. Francis, is well positioned to influence young seminarians to believe in the special claims of *Amma*'s "Chosen".

5.1.3.4 Francis Battles Demons

Back at our interview in Pabanasam on the evening of 27 June, 1993, Josephine told us in soft, conspiratorial undertones how Fr. Francis had arranged accommodation for herself and Kennedy to attend a Charismatic Convention in Madras.

"I took one look at that house, and said, 'Father, I don't like this place. I don't want to stay here.' Father said, 'Okay, the first night I will also be with you, so don't worry.' You know this Father, he's very prayerful man. We sat and prayed together in this upstairs room. Suddenly, on the wall, I saw something was moving. One black figure was running across the wall, and I said, 'Father, look!' He was facing us, his back turned to that wall. He kept his eyes closed, but because he was praying he could see. 'Yes, I can see it', he said. 'I'm chasing it out. Don't get frightened.' After some time, Kennedy also saw it: 'Father, that figure's running!' Then Kennedy saw a big buffalo with long teeth:

'Father, see! I can see this creature looking at me. It's got horns and it's got long teeth.' Father's eyes were still closed. He was rolling on the ground, grappling with something, and he said, 'I can see it! I'm breaking the horn. Just wait.' And he broke the buffalo's horn. Then all these creatures moved off, and there was a bright light which only I could see," said Josephine. She saw a number of white-robed figures going across, and over, the wall, and there was a deep sense of peace. "Father said, 'They were angels fighting with these devils. The devils have all gone away, and the angels are now filling this house.' You see? So... I had a lot of trouble because Fr. Francis stayed with us and all" (cf. Chapter 3, note 6).

Josephine's motive for telling such a story might be questioned. Earlier, Josephine had told of Maryamma's frequent visits to her house in Pabanasam, of the supposed intimacy between Maryamma and Kennedy, of *Amma's* special graces like the *katchi* of Irene, of *Amma's* retaining Josephine's syringe for her own purposes, and tales which provided her with material sacred relics like bloodied bandages and a bloodied picture. Each of her tales evinces an attitude toward the sacred which is highly public and transactional, yet personal, rather like Maryamma's own. Josephine seems to be competing for personal sacrality within the framework of the *Amma* cult for proximity to the symbolic center, Maryamma.

Josephine also appears to be in competition with priests and nuns who have the advantage over her of a professional and institutionalized sacrality. In this competition, any privileged symbolic resource which might amplify and enhance the impression of Josephine's personal contact with the sacred, such as her story about a priestly competitor with Kulandairaj, will be exploited. She was emphatic about the privative nature of her experience: "There was a bright light which *only I* could see".

I got no sense of the frenetic tone of Josephine's tale in my own meeting with Francis, though I cannot discount the possibility that he might behave in such a way while performing

exorcisms. Josephine had motives of her own in wanting us to contact Francis. She appears to be building her own constituency, forming her own circle of influence, within the wider circle of the *Amma* cult, and attempting to regain some of the respect and control she seems to have had in the days before the coming of nuns and priests.

5.1.3.5 Maryamma's Fondness for Fr. Francis

As our evening in Pabanasam with Josephine had grown late and we were making our initial motions to leave, Josephine concluded our talk by repeating how very fond Maryamma was of Fr. Francis, and how the only bar keeping him from Vadiyakkadu was his difficulty with the prominent role assumed there by Fr. Kulandairaj, his fellow Jesuit and Charismatic Renewal leader. Fr. Kulandairaj speaks confidently about his miraculous arrival in Medjugorje as a precursor to Our Lady's summoning him, especially and by name, to serve her at Vadiyakkadu. Francis claims that Kulandairaj has plagiarized his own Medjugorje story, presenting it to everybody as a first-hand report, and is exploiting it to build a constituency for himself among Catholic charismatics, priests, nuns, and Hindus. This claim contravenes Francis' own declared ethics of leadership, in which one should avoid becoming indispensable to, and creating dependency in, those one helps and nurtures spiritually.

Who is telling the whole truth? The answer seems impossible to know, but Kulandairaj and Francis are playing a zero-sum game. Meanwhile, young priests like Fr. Prakash who have heard of the *Amma* cult through Kulandairaj are discovering a renewed vitality in serving the cult, perhaps because their priestly formation has been deficient, perhaps because the Spirit of the God they worship is moving in the *Amma* cult. If Kulandairaj's method of imitating the Gospel of Mark ⁴ in urging an intimate secrecy about the news of the *Amma* cult within a widely dispersed variety of physically and functionally diverse small groups, we can expect a large number of priests-in-formation

and others, who will in future influence the Catholic church, to develop a passionate yet little publicised or officially noticed devotion to the sacred as manifested in the *Amma* cult.

"You have to go now," Josephine admitted, reluctantly. "I can't tell you everything now, but some day I'll tell you." At the door, in a flurry of "good-byes" and mutual thanks, Heather said, "Pray for us. I don't know when we'll meet..." But before she could finish, Josephine cut her short: "Ah! We'll meet. You don't worry. Whether we'll meet here... or maybe we'll come there, to Canada. After all, did you think you'd come here, all the way? Did he [Richard] think that he was going to come here, from Canada? So, we can't say. We may come to Canada" (cf. 5.1.2.2).

5.2 Balraj Rages - Faith Tested, and Hopes Dashed

The perspective of Mr. and Mrs. Balraj on Maryamma and the *Amma* cult was one of my most pejorative, yet richest, sources of information. The Balrajs are certainly not people whom Maryamma would want anyone researching her activities to meet. Mr. A. Balraj, who was introduced briefly in the opening of this chapter, and his wife, Mrs. Guyon Balraj live in Tanjavur, about fifty-five kilometers from Vadiyakkadu and eighty-five kilometers from Velanganni. They are *kallar* Catholics, although she was a Protestant before marriage. This may have influenced her more skeptical attitude toward Marian phenomena. She is a retired school teacher. He is an engine driver, now retired from Southern Rail.

Heather and I were guided to the Balraj home by Fr. Arul Arockiasamy, editor of *Vailankanni Calling* and *Velanganni Kuraloli*, who had earlier introduced us to Sebastian Raj. The management of this interview was complicated by the presence of Fr. Arockiasamy. As a Tanjavur diocesan priest and Marian devotee, Fr. Arockiasamy has a personal interest in the claims of Maryamma, and his concern either to prove or disprove them definitively hampered the interview process. He suggested the responses he wished to hear when Mr. or Mrs. Balraj paused to search for words,

and tended to lead the answers toward premature closure.⁵ Fortunately, Mr. Balraj resisted this coercion and told his own story as he chose, despite even his wife's pressure. Fr. Arockiasamy's disregard for subtle innuendos and his reluctance to allow us to direct the interview suggested to the Balrajs that our program of research and his of ecclesiastical investigation were identical. Our tasks differed, of course, but since the interview opportunity was the result of Fr. Arockiasamy's introduction, it was impossible to separate for the Balrajs our two sets of concerns.

The session was long, lasting more than two hours. It was frequently recursive, as we three interviewers took turns asking the Balrajs to go back over things they had said, or partially said, for clarifications and additional new information. The interview began in English, alternated between English and Tamil in the middle, and near the end shifted almost entirely to Tamil. Guyon Balraj occasionally discounted what her husband said, made a point of her superior education, and tried to steer his account. Mr. Balraj insisted on telling tangential stories at length which neither his wife nor we wished to hear. For a large portion of the time, both wife and husband talked at once, as though we could follow two conversations simultaneously.

Consisting of approximately 520 verbal exchanges, this interview posed the most difficulties of transcription. It was, fortunately, recorded by dictaphone. In order to present the interview as an intelligible sequence of events and utterances, and to interpret our sources' intentions, its presentation here is the most heavily edited and rearranged of all our interviews.

5.2.1 What It Means to Be a *Kaḷḷar*

"We know all the family," Balraj began. "How closely are you related?" I asked him. "No, no," said Guyon, "we are all the same caste, *kaḷḷar*," she continued, "but that is not the thing. He [Balraj] was in the railways."

"As an authorised man I took anything, everything," said Balraj, emphasizing the discretionary powers he used to have before his retirement. Such powers, especially in government employment, make one a respected and influential member of a caste community in India. "Nobody will question me," he said.

"One of her [Maryamma's] relatives was also in the railways," added Guyon. "Kallars are lots that side," said Balraj. "I know all the people there, around Nidamangalam, every place on those lines - Velanganni, Nagappattinam, Nagur. I used to go there every day."

Guyon explained how helpful her husband would be to fellow *kallar* who might need the favour of a special stop. "These village people, they'd wait there by the tracks. Or they'd come late, and he'd keep the train. They would get into it without tickets. People used to come to him, calling... You know, it's his obligation."

"They would come to me," said Balraj, "'Uncle! Please! Just two minutes stop near the railway gate. We'll get down and go directly.' All that is just obligation, outside of the rules. They would have to walk two or three kilometers by night in open territory, so I used to stop and let them get down. In that way, I got to know everybody."

5.2.2 Maryamma's Possession

The following exchange took place much later in our discussion, but as Maryamma's sacred career began with her affliction, it is important to deal with Balraj's judgement of what was actually going on at that time at the outset. "Do you know anything," I asked, "about some suffering this girl had when she was a child?" "She was possessed by some *pey*, it seems, as a child," added Fr. Arockiasamy.

"You say something possessed her? *Andavar* showed me a vision," said Balraj, eyeing us all knowingly. "*Angalamma* has possessed her and is making her do all this." *Angalamman* is a

fierce female *kiramadevata* [village deity] which afflicts her victims (cf. Meyer 1986: 194, *passim*).

"No one believes me. Even the Bishop won't listen. 'She is possessed by *Angalamma*. She worships it', I told him. *Andavar* gives visions to his children. I kept asking the Bishop to ask [*Andavar*]. 'I don't know,' says the Bishop."

Balraj here states that Maryamma was possessed by a village goddess in her childhood, but that she has always been, and is even now, in the power of uncanny forces of darkness. But this evaluation came late in our discussion and his earlier opinions of Maryamma were quite the reverse. Balraj struggled through his own dark night of doubt before coming to believe in *Anma's* appointment of Maryamma as her daughter, or surrogate. *Angala* is discussed further, in the context of his struggle to believe (5.2.12).

5.2.3 First Contact

Guyon offered to tell how the family had first become involved with Maryamma. It was while she was still called Santi, when visions and healing miracles were happening at Orattur, and before her seclusion began in May, 1987. At the time, Maryamma would have been fifteen or sixteen years old.

"As my daughter was not well, we took her to that village, because a railway man my husband worked with is there. We should not have gone there for her healing in the first place. I didn't like it at the time. How can anyone heal without Jesus' permission? It was a big mistake," said Guyon. She had grown up a Protestant and became a Catholic to marry Balraj. Guyon continued, "Santi was there in a hut."

"There are two portions in that hut," Guyon went on. "Inside the entrance, there is one room, then one door, another room, and one back door. That's all. When we first went there, before she came, we went and saw one *Mada's* picture there. Our Lady of..." Balraj interjected, "Our Lady of Health."

Guyon said, "Yes, Our Lady of Health, and in one cupboard, they kept two candlesticks, *doopakar* [incense] and all... kept it there, and that too in the corner. You imagine that!"

"So far," Guyon went on, "we couldn't see anything. People said, 'She'll be coming. *Mada* will be coming.' We waited there, all sitting, here and there, and one man, like a guide asked us to sit facing toward the second room. Some people were anxious, but he was talking all the time, 'Wait, wait. She'll come.' So we all waited in the front room of this hut.

"My daughter and we, all were praying. Like *Mada's kulam* [well], like Bethesda *Kulam* - in the Bible it is given. When *Mada* will come and what she's going to tell to my daughter, whether she'll be cured or not? So we were in that anxiety. Then she came. She was short. She went inside that shrine and was praying to Our Lady. She prayed naturally...

"Suddenly, she changed her voice, 'I am coming. *Amma*. I am coming...', " Guyon imitated the voice she heard, a high-pitched, staccatto intonation. "In that changed tone she talked. So, *Mada* came. When she said [changing her pitch and imitating], '*Mada varangu!* She'll give good health to everyone,' we believed it." Guyon laughed. "We could not see what she was doing inside, but nobody will be allowed there. When she stopped, we went by the door. 'Will my daughter...?' She sprinkled water, *Mada's* water, but she didn't give any blessing."

"Then we started for the bus stand, and my daughter was all right. Just imagine! She was able to walk to the bus stand! Before that, she was not able to walk. She's about forty years old. She was a deaf and dumb child, so she cannot hear anything. We have been praying for her, asking her to pray too. We told her that Our Lady will help, and bless her. Then we took her and walked in the village, on the road, and in the paddy field. So we, both of us, believed it."

5.2.4 A Vision of the Saint is Shown to All

"Some people whose daughter was also very sick learned of this healing and took us by car to Orattur," said Guyon. "That day *Mada* was 'shown' to us." When they arrived, they were told to return the next day. "Santi said, 'Come tomorrow evening. Our Lady will give her presence. You can see her.' What things she said! She is not even educated." Guyon Balraj, a retired teacher, places a high value on the benefits of formal education. Her disdain for the uneducated was also not lost on her husband, the engine driver. "'*Mada* will come,' that girl said. We believed it. In what *rubam* [form] we didn't think. We were waiting there, in that village, in that room, under that thatched roof. Imagine, the roof is angled up from the walls to the peak, with no ceiling. It is a common roof for both the rooms. We were all waiting the next day from 6:00 o'clock until 11:00 o'clock. At 11:30, she still didn't come. Then we saw it on the roof. Just imagine. Even now I can see the figure. A shade like that *Arokkiya Mada*, Our Lady of Velanganni. B-I-G!"

"Carrying the child?" asked Arockiasamy. "Yes, carrying the child," Guyon went on. "Our Lady of Velanganni has the child Jesus in her hand. B-i-g! It was coming so far." Guyon swept her arm in an arc, up the wall of her sitting room and across her ceiling. "Enlarged. The figure was bent. See, Father," speaking to Arockiasamy, "if you focus properly, the figure was bent and the head was... there." Guyon pointed across the ceiling, beyond her ceiling fan, as though past the peak of an imagined thatched roof. There were two bends in the shadowy figure, suggesting that it was being projected from within the shrine room, across two angles in the roof.

"Was it like a smoky shadow, or could you see...", began Arockiasamy. "Aaaaaanh!" answered Guyon with impatience. "You could see her form, but only shadow. But I will witness one thing. I once saw Our Lady and also her son, Jesus Christ, as 'Our Lady Help of Christians' in a vision. So I can imagine that figure, and

I can say how she has appeared to me, but this was a s-h-a-d-e. Black...."

"So what you're saying," I asked, "is if she was behind the wall and you're looking from the other room..." "Yes, that's what I said. Aaaaanh," protested Guyon. "We found out everything." Listening to this account, I had wanted to suggest that a light and a common small statue of *Arokkiya Mada* could have produced this apparition, but Guyon beat me to it. "The focus, no, and the light she has behind the figure, that's what.... I don't know how the people are believing."

5.2.5 A Show of Lights

"Whether that was a real thing or not, we don't know," added Balraj, restoring our perspective to the time of the miracle from that of his wife's superior hindsight. "The next day, Santi calls to me, 'You all come back about 9:00 at night, not in the day. *Amma* will come and give you light.'"

"I didn't go," added Guyon. "Look here, *Sami* ['Father']," said Balraj to Fr. Arockiasamy, "the first time we went, there was no *hundi* [Hindi for donation box] or anything. No one gave any money. Then, gradually, we saw a big 'dum box'...." Guyon interrupted, "A big *kasu petti* [literally, cash box]!" "Later," said Balraj, all these things came out - dum box, candles, garlands..."

"Eversilver [stainless steel] vases, lights, and all," added Guyon. "Then, only, I began to suspect her," Balraj concluded.

Balraj described his experience with the lights which came with *Amma* when Maryamma called her. "When it was nearly 12:15 we saw a white light, or red light, I cannot say. Santi said, '*Vandutanga* [She has come]. *Amma* has come, so everybody come quickly.' Up to that time, we should not enter the shrine room. Now she was asking everybody to come inside." "As soon as it becomes dark, *Mada* comes," laughed Guyon, derisively.

"'Come on, come on, see...' Santi said. So Our Lady appeared, Velanganni Mada and Child, a very small kid. His hand is like this." Balraj held up his right hand in a boy scout salute, palm forward with two fingers raised in blessing. "In it there was a small red light, a very, very small red tube, very bright." Balraj was frustrated with his inability to properly describe what he had seen. "I'm trying to tell you the shape of the light. The shape of the light was not like a tube [flourescent] light. The whole house was lit like by thousands of watts. It was very small, but such a bright, high-powered light. Nobody will fix [install] like that. No light can you purchase anywhere also, for focussing. Such a light I have never seen - Bangalore, Vangalore [onomatopoeia], Goa, Madras, this side, that side..."

This was a rare occasion indeed. Maryamma almost never permits anyone inside the room where she meets and talks with *Amma*. The light Balraj described sounds, on one hand, like a laser beam in its focussed concentration, and on the other, like an electric arc welder, which could produce this kind of intense illumination. "We all saw it for just ten minutes, and that girl said, '*Amma poranga* [*Amma* is going].'"

"As soon as the light was switched off, it became dark. Immediately I switched on the [room] light and saw nothing was there." Balraj immediately inspected the figure of *Arokkiya Mada*. "I saw nothing was there. There was nothing in the Child Jesus' hand."

"How can that be?" asked Fr. Arockiasamy. "I saw before that a light was there," said Balraj. "It was so bright. All the people saw it. This light was bright, a red light. On another day when I went, it was white." Fr. Arockiasamy began to press Balraj for a commitment: "Okay, so was it a miracle? Have you come so far? How could it be? Did you investigate?"

"When the light was so bright, won't it shine in the whole room?" he answered. "When they say, '*Mada* has come', it lights up. When *Mada* left, the light disappeared."

"So, that means *Mada* really came," the priest pressed on. "So, do you believe that *Mada* came?" Balraj responded softly, "Yes."

"Are you saying, 'Yes, she came'?" Sensitive to the ambivalence of his tentative affirmation, Balraj challenged Arockiasamy: "Who saw it? I saw only the light."

"You're telling me you saw the light," Fr. Arockiasamy came back, "and then you saw it disappear, and you saw there was nothing in the Child's hand, so what do you say? Was it a miracle? Do you say that *Mada* came? Because... you are also saying you saw what she did."

Balraj continued stolidly, unwilling to yield a commitment. "Nothing was in the hand. There was nothing there, no connection of any kind, no current, no wire, no light [ie., no bulb or tube], nothing to attach it to. Within a radius of three feet of the statue, there was nothing." To Mrs. Balraj: "What is around the *Arokkiya* statue? What is around it?"

"Could it be a spotlight?", Heather offered. "No, no! Nothing! Immediately I looked all over the statue. It was a plain statue." "No hole", I asked, "Nothing at all?" "I saw nothing," concluded Balraj. "All those people who came believed."

"Now, see," said Fr. Arockiasamy, "you're saying all that is humbug. How do you explain this?" "All that is later," said Balraj. "I saw all these things, and got confused, and '*Oru madiri aiyiduttu*'." Literally, this translates as "one kind happened". The phrase has a wide range of meaning, interpreted by the listener, in context (4.4.3; Chapter 4, note 7).

5.2.6 *Amma* Speaks in Different Languages.

but Does Not Know Latin

"Now, I'll tell you what happened one day," Balraj went on. "I told Fr. Victor at Ammapettai I would come by bus one morning and we would both go to Orattur and find out the facts. Hah! I told him to inform that girl that we were coming. When we arrived, they just told us that she's taking a bath. Some people

were there, sitting. Then she was there, inside the next room, 'Amma has come. Amma has come,' we heard Santi's voice, 'Ask her whatever you want,' somebody asking something, and she answered."

"Is all this in Tamil or English?" asked Fr. Arockiasamy. "In Tamil only, but they've kept a tape of Amma speaking in Hindi, English, German," Balraj offered. "Is there a tape?" asked Guyon. "Yes," said her husband. "Everything has been taped and kept. What she has spoken in Urdu is taped beautifully. But I speak only Telugu, not Urdu. She has also spoken in some other language. It is just like a foreigner's voice... that kind of tone."

As the conversation became more involved, it gradually shifted from English into more easily expressible Tamil. "What is she saying in these languages?" asked Fr. Arockiasamy. "Are they replies to questions, or ...?"

Balraj continued, "'Amma, my stomach is paining,' says someone. So, she says, 'Po, pa [literally, "go, sir", as one might say "go on", or "never mind"]'. You will be all right within a week.' A Hindi-speaking person said, 'In nine years I still have no children. I want a child.' 'In this year itself,' the voice answered in Hindi, 'you will give birth to a son... no, a daughter will be born to you. Go, a daughter will be born.' So, they told us, when the daughter was born, the same person came back, dedicated the child in Orattur, naming her 'Sagaya', and gave a dinner for everyone."

"So, if Hindi speaking people ask," enquired Arockiasamy, "the answer comes in Hindi?" "She spoke pure Hindi to me," said Balraj. "You said," said Arockiasamy, "that this girl, who has hardly any education, is replying in Hindi when she's asked a question in Hindi, in Urdu when she's asked in Urdu. How can that be?"

"When you were present there, asked Heather, "did someone ask a question in Hindi?" "Ah hanh, all that didn't happen," Balraj answered. "He heard only the tape," added Guyon. "This was told to him, and the tape was played."

"If you ask, 'How is that?'" Balraj answered Arockiasamy's query, "She will simply say that it is *Mada* who is speaking," "Wait, wait," said Arokkiysami. "When that lady spoke in Hindi, in Urdu, you heard it?" Balraj responded, "I only heard the cassette. They had made it earlier."

Who made it?" Arockiasamy persisted. "Who made the cassette?" "Those people cooked it up," said Guyon, who by now seemed to think our whole discussion a hilarious farce.

"You see," said Balraj, "when we went there, a small group of about five or six people were there. One of them said to my friend, 'Father, listen to this. Somebody has taped *Amma's* voice.'"

A discussion ensued, with all five of us talking, to determine whether Balraj had actually spoken with *Amma* in Hindi and received an answer. It was finally resolved that he had not, and all agreed that the tape could easily have been faked.

"Wait," said Balraj, "let me tell about this a little. When Victor and I went, when that girl said that *Mada* has come, and we were all listening, I asked Fr. Victor, 'What is all this? Is it really *Mada*? You ask.' So Father, because he has studied Latin, questioned her in Latin. He asked, 'Are you really *Mada*?' No reply. Up to then, she was replying to everybody, but when father asked in Latin. 'In the Arab country, did you also learn Urdu?' he asked in English, because we had just heard the tape. There was no reply at all. Now, if this was really a miracle, if it was Mother answering the questions....

"Somebody informed the police that she was doing some humbug there. They said she was gathering the people as Catholic and wanted to convert them," said Balraj, changing the subject. "'We have to control in this,' they said..."

"... because they are orthodox Hindus," added Guyon. "She messed the whole thing up. A young girl going about and all, they heard many stories. At first she said, 'We are going to build a church here, a church for Our Lady, and we are collecting some...'

We all put some offerings in the *hundi*. It's a nice place, Orattur, a small village, so we thought it would be all right. Naturally, we thought, God has chosen the place. Afterward, after finding out all we did, I refused more help."

"According to the police report," Balraj went on, "three policemen caught the girl. Even now, it seems, she is not to come into the village."

It is clear from Balraj's testimony that collecting money was a major activity of Maryamma's ministry at Orattur before her seclusion, and that her running away from home and moving about alone had earned her an undesirable reputation for a young woman. Her granduncle, Viraiyan had also told of how she used to run away from home, and how he had to go to various places and return her to her parents (Viraiyan 1993.06.21).

5.2.7 Balraj's Sponsorship of Maryamma

"After that," said Guyon, "she began coming here [to Tanjavur], and we took her everywhere, to everybody's house. It was we alone who told everybody. Also, we wrote some letters about all that she's doing, recommending [her], telling everything to the Father [parish priest]. These people came here; we were thinking and planning, both of us. Then we took her to everybody's house."

Clearly convinced of Maryamma's *bona fides*, the couple had cooperated in promoting her in Tanjavur as a holy woman. It seems that Maryamma was making efforts through such devotees to extend her constituency beyond her village, Orattur, to Tanjavur, the district headquarters and the seat of the Catholic bishop.

"They went to the rich *nadar* families," she went on. "He [Balraj] was her only mediator. He took her, the *Mada-amma*.⁶ He had some belief also. But I said, 'I don't believe all this.' I was having doubts. He was fully interested. That's why he took her."

"One question", I interjected. "You are saying '*Mada*,... *Mada*'. Did Santi and the others use that word, '*Mada*'?" "*Madamma*,"

Guyon answered, "that *amma* is herself. *Madamma*. People from the village, illiterate people, all believed in her." Heather tried to clarify, "Did she use the word '*Mada*', or '*Amma*'?" "*Mada* has come; *Amma* has come," said Guyon, still uncomprehending, and affirming both sides of this contrary. She seemed unable to understand that the question was in regard to the terminology, rather than to their referent. Guyon was complicating the matter by conflating the two, perhaps confusing even herself.

"The reason I asked", I pressed the issue, "is that in Vadiyakkadu they always say '*Amma*', while at Velanganni, they say, '*Mada*'." "Ah," she said, "*Amma*, *Amma* has come. Yes, we only say *Mada*." Guyon Balraj was using "*Madamma*" in reference to Maryamma, whose own mother, Kanakambujam, uses the term in reference to the Virgin Mary, the Lady [*amman*?] who is called *Mada* (3.2.3; Chapter 1 notes 3, 11; Chapter 3 note 11).

5.2.8 Betrayed by a Little Milk:

"He took Santi to Irene's house," Guyon continued. "Irene's an Anglo-Indian, a head-mistress of a school.⁷ She had lost her son and was in some agony. There they found out that Santi was having a bottle here...", Guyon pointed to a common handbag..., "and simply poured the milk from it. From that time," Guyon laughed, "she was found out. *She was a hypocrite*."

"So what happened was, in Irene's house," Guyon continued, "Santi went into a room and prayed, and said, '*Mada* is pouring milk.' Inside that room, we heard, '*Gada-gada-gada*' (cf. 4.4.4). We heard the very sound of the liquid pouring into some vessel, and there also we were not allowed to go inside. Water, she will have, naturally, because everybody gives it to her.⁸ Because it was blessed, so much water is coming. We did not know how much water God is giving, and our Lady is giving, and how much the people. *Mada*'s going to bless that water and all will be sprinkled with it. Santi brought out an eversilver *cambu* [vessel] full of water and milk, mixed, and she gave it to all. I didn't drink it, but all the rest of them drank."

"One of the teachers found out," Balraj picked up the story. Her name is Antoinette. We were all sitting in Irene's house. They never allow anyone to know what this Santi is doing inside the small room, but this Antoinette looked through the keyhole."

"All this time," admitted Guyon, who had spent much of our interview trying to distance herself from the whole affair, sometimes at her husband's expense, "we believed it, so we never peeped or anything. Where Santi went, and spoke with *Mada*, she said you must put a screen, or she must go inside a room." "She always used to instruct us that way," said Balraj.

"Because she's saying that, naturally we respect her," continued Guyon. "We should not come out of the room where she has asked us to sit. But that girl, Antoinette, was looking through the keyhole at what Santi was doing, without telling anyone."

"That Santi, she never goes into the room, or behind the screen empty handed," said Balraj. "She won't simply go and pray alone. There is always a basket. So, what happened finished everything. Antoinette called me, 'Uncle, Uncle!' 'What, Ma? What?' I answered. 'Did you drink that milk?' she asked me. 'It is such different milk, I say. It is pure - not boiled, no sugar, nothing - quite different from any I had before. Uncle, come and see.' She showed me a 'Horlicks' bottle with a little milk left inside. Santi had closed the bottle and kept it in her bag. That girl took the bottle and handed it over to the head-mistress. Irene asked me to wait outside. Then she called me. 'See this?' she said to me, 'The leftover milk is here. You drank that milk "*Mada*" gave. Taste this milk and tell me if it's not what you tasted before.'"

With this episode, *Amma's* miraculous pouring of milk was definitively exposed. Balraj was shamed, shown up as a dupe.

"She had brought fresh cow's milk from the village," said Balraj. "From that time, it was all over. Afterwards, Santi didn't stay here. Simply, I left her free. Otherwise, I would have kicked

her. After that, 'Strongly religious...', all the Hindus said, jokingly, about me."

"For some months people used to say, 'He is yearning for money; that's why he's doing it'," said Guyon. "So, after this happened, he could only say to them, 'Shut up!'"

5.2.9 Maryamma's Relations in Tanjavur,

and a Missing Gold Chain

"Okay, I want to ask something," said Fr. Arockiasamy. "People are saying Santi had kept her *tay mama*⁹ at that time and did *puja* [performed some sort of marriage rite]. Did she give birth to a child? Is it true?"

"What *tay mama*?!" demanded Balraj. "Where is there a *tay mama*? They are related to me. Her mother has no brothers. There are just two sisters... *akka*, *tangai* [elder, younger].

Balraj is here making a claim to privileged knowledge of Maryamma's antecedents as a relative, which Guyon had explicitly denied at the beginning of our interview. He is also responding with indignation to Arockiasamy's allusion that a *kallar* girl would engage in such immorality. His information about the family appears to be defective.¹⁰

Arockiasamy persisted with this line of questioning which, more and more, irritated our informants. "Here, she kept some boy... a *tay mama*. A child was born. That child was buried. After that they got married in some church in Nidamanagalam."

"Ayaye! It's not like that," said Guyon and Balraj in unison. "That is *Mada*'s child," said Balraj, in a clearly defensive reference to *Aiya*, Maryamma's special child.

"One teacher had come, a *nadar* fellow," said Guyon. "His name was like 'Adeshtari Tambiran'. He wrote many hymns, a lot of things. 'You better tell the Bishop', he said, 'that she is doing all these things.'" [The "name" of this *nadar* suggests the meaning "first master of (one's) choice", an obscure reference.]

"When we asked about what he did, we were told that you bring ten fresh roses and a dish," said Balraj. "He takes the ten

roses and puts them on the dish. When his prayer is over, only one or two rose flowers will remain. 'Poor Mada', he would say, 'I believe she liked them very much, so she ate them up.' Even the stem would be gone. The leaves alone would be there." "What nonsense," Guyon added. "The Bishop got sick when he read all that," said Balraj, laughing. "Then, that fellow went away."

"He had gone against her because, it seems," said Guyon, "she left that boy... that man. And she has got... Somebody saw others... because..." Guyon stumbled. This was dangerous ground. She was suggesting that Maryamma had been courting lovers. But she had taken the plunge, and so went on. "This fellow, the *nadar* teacher, was making some money, so another fellow, a relative [of Santi], ah... became jealous of him. And so that relative went and beat the fellow up. Something like that was going on. There was a... She's a girl, no...?"

In effect, Guyon had revealed that two men had been jealously fighting over Maryamma, at least partly because she was a potential, or actual, source of income. Guyon also suggested, perhaps unintentionally, that witnesses had noted other men in some connection with her. The implication is that, as a young, unmarried woman, Maryamma should not have indulged in such connections, but that, for the men involved, the attractions were natural.

Heather asked, "Who is this *nadar* boy?" "He's a teacher from Nidamangalam," said Guyon. Added Balraj, "This is some two, three years ago. We heard so much news about her afterward, how she got married, and all."

"Is she married now?" asked Arockiasamy. Said Guyon, "The people say so. I don't know."

"One day," Balraj began, "what happened at Pattuk-kottai..." but his wife cut him off. "*Ninga ponga* [literally 'You go'; that is, 'Stop talking']," Guyon said. Balraj was about to tell a story which she knew very well might embarrass them all the more. Guyon and Balraj had been badly shamed before people whose

opinion they valued by the exposure at Irene's home of a trick by Maryamma, their protegee. Balraj had struggled hard, through prayer, to believe Maryamma's claims before promoting her. He had committed himself, and all his hopes were suddenly crushed by the evidence of that tiny bit of left-over milk.

Fortunately for us, Balraj was not easily constrained, and after a narrative detour, while Guyon had gone to make some coffee, he eventually told us his story of Maryamma at Pattukkottai.

Not everyone had, like themselves, been convinced of any deceit. "Once," Balraj began his detour, "our relatives went to Vadiyakkadu. How mad they were. All the particulars we don't know, but our relative went, and told us this."

"He took these people," said Guyon, as she served coffee, "and with them was one woman having an eight-sovereign gold chain. Santi was doing some miracles there to make the people stay the night. That woman put the chain under her pillow and slept. In the morning, she woke and found that her chain was gone. 'Oh,' she was asking, 'Who took it?!' and began fighting with Santi, who said, 'Nobody took it. It must have been some *picacu*, some devil that took it.' Because she is not educated, she doesn't know how to talk. 'Somebody...', she said, '... whoever it was, it will come out.' She was saying, 'I don't know how, but the chain will come to you.' Santi was also wearing a gold chain."

"Who?" asked Arockiasamy. "This Santi," said Balraj. "Her chain was also missing. If only one chain is missing, then the suspicion will fall on her, so hers was also missing. She said, 'What to do?' They said, 'Ask *Mada* where the chain is.' 'The cross is near the coconut tree. Go and search,' said *Mada*. So they went and looked and found only the cross. *Mada* didn't say anything about this other lady's chain. It was only after that that she didn't believe and gave a complaint to the police. That's when they were taken into custody, Santi and [Yobu], and the police said only, 'If they're locked up for four days, they'll tell,' and

beat them up. Immediately [the woman's son-in-law] bailed them out. He was willing to go in for a compromise with the Pattukkottai police."

"The chain is missing,' Santi told him," offered Guyon.
"Everyone is suspecting me' Mary said. 'They'll beat me and kill me. If the police keep me here at night... they'll trouble me. Protect my honour.'"

"Now that boy is compensating the eight-sovereign cost," continued Balraj. "He is an ordinary fellow. He hasn't got anything. He may be earning only Rs.300, Rs.400. How can he give Rs.20,000? We are getting Rs.5000, Rs.4,000 and we cannot give Rs.20,000."

"He gave money to the police, that's all?" asked Arockiasamy, under the impression that the issue was one of police extortion. "How much money did he give?"

"No, no, no!" said Balraj and Guyon, together. "He gave," Balraj continued, "Rs.24,000, to compensate his mother-in-law."

5.2.10 Panjabakesan Threatens Maryamma on Principle

"What do you know about Mary's family?" I asked.
"Actually," said Guyon, "her mother was affectionate with the daughter, and she wanted to earn some money, so she went away with her daughter to Vadiyakkadu. The father went to Vadiyakkadu, but she drove him off. After that, the mother herself suffered there and went back home." It seemed that Guyon wanted to convince us that Kanakambujam had some pecuniary motive which would have taken her there, an unlikely possibility. This account corresponds with nothing we learned from others concerning connections of Maryamma's family with Vadiyakkadu, but it suggests a breach between Maryamma's parents which could conceivably have resulted from Kanakambujam's guilt at abandoning her child, years before, due to Panjabakesan's rejection of her.

Balraj said, "At that time, her father used to come to our house. I used to say, 'What is this daughter of yours up to? So much mischief!' 'If she comes back to my village,' [Panjabakesan

is alleged to have said,] 'I'll chop her in two pieces. I'll cut off her head. She should never enter my house.'" When Kanakambujam and Baskaran were interviewed in their home at Orattur (3.4), Panjabakesan kept well away from our conversation and did not refute Kanakambujam's willingness to have their daughter return home, even to vacate it themselves if Maryamma would asked them to do so (3.4.6).

5.2.11 The Breast Surgery

When Balraj heard that Santi was in Tanjavur for breast surgery, he went in search of her. She had, however, already left to stay with Josephine Thomas in Pabanasam. Balraj told this story about their search for her:

"My best friend, Kulandaisami called me. The first day, it seems, she was in birthpangs (cf. 3.6.2). She was there in some ward. He heard about it and asked me, 'What? Do you believe in that girl? I know she is the same caste and related to you also, but do you believe her?' *Mada*, *Velanganni Mada* came, they said, and operated the case and they kept all the blood swabbed cotton. I sent someone to tell her Balraj *Tata* and a friend are coming to meet her. My friend was in the Charismatic [Renewal]. They go in for prayer, Charismatics. At night they get that feeling of God and they continuously go on praying. Otherwise, they won't do it." There was a hint of sarcasm in Balraj's voice.

"Let it be," Fr. Arockiasamy said. "Now tell us about the operation performed by *Mada*. Was it really performed by *Mada*?"

"They said *Mada* did it," returned Balraj, noncommittally. "But they didn't allow anyone to see. Then, they ran away, maybe when she heard about us. 'Where's she gone? We want to see her', I asked them. 'She's at Pabanasam', they told us. We went to Pabanasam, and got there the day before she left." Josephine Thomas had cared for Maryamma in her home from April 15-24, 1989 (Josephine 1993.06.27). Balraj's visit would have been on April 23, 1989.

"We went there, to our relative Mrs. Thomas [Josephine], and found Santi. When we entered her house, Mrs. Thomas told me, 'Uncle, see this Christ's picture.' What we saw was, at the heart, a red mark, two dots. As a Catholic and all, a charismatic, Kulandaisami wouldn't believe it." Softly, Balraj repeated, "He wouldn't believe. He likes clarity, is always asking for facts. She told me Lord Jesus wept."

"Where were the red dots on the figure?" I asked Balraj. "Below the heart, you got two dots. It is coming out from the heart. You can touch it. Where can you touch and keep like that?"

"Was the dot wet, or dry?" I asked. "If a dot of blood comes," Balraj said, "a drop is formed. It has to flow, isn't it? If you take a safety pin and poke, it will flow, isn't it? But this is touched. I told Kulandaisami, 'Brother, don't believe this. She is up to no good here. Okay, blood may be there, but she touched that blood to the picture. She has done it herself, and is making humbug here.' I said to Santi, 'What is this Ma?' With what face are you telling lies over and over again? 'Ayoyo...' I said, over and over again. 'You're putting your blood on the glass and saying *Andavar* is crying. You are going to *Amma* and saying..., and if *Amma* cries tears of blood, someone might believe. How is this, *Appa* is crying? Who has heard of this? What a bluff you're doing.'" This, it should be remembered was the event which convinced Josephine's husband, Thomas of the truth of *Amma* in Maryamma (3.7.3.2).

"Was the blood on the picture itself, or on the glass?" Arockiasamy asked. Balraj was unable to answer his question, because, when we examined the bleeding picture at Josephine's home five days after this interview, it turned out to be not a framed print, as Fr. Arockiasamy presumed, but a frameless plastic laser picture of a crucifix. It depicts Jesus' eyes open from one angle, and closed when the axes of the picture are shifted.

"Mrs. Thomas offered us coffee." By this time, Balraj had had enough. "I said, 'No, no, no. I don't want anything... no

coffee, nothing. *Mada* made a blood mark, then came and made coffee!!' All these people were going and coming, and it's all bluff. My friend, he's a staunch Charismatic - devils and everything. So I said, 'You come and pray, Kulandai. You Charismatic, you go for a meeting simply to pray, with devil spirits.' I told her we'll come and pray. Very early in the morning, at 4:00 o'clock."

5.2.12 Balraj's Struggle

"After they showed me the blood on the picture of the Sacred Heart," said Balraj, "I just couldn't believe it. Because I couldn't believe, you know what I did? I cried, and cried, and prayed to *Andavar*. I sat down continuously and cried to *Andavar* that only if you tell me will I get up from here. After all this humbug in Pabanasam, I was praying one night. Nearly 11:30, my wife got up, 'What, you've started prayer? Is this a time for prayer, starting by night at 11:30?' she asked me. But I prayed, and prayed, weeping, until morning, 4:00 o'clock or 4:30. I prayed like this, weeping, weeping, weeping throughout, 'Lord, let me know. It is purely humbug. I won't believe. Lord Jesus, give me this. Your mother will not come and do all this blasphemy in the village. I want to know. Tell me. Tell me!' I said. In the night, I heard something - just like these very words - in a fantastic way. It was the Holy Spirit.

"At that time," continued Balraj, "what I saw... you know, when we go over to her house in Orattur, in a cutting [side lane] on the left, we got one temple. That's called *Angala*. Hindu... *Angalamman* is crushing this ordinary man."

"That is the devil," Guyon interrupted him, certain that this talk of Hindu goddesses would not be understood by a mere foreigner. "There is an evil spirit. Simply say that."

Balraj persisted, "See, there are Nine Sisters. *Angala* is the seventh sister... very harmful (Meyer 1986, *passim*). Santi is there, nearby, and we pass by this temple to her house [in Orattur]. In my prayer, God is talking and shows me the temple.

The devil is there, shivering... in the side of the chair..." I take this devil to be the "true" form of the *amman*, *Angala* who seems so formidably powerful without the divine sight Balraj believes the Holy Spirit gave to him.

Guyon interrupted again, "That's okay, what you saw... What should be told to them is about the time you went to Vadiyakkadu?" Balraj fended her off again, "I didn't go to Vadiyakkadu yet. That was much later." Guyon would not desist. "What you saw... the *picacu*... let that be."

"It's because of what I saw that I went to Vadiyakkadu," said Balraj. "Otherwise, why would I go?"

"What is the research they are doing...?" Guyon asked her husband, insisting that he keep the discussion to what she imagined to be our concerns. She could not have known just how much more interesting Balraj was making the interview with this account of being shown by the Holy Spirit [*Parisutta Avi*, which he used interchangeably with *Andavar*, Lord] that Maryamma was possessed by *Angalamman*.

"*Andavar* showed me a vision," Balraj repeated with firm conviction. "This *Angalamma* has possessed her, is making her do all this. No one believes me. Even the Bishop won't listen. I kept asking the Bishop to ask *Andavar* himself. 'I don't know', he says. She is possessed by *Angalamma*. She worships it. *Andavar* showed me." Turning to Heather, Balraj said, "You are in the Charismatic [Renewal]. Why don't you ask?"

5.2.13 Maryamma's Leg Affliction

"That devil is said to have taken away her legs," said Guyon. "I saw it in the photos," added Balraj. "I don't know if it's true. I believe she was just sitting and praying, when Satan came and said, 'What is this? You are making 'bada-bada-bada' [just chattering] and increasing the faithful, saying 'Mada, Mada'." Then he took her legs, from the knees down." Guyon asked him, "Did you see it?" Balraj answered, "The photos are there." To us, he offered, "If you come now to Vadiyakkadu, I'll show you."

They're bald, both the legs. There are no knees at all. Three days she was there. She suffered a lot. After that, she asked *Mada* for her legs, and *Mada* brought them and stuck them back immediately. On the third day, she was healed."

5.2.14 The Bishop's Orders

"The Bishop", said Balraj, "called me and told me, 'I heard about all this, about all the people coming. The president of the charismatics for the whole of Tamil Nadu has written, and now the All-India president, Fr. Kulandairaj, is in this [i.e., involved].' Fr. Francis is the Tamil Nadu president. We used to go and talk to him. He was all right. Kulandairaj was called by that Mother at Pabanasam [Sr. Jacinta].

"*'Aiya* [an honourific form of address suitable for a bishop]', Balraj related what he reported to the Bishop. 'We got one girl, Mary, born of Hindus, blessed by Our Lady, Virgin Mother of Velanganni. She's doing miracles. Then we have one child dug up and taken out from the grave, after one year.' After one year! This Mother wrote to Fr. Kulandairaj. So he came and met her, and asked, 'Mother, what's this you wrote about a child, dead before, again buried, and the same child is going to be taken out of the grave? Are they Catholic?' 'No. Hindu', she told him. 'Hindu? All right, we'll go and see.' So that Mother, Father, and other people all combined and went to Vadiyakkadu."

5.2.15 Moses' Resurrection

Fr. Arockiasamy began, "That man who was keeping her, he was from somewhere near Vadiyakkadu, married. They had a child that was dead, buried. That chap used to go there daily and offer flowers for that baby." Shocked, Balraj exclaimed, "You heard this?!"

I sympathized with Balraj. He was trying to protect Maryamma's honour, in spite of his acceptance of what he regarded as her tricks. The priest insisted on constructing his own connections out of bits and pieces of different stories. By this time, I had a much better sense of how they fit together than did

Fr. Arockiasamy, who had told me about the girl who resurrected a child in the first place, but I had assured the people at Vadiyakkadu that I would not be sharing information with the Bishop or with his subordinates. Fr. Arockiasamy needed to believe that Maryamma had had a child, since it was rumoured she had one. Thus, he inferred that Moses was the son of Maryamma and Rajendiran of Kalliyur. I wished that Fr. Arockiasamy's curiosity could have been allayed before his participation in this interview, which was taking on more and more importance for me.

"I went to Vadiyakkadu and I saw," Balraj went on. "They kept a vessel and were doing *pūja*. I saw all the photos, too. This fellow told me, 'Uncle, one year ago in Tirutturaippundi hospital, a child died...'"

"But Mary did not tell this," Arockiasamy interrupted. "No," Balraj agreed, "she did not tell. It was that Kennedy from Pabanasam. He came there and stayed at the [Tirutturaippundi] hospital. He went to see the person whose son died.

That fellow and his wife are Hindus. He used to go to Vadiyakkadu and pray to Our Lady for a child. Our Lady promised him, 'I'll give you a male child,' but the child which was born was a female child. The child which was born dead was a girl. After the death he was always there, requesting *Mada* to give him a male child. So they buried a girl child, and dug out a male child. What is this! While that fellow, Kennedy told me this, Mary just sat there, shaking her head, quietly.

"I can say this - I cannot believe it," continued Balraj. "The Bishop sent me, so I went to the village of this man whose child died. There was a small boy there. 'Is this the child that was resurrected?' I asked him about how it happened. 'I didn't go. My wife went there,' he told me." Now, if Balraj was speaking with Rajendiran, and quoting him accurately, this is an evasion, for Rajendiran is clearly visible in the disinterment video and photographs as one of those using spades to open the grave.

"Now where have I gone to bang my head, *Sami*?" said Balraj, turning to Fr. Arockiasamy. "'If you went and *muttina* [literally, banged it], had searched somewhere, you'd have found something,' the Bishop will say. But when I got there that fellow says, 'I don't know anything. My wife went to Vadiyakkadu. She brought this child'" (4.5.3).

"But the child had died," said Guyon. "That's the truth, isn't it? And it is true that it was dug out. That's what you were to find out."

"Such a big... joke," said Balraj, dejected. He was referring not to the truth or falsity of the resurrection but the futility he experienced in trying to find out things for the Bishop. "Look here, Ma," he addressed Guyon, "the child that died is different from the child that was dug up. The one that died was a girl, buried near the Tirutturaippundi Maternity Hospital, in the *konda mattadi* [refuse dump]. All that I went and saw. The hospital people buried it... as though it was this family who buried it."

"Wasn't it buried in Vadiyakkadu?" asked Guyon. "*Po, Ma*," said Balraj. "If a child dies in the maternity ward of a hospital, the people of the hospital will simply bury it somewhere. So, how did the child that was buried then come and bury itself where you are saying?" Fr. Arockiasamy intervened, "There is a story about it, we know. But when you saw the child, it looked rather big."

"Yes, it looked about one year old, because it was dug up after a year," said Balraj. "I saw the boy. The child is nice and fair, with white skin, and good looking. After the child came, the father went to Vadiyakkadu and fed the whole village. That is how everybody came to know. That fellow [Rajendiran] is behind this whole drama. 'Oh! *Mada* has dug out my dead child and given it new life!' he said, and invited everyone for a big dinner. Only because of that everybody knows about Vadiyakkadu."

"Are they very rich?" asked Heather. "Not bad," said Guyon. "He has a lot of land." Balraj continued, "He is a very

rich man. He could have paid money and bought that child. Even when they told how they dug the child up, I couldn't believe it. That Sister was there from Pabanasam [Sr. Jacinta]. All of them were there when they dug the pit. All this that Kennedy fellow told me. They could hear the child crying. So gently, they removed the mud with their hands. When they opened the coffin, there was the child. Many people came and they all believed."

"So," Balraj continued, "I asked his wife [Pirabavati] more about it. 'What, Ma? What did you ask *Mada*?' 'I asked *Mada* for a boy child, and one day, she said to me, 'I'll give you a boy child soon'. 'When? How long after your child died did you get this child?' I asked her. 'It all took about seven or eight months', so she said. She's a village woman. When I asked her husband [Rajendiran], he said, 'I don't know anything. She went and came back with this child, that's all.'"

"Is that sister who was there also a *kallar*?" asked Heather, "Is Fr. Kulandairaj?" "He is not," said Balraj. "She, maybe, but he does not belong to our caste."¹¹ "Definitely not," said Fr. Arockiasamy. "He's a Charismatic, isn't he? That is why, in the very beginning, he believed this." It is interesting that Fr. Arockiasamy associates Charismatic Catholics with gullibility, while Balraj expresses respect for the discernment and judgement of his friend, Kulandaisami, precisely because he is a Charismatic.

"Fr. Kulandairaj and that Sister are the ones who did all the propaganda," said Balraj. "If they didn't do propaganda, no one would know about all this." "Kulandairaj is giving talks everywhere," said Arockiasamy. "Yes," said Balraj. "He gave a talk which was heard by some bishops. Those bishops asked our Bishop." Said Arockiasamy, "They asked about the apparitions in our diocese. Since the Bishop has no time, and he cannot go directly, he has to ask others." Balraj agreed, "The moment he goes, they get too much fame. I told him not to go. The Bishop kept asking me

to go to Vadiyakkadu. "What a pain it is, *Sami*," said Balraj to the priest. "I told him, 'I don't know anything'.

"On top of that," Balraj went on, "our Bishop is doing even greater propaganda and sending everyone into a spin. Why? Because a man from *Canada* has come. All dupe! There was also some Charismatic, Brother Peter. When he prayed, some candles appeared. If such things happen when such a man prays, why don't any lights and candles appear when Mada appears?" ¹²

"Can you tell me about Josephine Thomas and her family?" I asked Balraj. "Kennedy's mother is a nurse. Her husband is a teacher, retired now, I'm told. Kennedy is searching for work. He comes around Mary so she'll pray to Our Lady of Health to give him an appointment. Their daughter died by *panni*, by poison." "Her name is Irene. She was married", Heather offered. "Married," Guyon confirmed, "and ill treated. Actually, they say that she herself took poison. I cannot believe that."

"All the devil's gang," said Balraj.

5.2.16 The Special Child

After the Bishop heard about Moses' resurrection, Balraj went at his urging to Vadiyakkadu, despite his disaffection with Maryamma. She was not at home, but was visiting in Pattukkottai, about twenty-five kilometers away. "I went straight [to the house where she was staying]," said Balraj. "When I entered, she was sitting on a chair and all the others around her were doting on her, saying, '*Amma... Amma... Maryamma*'. The people were bowing before her. As soon as she saw me, she went and sat on the ground, saying, 'Come *Tata* ["grandfather", used figuratively to address any sufficiently senior male].' 'When did you come, *Tata*?' she asked [politely, but rhetorically]. 'I came just now', I said. 'I heard that something was buried and dug up, so I went to Vadiyakkadu. Beside the stable, there was a pit. What is it?'

"Then I saw a small child there with her and asked her, 'Who is this dark fellow?' Many people were there, but I never fear to ask anything. 'Who is this?' I asked. She said, '*Tata*,

I'll tell you later.' 'What is this... like a monkey? You've kept this from me, and you're saying you'll tell me tomorrow!?' Each of them was irritated with the way I spoke to her. Her name is Santi. I never called her Mary. 'Hey Santi, who is this orphan boy?' I asked her. Then she had the guts to offer to send me home to Tanjavur by taxi! 'I'll hire a taxi, Tata... for you to go home.'" Balraj was glad for this opportunity to vent his rage. "I have so much money and she dares to offer me a taxi! Can she!? Can she engage a taxi from Pattukkottai to Tanjavur? It is sixty kilometers. Who can pay for it?" Maryamma, it appears, was especially anxious on that occasion to be rid of Balraj. "She never did tell me anything," he concluded.

Balraj, whose caste loyalty demands that he not impugn the virtue of an unmarried *kallar* woman, still wanted us to appreciate that *Aiya's* existence, hidden until he made an unannounced visit to Pattukkottai, was still of moral and theological consequence for him. This portion of the interview was in Tamil, but the pointed use of the term "orphan" in English in reference to *Aiya* alluded to Maryamma's marital status and forcefully asserted the child's fatherlessness. How, exactly, Balraj can reconcile his insistence that Maryamma is possessed by *Angalamman* with his apparent belief that *Aiya* is *Amma's* child is a mystery. Perhaps he is not so sure of the latter claim as he seems, it being better than having to admit to something much worse in Maryamma's sexual morality.

5.2.17 Arockiasamy's Passion

Fr. Arockiasamy asked, "Okay, you are saying that she is cheating, but what is her motive?" Balraj began, "At first, I couldn't understand at all. That is why..." "No!" insisted Arockiasamy, "Tell me her motive. Is it to mock us or is it to earn money? Do you feel she is mocking us?"

"She appears to be cheating us in the name of *Arokkiya Mada*. The name of Mary is leading to earning," Balraj conceded with summary insight. "But now," said Arockiasamy, "they are not

having any *undiya* or anything. People are going and just staying there, and eating. No one appears to be giving any cash."

5.2.18 Balraj Wants Us to Go and Surprise Maryamma

With that particular mystery, for the present at least, we had to be satisfied. As we were preparing to leave, Balraj made as though he were going to start with us for Vadiyakkadu immediately. "We'll go and surprise her. I'll take you to her place. She's afraid of me. I know everything." We assured Balraj that we had recently come from Vadiyakkadu, and had no immediate plans to return. "You should not give her any news that I'm coming. If you do, she'll run off, she'll disappear," he said. Standing on their verandah, Guyon and Balraj waved us off down the street.

5.3 Two Faces of Disaffection

Josephine and Balraj portray two faces of disaffection with the *Amma* cult. Josephine represents firm belief in the cult and loyalty to it despite her problems with members who have recently come within its ambit and assumed leadership roles. By her own account, Josephine was instrumental in initiating or managing key events in the cult's history, notably removal of Maryamma from Orattur, and the appearance of Irene in the *Arul Arai*. Whether we believe she literally accepts Maryamma and the cult's truth-claims or not, Josephine has her own repertoire of events to describe and collection of relics to display. *Amma* even keeps a relic from Josephine's life - her hypodermic syringe! Josephine's story shows no resistance to belief in Maryamma, and she relishes the intimacy she has experienced with *Amma* in her own home.

Balraj presents quite a different picture. He struggled to believe in Maryamma, I think, because however incredible her claims might seem, he wanted them to be true. His *kallar* identity is very important to him, and a Marian presence in and through Maryamma, a caste-fellow, had tremendous appeal. Balraj's Marian devotion is also a good reason why he has become so alienated from Maryamma. Even though he challenged Maryamma to account for *Aiya's*

existence, when explaining this situation to us, Balraj insisted that *Aiya* was "*Amma's* child". When Maryamma's deceit embarrassed him publicly, her arrogation of *Amma* became a bitter experience. Like the Hindu Viraiyan, Balraj the Catholic remains devoted to and trusts *Amma*, in spite of the marginalization which Maryamma has imposed on their devotion.

Josephine seeks to regain her lost leadership in the *Amma* cult and is looking to recruit influential allies. This is why she took such pains to give the appearance of being willing to tell me "everything". Josephine did admit on parting that she had not told me everything, but promised that one day she would do so. She would not, however, permit me to see the Tamil version of the cult history, and I had to be satisfied with a bowlderized English version, parts of which I have passed on to the reader in Josephine's testimony. Her need to build a network of her own is also the reason why she prompted me to arrange the ill-fated meeting with Fr. Francis in Madras.

Josephine is very attuned to her own experiences, and needs to have herself acknowledged as special, as for example, in her claim that "There was a bright light which only I could see". Josephine especially resents people telling tales of wonder as first-person experiences when these are actually someone else's personal testimony. This resentment is one of her main irritants with both Jacinta and Kulandairaj. Josephine would not accept the less proprietary rationale, I am sure, that the main purpose of such tale-telling is to cultivate belief and ingenuously promote the cult's truth. Perhaps she is measuring her rivals with the scale of her own motives. Kulandairaj has made a huge difference to the substance and future direction of the *Amma* cult through the expedient of using Fr. Francis' stories in order to recruit believers who are also Catholic nuns and priests, some of whom have influence on the consciences of young seminarians in formation.

Like Balraj, Josephine has been embarrassed before her community on account of the *Amma* cult. Kulandairaj caused a major breach between himself, a brash newcomer at the time, and the old-timer, Josephine, by indiscretely and irregularly baptising people without the authority to issue the proper certificates. Josephine herself likes to claim she was present from the beginning (although she actually arrived about two years after the first apparitions).

Balraj cherishes the discretionary role of patron, *pater familias*, which his former employment on the railways conferred on him and loves to refer to himself as "Balraj Tata", or grandfather. He could hardly have accepted Maryamma as a prodigy without also promoting her as his *protégée*. He even wrote to the church authorities in Tanjavur, recommending her. It must have been difficult for him when Guyon's qualified enthusiasm waned. The *son et lumière* - *Amma* speaking in Hindi and other languages and appearing in unearthly lights and shadows at Orattur, left a deep impression on Balraj as something he could neither fully believe nor entirely explain away. I have a deep sympathy with him in that dilemma.

Balraj is committed to caste solidarity and found it very difficult to both criticise Maryamma as freely as he wanted to, and yet protect her reputation as an unmarried young *kallar* woman. Fr. Arockiasamy's blunt accusations that Maryamma had been living with a man to whom she was not married, and had borne a child, offended him. Guyon did not help Balraj, but helped me greatly, when she suggested that, apart from frequently running away from home as a preadolescent, Maryamma had also had something to do with a *nadar* teacher and hymn-writer in Tanjavur (or perhaps in Nidamangalam). She implied that Maryamma and he had possibly been making money together, without regard for propriety, and that Maryamma was actually the object of an altercation between this man and a jealous relative, another young man, [Yobu?], who came and beat him up. Balraj himself alleged that Maryamma had come to

Tanjavur in April, 1989 to be delivered of a child. Sebastian Raj, another Catholic of Tanjavur said the same thing. It may be that this allegation was, like Fr. Arockiasamy's seeming compulsion to attribute some malicious motive to Maryamma, merely a product of rumour. Alternatively, there may be a subtle campaign by the Catholic authorities of circulating disinformation, by speaking suspicions aloud as if they were fact, to discredit her morally.

I calculate that for *Aiya* to appear, as he did, about two years of age in Moses' June, 1991 resurrection video, nearly three when I first saw him in March, 1992, and about four when I photographed him in June, 1993, he would have to have been born in about July or August of 1989. This would place his conception, assuming that he was conceived naturally and gestated for his full term, in about November or December - just when Maryamma was removed by Josephine from Orattur to Vadiyakkadu.

If *Aiya* had been born three months earlier, in April, under cover of the breast surgery, he would have to have been conceived in July, 1988, two months or so before Angelamma dreamt that she and Josephine should take Maryamma away from Orattur. This was during the time of her abandonment by *Amma*. Had Maryamma been pregnant at that time, there was good reason for her to have been removed from her family home by December. After the difficulty her family had borne with her for five years, since mid-1983, knowledge of her pregnancy might have placed her and the child in physical and emotional danger, a theme which continues to be strongly communicated in the *Amma* cult today (4.5.4).

Balraj and his wife allege that Maryamma and Yobu had gotten into difficulty with the Pattukkottai detachment of the police over a devotee's heavy gold chain which went missing while she was visiting in their home. They say that she and Yobu were actually taken into custody and roughed up, but Maryamma was spared the indignity and likelihood of sexual harrassment during a night in jail by a devotee who compensated the complainant for the lost chain. Having to spend the night in jail is a crisis which

most certainly would have compromised Maryamma's chastity. Even earlier, while she was still at Orattur, Maryamma appears to have attracted the interest of the police, but this interest appears to have arisen from Hindu fears that she was attracting their people to Catholicism.

"Bluff" and "humbug" are Balraj's favourite words for Josephine's miracles and relics, yet after his visit to her home in Pabanasam where he saw a blood-smudged picture, he wept and prayed to *Andavar* all night, demanding to know the truth. *Andavar's* mother would not come and do such humbug, such blasphemy. *Andavar* gave him a vision through which he understood that Maryamma was possessed by the ferocious goddess, *Angalamman* and that Maryamma worships her. He is certain, as well, that Satan is the villain who took Maryamma's legs and that *Amma* had truly returned them and healed her. The ambivalences in Balraj's account keep it in continual turbulence, an experience familiar to me from my own experiences of examining the truth-claims and evidences of the *Amma* cult.

There appears to be evidence of dissimulation in the *Amma* cult, at least on Rajendiran's part, in Balraj's report on his commission by Archbishop P. Arokiaswamy to investigate cult claims regarding Moses' resurrection. Balraj states his belief that the dead child who was resurrected as a boy, was originally a girl. This change of gender was because the couple had wanted a son. Balraj alleges that Rajendiran told him that he had nothing to do with Moses' resurrection. Pirabavati, he reports Rajendiran as saying, had simply gone to Vadiyakkadu and brought back this male child. Perhaps stories were being woven to confuse the Bishop, or perhaps Balraj himself was just confused.

Upon discovering that Maryamma had had a child without being married, Balraj accused her and insulted her "orphan boy". The final outrage for Balraj was her offer to pay for his departure by taxi, a journey of forty-seven kilometers which would

have cost her many hundreds of Indian Rupees, simply to be rid of him.

In this chapter, we have seen how one *Amma* cult adherent, Josephine, has managed to remain within it despite her sometimes profound differences in values and perceptions from other cult members. Another adherent, Balraj, would not remain with the cult when he saw that things were amiss, although he wished he could believe in the "truth" which Maryamma represents. Among my sources, Balraj is the only one who voluntarily severed his ties with Maryamma and the cult, and our interview may be interpreted as an exercise in apologetics for his current non-involvement, despite his longing to believe in any miracle which might be attributable to the Virgin.

As noted in the Introduction, the perceived continuity, consistency and integrity of a sacred image contribute to construction of a polyvocal symbol on which religious claims may be predicated (0.1; Fernandez 1974: 120). In this chapter, I have shown how discontinuity, inconsistency, and lack of integrity can undermine such a symbol. Both Josephine and Balraj offer insights into the processes of constructing a sacred identity, and by calling attention to those features which the canonical version of Maryamma's hagiography elides and obscures, they point out how artificially reduced, discretely framed, and reified the image of Maryamma is. In the Introduction I also called attention to refractory, marginal voices which undercut the claims of the principals to a religious phenomenon, offering that such voices may become the most useful for constructing a judicious reading and deeper appreciation of sacred events and truth-claims. I am grateful, therefore, for these voices which warn, each in its own way, against the dangers of hegemony.

5.4 Summing Up Contested Events

In the beginning, the presence of *Amma* and a few simple physical manifestations were enough to initiate collective worship. The earliest social responses to Maryamma's symbolic

initiative were simple and positive. Her family revelled for a time in the public attention she attracted. A new public, from beyond the margins of Orattur village brought new sets of hopes and needs which *Amma* was called upon to address. Some petitioners received solutions, while others did not (3.7.5; Viraiyan 1993.06.21). Maryamma's seclusion represented a contest for control within Panjabakesan's family and the promise of a new shrine was insufficient to sustain Maryamma's family's faith through the trials and demands of her seclusion. When *Amma*'s "Chosen Family" at Orattur dispensed with her, Maryamma was conclusively disempowered and *Amma* discredited until Josephine could induce *Amma* to return by relocating Maryamma to Vadiyakkadu.

The breast surgery, beginning as an expedient to again remove Maryamma from her family's control, quickly became a nexus for Hindu-Catholic hostility and suspicion which, four years later in 1993, were still alive. In Tanjavur a dangerous, critical, resistant public was encountered for the first time. Josephine had always been obliged to travel to Orattur to encounter *Amma*. This need separated her from her own Catholic community. By exposing Maryamma to a wider Christian urban community in Tanjavur, Josephine fulfilled her own need to seek recognition and validation for *Amma*. By bringing *Amma* physically into Josephine's own Catholic community, Josephine was attempting to relieve the stigma which her personal reputation had suffered owing to her idiosyncratic devotion to a Hindu-managed Virgin Mary. When Maryamma came to Pabanasam, Josephine's house overflowed with local people coming to acknowledge and honour *Amma*.

Maryamma's use of borrowed Catholic symbolic resources, the claimed presence of and unconventional actions imputed to *Mada*, however, represented for Tanjavur Catholics an unacceptable transgression of sectarian boundaries. Maryamma's borrowing of such a key Catholic symbol as *Mada*, and engaging her in social competition, by the manner in which Maryamma "owned" her, had challenged the Catholic construction of *Mada*'s identity and

meaning. It is one thing, as the Hindu Dr. Alagappan said, to "simply... pray and come away" (4.6.1) as do millions of Hindus at Velanganni, but quite another - and unacceptable to Catholics - for Hindus to adopt and exploit the sacred symbol of the person of *Mada*, which motivated the question whether the strategy was to earn money or to mock the Church, as Fr. A. Arockiasamy was so anxious to determine (5.2.17).

Isolated from the troublesome Christian presence in the rustic seclusion of Vadiyakkadu, Maryamma would be sought out only by those with a sincere interest and deeper mysteries could unfold - visions of the dead, *Amma* impersonating a maligned devotee to shame her fellows and leave a reminder of her radiance - a new localization of the sacred which gave the *Arul Arai* its sacred charter. In Vadiyakkadu, ideological imperatives came to supplant bodily representations in the symbolic language of miracles. Irene's appearance answered a question, predicated on the notion of the *pey* as the restless, stalking dead, which must have persisted in Josephine's and others' minds since Irene was believed to have suffered an unnatural death. *Amma's* gave the assurance, "She is with me" (4.1.6). *Amma's* promise gave Josephine a hope for which to live.

Maryamma's contentious leg affliction demonstrated that Satan is no match for *Amma*, although cult adherents appear to see in this event quite another cultural meaning than I do (cf. 6.6). The leg affliction, for me the biggest mystery of all, makes more sense, as we shall see in the next chapter, as *Amma's* contest for precedence (or her devotees' advocacy of her precedence) in competition with her son, *Andavar*, as part of a general jostling for status among Indian gods, than as some kind of advocacy for Maryamma. This incident, which occurred in September, 1989 in the *Arul Arai*, elevates contests for control from the mundane to the celestial plane and depicts *Amma* as actively testing the limits of her own sacred identity. Puranic Hinduism is replete with such competitions, the gods taking turns at being superior.¹³ The

narrative pattern is occluded, however, for it appears to celebrate *Amma's* defeat, the victory of *Andavar*, and the reaffirmation of his orthodox primacy.

Perhaps, I suggest, this demonstration of *Amma's* limitations was the beginning of a pattern of apologetics for the advent of *Aiya* whom, I estimate, was born one to four months prior. As drama, the *kaḷ piracchanai* was a fine sequel to the breast surgery which had been enacted with relative crudity. As a marker for recovery from the powerlessness of Maryamma's post-seclusion period, and a reassertion of her thaumaturgical privileges, a reinauguration of her sacred career, it was insurpassable, unless by a resurrection of the dead.

Chapter 6

Goddesses, Saints, and Apparitions

If a stone can emit god's power, god's grace,
why can not a human being?

- Dr. M. Alagappan (4.6.1)

This whole scheme of God does not want interference....

- Fr. Peter (4.2.4)

How, precisely, is a garrulous, overdetermined
cross-cultural encounter shot through with power relations
and personal cross-purposes circumscribed as an adequate
version of a more or less discrete "other world".... [and]
transcribed into an authoritative written account?

- James Clifford (1988: 25)

The processes of the self-construction of Maryamma's, Aiya's, and the *Amma* cult adherents' sacred identity, and the controversies which condition them, are nested in tensions between Hindu and Catholic visions of reality and in social competition and ideological differences within each of these religious configurations. This chapter resumes the earlier discussion of spirit possession in the Hindu goddess tradition, as that tradition informs the afflictions suffered by Maryamma both in the seminal pre-apparitional stage, and at key points in her sacred career. In the first section, I attempt to show how afflictive states and possession are understood and incorporated into the *Amma'* cult's self-understanding. The fluidity of religious identity in the setting dominated by *Arokkiya Mada* worship is examined to help understand how both Hindus and Catholics can join

in devotions to the same sacred symbols. How competing "religious regimes" (Bax 1991a; Introduction, note 3) within the Roman Catholic Church are expressed in marginal, personalistic, thaumaturgical Catholic cults in Sri Lanka will shed light on the relations between "living saints", their clientele, and Church authority. Finally, the *Amma* cult's desire to have its apparitional phenomena officially approved by the Catholic Church, the issues of "private revelation" and the eschatological incompleteness of public revelation, are examined in terms of the criteria the Church has established for such recognition.

6.1 Spirit Possession and Goddess Religion

Many of the tensions expressed by the voices presented in the preceding chapters derive directly from the variance of participants' intentions toward, and their consequent understanding of, *Amma* cult phenomena. Adherents and prospective devotees will, quite properly, desire nothing less than the *whole* truth about Maryamma. It should be clear by now that nothing approaching "the whole truth" is available through cult sources authorized by her, and Maryamma has, herself, indicated that events prior to her initial affliction are irrelevant to her present identity. I have attempted to show how many of the incidents in Maryamma's life, even those occurring since the beginning of her career, have also been expediently edited and excluded from her life-story, which has been reduced in ways that permit construction of a less unambivalent hagiography. Maryamma's performance of personal holiness is selective and partial precisely at that point, honesty, where devotees implicitly seek and expect the most perfect and healing wholeness.

6.1.1 The Hindu Way of Possession

Kathleen M. Erndl in her study of Seranvali the "Lion-Rider", a popular goddess of Himachal Pradesh, regards what is commonly called "possession" as a cultural performance in which the cast of characters includes the goddess herself, the human vehicle on whom she "comes" in her "play" and whom she controls,

and the community of worshippers as their audience (Erndl 1993: 133; cf. Wadley 1976: 233-52). Erndl's perspective is a fruitful one for understanding the construction of *Anma's* and Maryamma's sacred roles in the *Anma* cult.

Erndl insists on accepting the primacy of the participants' understanding of sacred identity, their understanding of the reality of divine beings, and the mutual interaction between themselves and the sacred as an ontological assumption for ethnography. C. G. Diehl agrees:

Divine identity is a real phenomenon, whether as an object of emotional engagement or as actual interference in human life, and human behaviour when confronted with it is the story of religious life in India today. A starting point for an orientation in the vast material providing examples of how men [sic] behave when faced with the divinity is the way in which the identity is localized (Diehl 1986: 112).

The fullness of no religious tradition may be appreciated through reductive epistemologies and methodologies. To take seriously all of the inhabitants of a world of religious meaning - above all the presence of the divine in whatever form it takes - is the only way a scholar can approach the rich multiplicity of meanings, the textures of ambivalence, and the fullness of religious understanding with which those native to the tradition inform their own lives (Erndl 1993: 132).

Who controls the sacred performance? Erndl approaches this question from three perspectives - theological, collective, and personal - and affirms all of them:

The possession performance is characterised by the Goddess appearing as an actor herself, acting in concert with the human vehicle for the benefit of the audience, human devotees.... The theological, cultural, and individual dimensions are mutually dependent and must be considered together. The Goddess, the audience, and the vehicle act and interact simultaneously in the "play" of possession. (Erndl 1993: 133-4; cf. Younger 1980: 497, 509-511).

From the theological point of view, it is the goddess herself who directs the possession. It is the vehicle for her self-manifestation to her people. Her devotees' faith in her enables the goddess' presence among them in a gracious form, and it is their faith and yearning which induces her to appear (Erndl 1993: 133).

From the individual point of view, the possession performance is controlled by cooperation of the one possessed:

A common pattern emerges: the vehicle participates in the power of the deity, at first seemingly unwillingly. But gradually she is able to gain control over this power to a certain extent, to predict its coming, to prevent it from coming at times, and to bring it on at other times. Idiosyncracies in the Goddess's behavior during possession seem to emanate from the vehicle's personality (Erndl 1993: 134).

Erndl regrets that she could not pursue this line of enquiry owing to lack of information about the families and early experiences of her sources (Erndl 1993: 184, note 39). The present study is, in part, an effort to offer insights into such emergent idiosyncracies by exploring the family history and early experiences of one such "vehicle".

As Erndl notes, from the collective point of view, the audience controls the possession. The enactment of possession has a grammar located in antecedent, accepted cultural meanings which are necessary to validate a vehicle's genuine possession. Fluid boundaries between self and the sacred are conducive to acceptance of possession phenomena. The audience, by interacting with the possessing deity, affirm its presence within the vehicle, converting what without this interaction would be a disordered subjective experience into a public one (Erndl 1993: 133).

Erndl characterizes the common mode of communion, in the goddess religion she studies, between the human and divine orders:

The most dramatic way in which devotees experience the Goddess is through her possession of human... vehicles.... It is seen as her sport or play... and also as her response to the faith... and devotion... of her worshippers. Devotees approach the possessed person, worship her as the Goddess, ask her for help with their problems, listen to her pronouncements, and receive her blessings. Thus, possession is a means for the Goddess to participate in the world of humans and for the medium and her audience to participate in the Goddess' divinity.

It is the Goddess' power of transformation, that is, of changing from one form to another or of being between forms which provides a context for beginning to understand possession as one of the Goddess' modes of appearance (Erndl 1990: 176).

Later in this chapter I discuss how the boundaries of classification of humans, spirits of the dead, and gods are ambiguous and indistinct in Hindu culture (Stirrat 1992: 86;

6.7.4).¹

6.2 The Goddess' Mouth

Maryamma's mode of petitionary communion corresponds to the Hindu model of relations between a divine patron and her human protegee that Erndl has documented, departing only in the particular that the Hindu tradition unambiguously admits the divine patron's self-expression through the medium's speech organs. Gold, in her study of spirit possession in Rajasthan, notes that

...Spirits, both divine and destructive, are frequently understood to enter and control human bodies, either in response to a summons or for purposes of their own. As has been noted for many parts of India..., episodes of spirit possession... are generally distinguished according to whether their sources are deities, on the one hand, or malign beings such as 'ghosts' (*bhut-pret*) or 'witches' (*dakan, meli*), on the other. These two categories are not, however, totally exclusive, at least over time. The afflicting ghost... may be transformed, through enshrinement and nourishment, into a beneficent household deity. Possession by that spirit, formerly a dreaded attack, may then become an invited source of diffuse blessings and specific knowledge (Gold 1988: 35).

No one in the *Anma* cult, however, will acknowledge that Maryamma's mouth is the human, physical instrument through which others hear *Anma*'s voice. This, I think, is because in Catholic apparitions, the medium is a seer and hearer of an externalized, objective sacred figure, not a bodily vehicle for that figure's speech or actions (cf. 6.7.6). For Maryamma to be expressly understood as speaking *Anma*'s words would be to undercut something essential to the style of Marian apparitions, and possible call into question the authenticity of *Anma*'s presence. In contrast, that the Hindu goddess does in fact speak through the medium's mouth is precisely the test of her genuine presence. Although I was unable to submit *Anma*'s tape-recorded "mass" of March, 1987 to an audiogram analysis, I am quite certain, from the nature of *Anma*'s hesitant, staccatto pronouncements, her rephrasing and corrections, that the voice is Maryamma's own, queered by raising the pitch.

To explain the departure by the *Amma* cult from the Hindu models it resembles, and the expectations it generates, I suggest that either

1) the visitations of *Amma* to Maryamma are not in fact regarded as benign possession, but as simple "apparitions", or

2) there is a fear that an open admission that Maryamma is possessed by *Amma* would be regarded as too pointed a challenge to the Catholic authorities.

6.2.1 "Private Revelations"

The Catholic model of human-divine communication recognizes "private revelations" to particular persons. In fact, as we shall see in the concluding section of this chapter, all Marian apparitions are regarded as such private revelations, and belief in them is not obligatory for Catholics (Zimdars-Swartz 1991: 9), even in the case of such famous "approved" apparitions as those at Lourdes (Zimdars-Swartz 1991: 11). This model does not, however, readily acknowledge auditions such as Maryamma's as public revelation, binding on the faith of Catholics. The *Amma* cult's rejection of the logic of possession may be taken as an indicator that the cult is attempting to stand closer to the Catholic than to the Hindu pole on a continuum of apparitional and auditory phenomena.

6.3 An Unusual Hierophany

Amma's first manifestations to Santi were solely visual. Shortly, *Amma* began speaking in such a way that only her "daughter" could hear. However, within two weeks, *Amma* was speaking so others also could hear, which conforms to the speech of a goddess directly through the mouth of a possessed medium. In the Hindu tradition, such visitations are often first considered an affliction of sorts, and only later recognized as a grace, and as such, desirable.

Susan Bayly notes that "there is no real distinction between affliction and its relief, between the disease and its cure" in the world of the local goddess who afflicts with disease

but also protects. As these dyads are not separated, so the identity of the goddess is not split into an afflicter and a remover of affliction. Only by appeasing the goddess, through acknowledgement and praise, whose petulance is the source of the affliction, can it be relieved (Bayly 1989: 133; 1.2.4; cf. 6.5.2).

Maryamma's family was skeptical at first but, relieved that her afflictions somehow had ended, they came to accept what appeared to be a more benign possession state, and cooperated with *Amma's* instructions. It is common in states of benign possession like *Amma's* "possession" of Santi for the inhabiting spirit to request the things it likes, and for the family of the possessed to do their best to please. This induces the people to cater to the spirit's preferences (Bharati 1993: 348). Thus, as Balraj says, *Amma* likes fish, so Santi is fed fish (cf. Gold 1988: 36-39). *Amma* also insists that Santi not be contradicted and family decisions not be made without her approval.

So clearly not all possessions need be malign, and the presence of a benign spirit may be profitable, helpful, and appreciated. However, during Maryamma's seclusion, *Amma's* demands became excessive and the family again objected, intervened, and drove her away. They thereby deprived themselves of the honours and the advantages of having a sacred *alayam*, a place of pilgrimage and healing, in their home and later regretted their intrusion. Their interference, however, so offended *Amma* that she abandoned the "daughter" who had been faithful to her, repeating Kanakambujam's initial abandonment of Santi as an infant. Santi's powerlessness to complete what *Amma* had commissioned her to do appears not to have mattered.²

During the early period of Santi's experiences of *Amma*, she appeared quite casually whenever Santi called her. This pattern of summoning and response is typical neither of Hindu goddess possession nor of Marian apparitions. The goddess or the Virgin may be invited, but the timing and manner of her presence

are of her own volition. It was rather as though Santi had discovered an "invisible friend", a situation commonly known to parents of preadolescents which expresses a need for intimacy while symbolically retaining social control of the intimate relationship produced.

The staging of *Anma's* visitations has always had a liminal quality. Most occasions when *Anma* speaks are so organized that no witness can ever see Maryamma at precisely the same time.³ When *Anma's* voice is heard calling "*Tambi!*", Maryamma responds by immediately entering the room from which the voice seems to emanate. Maryamma then seems to be secreted with *Anma* inside a room, the door of which is always slightly ajar - almost, but not quite, closed. *Anma* first prays for about half an hour, then answers questions and petitions from devotees, and makes pronouncements of her own. This she does in the *Arul Arai* at Vadiyakkadu and also from the seclusion of a room, or from behind a screen (5.2.8), while visiting in devotees' homes. No committed worshipper would dare to investigate this arrangement, though an incredulous school-teacher's keyhole peeping brought Balraj's sponsorship of Maryamma to an abrupt and embarrassing end (5.2.8).

Josephine Thomas describes the sense of grace and privilege she felt, and intimacy, when Maryamma visited her home in Pabanasam. Josephine sat with her ear just next to the crack of the door behind which *Anma* spoke so softly that only she, Josephine, could hear. Even so, *Anma* had not become visible for Josephine, and Maryamma had entered the room alone and remained sitting inside, in response to *Anma's* call, supposedly inactive (Josephine 1993.06.27). On one occasion when Maryamma was still at Orattur, a policeman burst in on her, without permission or warning, during a visit by *Anma* to find her, sitting alone, and quite startled, inside the room (Baskaran 1993.06.25).

6.4 Explaining Away the Most Important Thing

How may we receive such testimony? In her study of *Seranvali* (Erndl 1990, 1993), Kathleen M. Erndl notes that

scholarly research on possession has interpreted the possessing or communing spirit or deity as an epiphenomenon of the medium's psychological or social condition. Noting that studies have either attempted to explain possession states in terms of psychopathology⁴ or represented them as forms of social deviance,⁵ Erndl holds that it is fruitless to try to explain possession states through models of individual or collective pathology. The agenda of such studies is to explain away, rather than to understand, what is to the participants the single most important issue - the presence of the possessing spirit. Erndl takes deities seriously as personal beings, the way that devotees do, and attempts to understand the goddess' possession of female mediums through the indigenous terminology and semantics used by devotees in preference to the modes of explanation which reduce the meaning of deities by seeing those they possess in terms either of psychopathology or social deviance (Erndl, 1990: 222, 227-8).

6.4.1 Entering, and Surviving, Other People's Worlds

To regard possession, Erndl argues, as either entirely performance or entirely pathology is to miss the cultural meaning, and the putative mutual satisfaction, of the reciprocity between the divine and the human. To understand is possible only if the possessing spirit or deity is accepted by the investigator as at least a semi-autonomous personal being who interacts with humans. To fail to do this is a grave omission because, to the participants, it is not the person who is possessed that is the focus of attention, but who or what is possessing the medium, and for what purpose. To ignore the one who, from the participants' point of view is the most important actor, and to regard the deity as an epiphenomenon of the possession process, is to miss entirely its cultural purpose. To approach a better understanding, it is necessary to accept, in the first instance, that the spirit or deity is the most important actor in the drama of possession and the focus of worshippers' attention. Erndl cites Peter J. Claus in

regard to the importance of cultural meanings which enable the interpretation of particular behaviours as possession:

In order for psychological states to be interpreted as possession and in order that sociological preconditions set the stages for such states, there must be precise ideological correlates that anticipate precipitation of the phenomenon (Erndl 1990: 177; 1993: 105).⁶

Erndl grounds the participants' understanding of possession phenomena in a set of normative expectations in which an investigators' own understanding must be framed when attempting to approach cultural phenomena on their authors' own terms. This means accepting Ricoeur's "hermeneutics of recovery" and abandoning the "hermeneutics of suspicion" (Ricoeur 1970; Erndl 1990: 222-3; Erndl 1993: 132). The suspension of disbelief which this requires may, however, be prohibitively difficult, especially for the ethnographic investigator, because of what is at risk in the epistemological shift it requires.

How can one stand, with sincerity, at once inside and outside a religious commitment? An epistemological struggle is required of an ethnographic fieldworker if the gap separating the common-sense world of an academic discipline and the common-sense world of a religious cult or movement like the *Amma* cult is to be bridged, and unfamiliar phenomena to be taken for real, in their own right. My most pointed contest in this respect was the encounter with Fr. Peter. In my report of that encounter, I strove to show not only how difficult an appreciation for the meaning of commitment can be in the Other's world, but how difficult it is for an Other to attain a sympathy for the distance from that commitment which I must sustain in order to be credible in my world. To avoid being accused of fabricating rationales which are not part of the explicit understandings of my sources, I have striven to facilitate the expression of a variety of informants' own faith and doubts, in their own terms and, so far as is possible, in their own voices.

6.5 Was Santi Ever "Really" Possessed?

In what follows, I attempt to get inside the *Amma* cult's understanding of the afflictions which so pervade Maryamma's story. Her management of *Amma* (or *vice versa*) is not typical of Marian phenomena at Velanganni Shrine, which already bridges a large gap between foreign and Indian styles of thinking and acting. Maryamma's representation of *Amma* is always intimate, which distinguishes it from the mass phenomena of Velanganni, and it often anticipates emerging needs and aspirations.

6.5.1 Which Comes First, the Solution or the Problem?

One crucial issue of interpretation must be considered which concerns the nature of Maryamma's initial affliction and which may allow it and the *kal piracchanai*, the loss and replacement by *Amma* of Maryamma's legs which followed it, to shed light on each other.

Santi's early affliction was unambiguously labelled as demonic possession, and her family made every effort within their repertoire of response and their means to rid her of it (2.4.2-3; 3.2.3). While Santi was treated during this initial affliction as though she was possessed by a *pey* or by some village god or goddess and taken to numerous holy places and exorcists to get rid of this possession, no treatment worked until she got temporary relief from the young woman who brought her peppercorns and a rose in the night (2.4.3). It is quite possible that this event, which occurred near Velanganni shrine, may have been interpreted as a visit by the Virgin which inspired Yobu, though this connection is not explicit in any informant's account, to install her picture, as *Irudaya Mada* [Immaculate Heart of Mary] in the Orattur shrine room (2.4.4).

Michael P. Carroll (1992: 79-81), in his account of southern Italian *tarantismo*, the exorcism of spider bites, asks why cases increase dramatically at harvest time. For actual bites, there is a natural explanation as rural people are more likely to encounter spiders when they spend more time in the fields.

However, many of these bites seem, rather, to be symbolic, their sole effective treatment being ecstatic dance and *only* an appeal to St. Paul for release from the malady. In the world of actual bites and conventional medicine, other remedies would prove effective. It happens that harvest coincides with the approach to the annual feast of St. Paul. The affliction, which takes the form of a depressive melancholy in the victim, the *tarantata*, becomes most freely expressible, and reaches a crisis stage, at the penultimate moment before a resolution, through the intervention of St. Paul on his feast day, becomes possible.

Similarly, Santi's leap of faith, her despairing appeal to the *Irudaya Mada* icon, "Save me, or let me die!" became possible only in the symbolic proximity of *Amma* in her household's shrine. By this logic, more skeptical observers might say that Santi's hallucinatory career began when a psychological solution was present and available to her. True believers will use the same logic to assert that when Santi responded knowingly and genuinely to *Amma* in her wretchedness, *Amma* could not disregard her, but came almost immediately to comfort her. Santi's relief by *Amma* from affliction might, therefore, be interpreted as a corrective which was also a correlative benign possession.

6.5.2 Was *Amma* "In Charge" All Along?

Apart from the simple apparition and the benign possession to expell a malign spirit, a third possibility exists - that *Amma* herself had chosen Santi and been the source of her affliction from the start. While no one in the *Amma* cult will admit to this possibility directly, there is a structural correspondence which cries out to be recognized between Maryamma's experience of *Amma* and the Hindu ethos of the village goddess which environs the *Amma* cult. There is a strong resemblance between *Amma*'s communion with Maryamma and communication, as understood by Hindus, between a Hindu goddess with her worshippers, through a human medium upon whom she "comes" (as distinguished from a demon who "rides" its victim) (Erndl 1993: 106).

In the Hindu view, it is quite in order for a goddess, especially, to be the purveyor of disease and distress precisely in order to evoke a worshipful response in the victim and the community.⁷ Susan Bayly describes the cultural process of mutuality between the goddess who desires worship and the devotee, first afflicted, then empowered:

In the human world the demonic energies which the goddess confronts and with which she is identified are realised in the form of illness and other physical afflictions.... In this system there is no real distinction between affliction and its relief, between the disease and its cure.... At the same time the disease is the fiery wrath of the goddess. Her sakti is deployed in a righteous cause, but it is capricious, vengeful and destructive once it is liberated and allowed to carry out its terrible cleansing function. Thus disease and other manifestations of the amman's anger may only be dispelled if the sufferer succeeds in appeasing the goddess, if he performs rites and makes offerings which cool or damp down her anger and thus bring about the containment of her liberated sakti. (Bayly 1989: 133; cf. 1.2.4)

The afflictive goddess may then become "benign, a comforter and healer and a source of refuge for the afflicted." This logic, which underlies the worship of such ubiquitous goddesses as *Mariyamman*, may be used to interpret Santi's despairing appeal to the picture of *Irudaya Mada*, to take some definitive action by either killing her or saving her, which initiated *Amma's* care and protection of Santi.

This hypothesis is especially appealing since *Amma's* voice is heard only where Maryamma is present, which suggests that *Amma* seems not, at the present stage in the evolution of the cult's ideology, to be objectified outside of Maryamma, but is latently or manifestly immanent within her. Maryamma is certainly honoured as though she were *Amma* herself (cf. Weissman 1988; 6.7.7). However, Maryamma's own, and her friends' resistance to the notion that she is possessed by *Amma* clearly and self-consciously separates the *Amma* cult ideologically from Hindu cults which freely acknowledge and use the spirit medium as a means to make the deity present and useful to humans. This interpretation, which remains undiscussed - at least in exoteric cult circles - that it was *Amma* herself who brought on Santi's affliction in the first place, is structurally coherent and corresponds to a common Hindu

model of goddess possession. It provides Santi's unexorcised "demon possession" with a rationale which it lacks otherwise.

6.6 Divine Competition

Maryamma's seclusion and leg affliction carry resonances of processes which characterize goddess possession, as well as competition for status among Hindu deities. When I sought an explanation of why Maryamma's legs were taken away at the precise moment that she was waiting, anticipating *Anma's* coming to heal her lameness, I was told that Satan had taken them away "to show *Anma's* power". This glib explanation involving the role of Satan ["a Shaitan"] (2.8.1) led me to suspect that I was getting but a reduced interpretation of what was, and is, actually believed to be going on. Surely, it would be a superior demonstration of *Anma's* power if she had first to replace Maryamma's legs, before restoring their function. As I contemplate this rationale, I can not help but think that the reference to Satan (cf. 5.2.12) was a simplistic explanation for a complex problem which my source felt I could not be expected to appreciate.

While this answer might suggest that Satan and *Anma* were in collusion in the staging of this event, I do not think such a meaning was intended by the speaker. From the perspective of theological coherence, *Andavar* might, on the model of "Job", be imagined to have *permitted* Satan to take Maryamma's legs, thereby deceiving the Evil One, confident that *Anma* was capable of managing the crisis. This, of course, is a theological nicety which most lay *Anma* cult devotees might not appreciate. It is also belied by *Anma's* own subsequent admission that she had not sought *Andavar's* blessing for this particular miracle.

Gold notes that the higher Hindu gods are distant from human concerns and it is the lesser deities which show interest in human affairs and are more likely to possess humans (Gold 1988: 41). These are also the gods which are available to drive out demonic spirits, sometimes to replace them, turning psychic torture into "signs of power and grace" (Gold 1988: 40-41). If,

indeed, *Amma* "possessed" Santi in this way to rid her of an evil possession, this act would belie her status as, or aspirations to become, a higher "god". The failure of *Amma's* first effort to solve Maryamma's *kaḷ piracchanai* appears to represent her attempt to escape her subordinate status by performing a dramatic healing without acknowledging *Andavar's* superiority by not obtaining his prior approval. It may be noted that when Josephine persisted in seeing the results of *Amma's* promise to show Irene to her, *Amma* had continually to respond that she had not yet been able to obtain *Andavar's* permission (4.1.6).

Arokkiya Mada's reputation for solving the sorts of problems which have proven intractable for lesser deities like *Mariyamman* position her for just such an attempt at independence in the struggle for status among deities. Thus, *Amma* may be seen, at the least, as attempting to negotiate her supremacy through the resolution of Maryamma's affliction, and at the most, having inflicted it in order to show her power by resolving it. *Amma's* summoning of the Velanganni Parish Priest to witness evidence of her presence failed to establish Santi as the Velanganni cult's seer.⁸ The leg affliction failed to establish *Amma's* definitive independence from a superior sacred person, *Andavar*. Unsuccessful, *Amma* had to seek *Andavar's* help, acknowledging his precedence and power, in order to complete the healing successfully. If *Amma* could not demonstrate her sovereign power, the logic of the situation required that the supreme person be incarnated in Maryamma's care in order to bring that power within the scope of human action. This demonstration of the derivative nature of *Amma's* power may be a key to the still tentative and oblique identification of *Aiya* with *Andavar* (4.6.4).

6.7 Some Comparisons in Constructing the Sacred

The Catholic tradition is, and has usually been, fraught with tensions and rivalries between clergy and lay people, between the secular hierarchy and religious congregations, between levels in the hierarchy, and even between priests and the saints to which

many Catholics offer their special devotions (Badone 1990; Behar 1990; Bax 1991a: 22-3; Wolf, ed. 1991). To better understand the challenge Maryamma poses to the institutional Church, it may be helpful to examine a south Asian context which in many ways resembles the Catholic situation as a minority in Tamil Nadu. Richard L. Stirrat's work in Sri Lanka on Catholic holy people has shown how saints, both living and dead, can come to challenge, and potentially to displace, priests and the sacraments which they are ordained to perform (Stirrat 1979, 1981, 1982, 1991, 1992).

The inherent tension between saints and priests as alternative channels of contact between humans and God has been attenuated, generally, in the Catholic Church, by splitting their functions. Saints act as mediators for worshippers' pragmatic worldly concerns through vows, pilgrimages, and favours, while priests mediate transcendental and soteric, or salvation-oriented, concerns through the sacraments (Stirrat 1981: 183). This tension is further attenuated when human contact with the saint takes place through the mediation of inert relics and statues, usually located within shrines controlled by priests.

Priests normally are alive, and saints - most often - are dead. A living, breathing saint, however, poses complexities for priests and the Church which the dead cannot (Eade and Sallnow 1991: 8, 14).⁹ By becoming worshippers' primary mediator with God, such a manifestation of the sacred challenges the authority of priest and Church, actively competing with them (Eade and Sallnow 1991: 7). Living saints also undercut the very meaning and efficacy of the sacraments which the institutional Church purveys, and which, in any case, promise no certain advantage in this life.¹⁰ One prays to the saints as one might petition a human patron of social status and political influence who might be of help, by interceding on one's behalf with the powers that be, in worldly struggles against the effects of sickness, poverty, and misfortune (Stirrat 1981: 187). A relationship with a saint

becomes, in this model, one of reciprocal obligation between patron and protegee (Boissevain 1977: 92-3; Di Tota 1981: 327-9).

6.7.1 Anma's Authority

Maryamma has assumed the role of mediator of the sacred. She mediates worshippers' pragmatic concerns for health, and advises select devotees on each and every life-decision. *Anma* stepped across the transcendental boundary when she came to Santi in visions. She also transgressed the sacramental boundary, the special preserve of priests, in two respects when she celebrated a baptismal Mass and gave Santi her own name. Although at Pentecost *Anma* was a member of the party of the Apostles, she was not one of "the Twelve" and so not entitled to a claim in the "apostolic succession", the formal right of the bishops to celebrate the sacraments, to ordain priests, and to consecrate other bishops. Celebrating the Mass was *Anma's* sacramental transgression. She also committed a gender transgression. *Anma* is a woman, and no woman is eligible to be a Catholic priest, for much the same reasons - the priest images Christ in the sacrifice of the mass, and no woman is deemed capable of imaging Jesus' maleness. *Anma's* Mass in March, 1987 constitutes the Christian charter of the cult. For the followers of Maryamma, this Mass represents a symbolic declaration of *Anma's* intentions to enact her competition for authority with the Church hierarchy through them.

Recent developments in the ideology of the *Anma* cult, such as the onset of the "Age of Mary" (Laurentin 1967: 28), a new order with which the "old order" of the Catholic Church and its Canon Law must not be allowed to interfere (Fr. Peter 1993.06.17), and the advent of *Aiya*, are challenges which the institutional Church might prefer to ignore.¹¹ I expect that this approach will prove impossible because of increasing popular knowledge, partial and therefore more intriguing, about the *Anma* cult's claims. Official attention has been drawn to the cult, especially since the Catholic Church's own priests have begun opting, in significant numbers, to serve the cult in promotional and

liturgical roles while using their ecclesiastical offices, against the explicit prohibitions of the local bishop, to confer credibility and sacramental legitimacy on the cult.

The "*Mada Kovil*" Marian orientation of the Tamil Catholic Church makes it especially sensitive to the apparition claims on which the *Anma* cult is founded. This vulnerability is at least partly a result of the fact that the Church cultivates its own apparitional tradition at Velanganni which, like the *Anma* cult, functions without benefit of any special ecclesiastical verification or official recognition.¹² This caveat which appears over the *imprimatur* of the Bishop, inside the title page of every edition of the Velanganni shrine history published since 1933, resembles a statutory warning to consumers and reads:

In accordance with the decrees of Pope Urban VIII, we declare that the supernatural occurrences related in this book, and which have not been examined and recognized by the Holy See have only the authority of tradition and legend. When using the words graces, miracles, favours, we only follow the common form of speech in use among the faithful, and do not presume, in any way to forestall the judgement of the Church whose exclusive right it is to award to these names their proper, real and full meaning (Santos: 1933; Gabriel et al. 1987).

The *Anma* cult also benefits from the personalistic attraction of *Anma*'s own chosen "daughter", who is today alive and well despite the many tribulations which have brought the girl Santi to the place which the woman Maryamma now occupies. In a distinctively Tamil sense, Maryamma's sufferings empower and authorize her (1.2; Egnor 1980: 13-19; MacPhail 1988) to criticize the Church in *Anma*'s name and to act, if she is constrained to, outside its authority. From the beginning, Maryamma has shown the greatest respect for Christian, especially Catholic, symbols. This respect has been qualified by *Anma*'s direct critique of priests, nuns and bishops for their personal faults, but always in the name of rectitude, truthfulness, and a deeper intimacy with the Mother of God. There is clearly a competition between cult and Church for the use and proper meanings of a common set of shared symbols. As the vituperative response of Yobu and Maryamma to the Bishop's unheralded visit indicates, the *Anma* cult has set boundaries

against unuseful and unwanted intrusions from the Catholic Church. On the other hand, cult members are delighted at the helpful interest and support they receive from other quarters - from priests of other jurisdictions, and from Catholic congregations of women religious.

Anma herself recognizes the superiority of *Andavar* [Christ], though there is evidence, in her attempt to heal Maryamma's legs without consulting him, that she strives to overcome this subordinate status in her relations with her devotees. For all practical purposes, *Andavar's* precedence is merely nominal. *Anma* acts independently, even if the results may sometimes not turn out quite as she had intended. An example is the frustration by Baskaran of *Anma's* plans for an *alayam* [shrine] at Orattur, which were to have come about through Maryamma's successful completion of her seclusion. Another is, of course, that occasion when *Anma* miraculously reattached Maryamma's legs, but defectively, and they festered for a month. *Anma* had to re-sever the legs and take them back for *Andavar's* blessing, a permission which *Anma* might well have arranged in the first place. On the other hand, while the raising of Moses from death is now formally acknowledged to be *Andavar's* miracle - the nature and status of which is today probably the result of *arrivé* priestly interpretation - the miracle could hardly have been imagined without *Anma's* active mediation, even to the extent of personally directing the disinterment of Moses' coffin. Neither could *Anma* be present to the devotees without Maryamma's mediation. My personal experiences with certain cult members - Fr. Peter, Josephine, and notably my inability to meet Angelamma - showed that another whole rank of brokers must be satisfied in order to secure access to particular persons and features of the cult. I have noted elsewhere how perplexing it can be for pilgrims to seek even the simplest information about the cult, and how difficult it was to obtain accurate information within the cult which would be useful for this study. Some prospective devotees, ironically, have

had access to knowledge about the *Anma* cult only, or at least primarily, through myself. This chain of intercessory mediation is in danger of becoming so extended that God, ostensibly the principal party to the miracles, comes to be distanced entirely beyond human approach.

6.7.2 Possession and Sacred Personhood in Sri Lanka

The 1970's saw about a dozen cases of saintly possession and cult formation among Catholics in Sri Lanka. In R. L. Stirrat's studies of Sinhala Catholic shrines at Kudagama, Mirisgama, Suvagama, and Katunayake, Sri Lanka (Stirrat 1981; 1992), we find a form of religiosity which bears a family resemblance to the situation in the *Anma* cult at Vadiyakkadu.

Stirrat's cases focus on males - priests, priestly imposters, or laymen - who acquire a reputation for a special personal sanctity. Most usually serve devotees in their normal states of consciousness but are famous for successful exorcisms. Norbert, a young layman in the village of Mirisgama in 1972 was distressed, wondering what to do with his life, when he became possessed by St. Sebastian (Stirrat 1981: 189). Norbert learned that, as the chosen vehicle of the saint, he had a special purpose which would gradually be revealed (Stirrat 1981: 190). Norbert's public career began when a man, suffering from cancer in his leg as the result of sorcery, was exorcised by St. Sebastian. The saint told the man to go to a certain church. There he met a beggar who applied some oil to the afflicted leg. The man immediately fell unconscious, and when he awoke, the beggar was gone and the use of his leg had been restored. Back at Mirisgama St. Sebastian, speaking through Norbert, explained that the beggar actually had been St. Antony (Stirrat 1981: 190).

News of this remarkable healing spread, and soon up to a thousand people were coming to Norbert's parents' home daily to glimpse and hear the saint. St. Sebastian had to limit his possessions to Mondays, Tuesdays, and Wednesdays to give Norbert some rest. St. Sebastian exhorts his listeners to be good

Catholics, to attend Mass regularly, respect priests, and he declines to possess Norbert on days which might produce a conflict between himself and Church-sponsored events. In 1975, a rich patron constructed a *palliya* [chapel] comprised of a veranda where the Saint, identified by a red cloak, held public audience and gave sermons, and an inner room where Norbert prayed and the Saint also held private audience with devotees who received numbered tokens to indicate the sequence in which they should approach him.¹³ Norbert, in his own persona, prays to the Trinity, the Virgin Mary, and to St. Michael. Sometimes, other saints, such as St. Joseph, possess him. St. Joseph (whose possession of Norbert is indicated by a different coloured cloak), speaks only Hebrew, however, and needs St. Sebastian to translate his messages into Sinhala. Thus, Norbert sometimes is possessed simultaneously by more than one saint (Stirrat 1992: 146-7).

The tangible presence of the saint in and through Norbert's body offers worshippers a contact with the divine world with which the local priest cannot compete. The cult of the saint undermines the role of the priest, and at once threatens the authority of the Church (cf. Christian 1972: 132). Stirrat locates the appeal of St. Sebastian in the tensions implicit in political pressures on Catholicism as it develops in a majority Buddhist culture (Stirrat 1981:183).¹⁴ Correspondingly, there has been a sharp decline in patronage at the older Sri Lankan shrines such as those of St. Mary at Madhu and St. Anne at Talawila, which were extremely popular from the mid-19th to the mid-20th century. In the wake of Vatican II, pilgrimage to these shrines has been discouraged by the Church, pilgrims' behavior has been circumscribed, and miraculous claims have even been denied. These shrines are now coming to be viewed as little more than spiritually sterile tourist spots, useful merely for recreation (Stirrat 1991: 130). A similar, though not identical, fate threatens Velanganni as well if its impulse to infinite material aggrandisement and the attraction of tourists - especially if land

developers and speculators have their way - have not already pushed it beyond the point of no return. Active Diocesan promotion of the shrine and its miraculous reputation will ensure that it will not be reduced like Madhu and Talawila, but the reputed sanctity of Velanganni is already seen to have suffered, through its loss of pastoral simplicity, and we can only anticipate a further reduction with its urbanization.

6.7.3 Sacred Personhood, Incumbency, and Patronage

In Sri Lanka, sincere devotion has shifted away from traditional pilgrimage places like Madhu and Talawila, which have historically been controlled by the Church, to sacred persons who claim an unmediated and personal relationship with the divine, and whose common message is to draw the laity back to traditional, or "true" Catholicism (Stirrat 1991: 131). Stirrat outlines the careers and missions of three figures similar to Norbert - Fr. Jayamanne of Kudagama, a Marian devotee who heals with a thorn relic of Christ's crown, Brother Lambert of Suvagama who is specially favoured by the Virgin Mary and heals with a miraculous rosary which she gave him, but which only heals when in his hands, and the self-styled "Bishop Aponsu" at Katunayake, a stigmatic who claims to have been ordained by Christ himself and exorcises demons (Stirrat 1991). Each has constructed a shrine, but the sacred qualities of Mirisgama, Kudagama, Suvagama, and Katunayake, in contrast to the older traditional shrines, do not exist separately from the sacred persons who reside in them. A visit from one of these holy men is equivalent to a pilgrimage to his shrine when he is in residence there (Stirrat 1991: 129).

The personalistic quality of Maryamma's religious leadership follows the same pattern as Stirrat's holy men. Healing and supernatural messages are the main personal attraction. Periodic startling miracles sustain and broaden public interest. Her personal sacrality is detached from the place where she happens to reside, as witnessed by the present destitution of Orattur where the abortive shrine with a healing spring was

supposed to have developed. Still, sacredness does adhere to Vadiyakkadu, even in Maryamma's absence, because of Moses' grave and the *Arul arai* with *Anma*'s shining footprint.

My concern in this study, which I have called a "critical hagiography", is with the *Anma* cult's personalistic origins, its subsequent construction of sacred identity, its development by stages, and its adaptations to a fluctuating ideological constituency. Theological issues, and therefore matters of orthodoxy, become important in the recent, nuanced manifestations of the cult's ideology. Stirrat treats issues of religious orthodoxy solely in institutional, rather than in theological, terms. For his purposes, orthodoxy, "is a matter of what suits those who wield power in an ecclesiastical institution" (Stirrat 1981: 184). His interest is "in the ideological development of the shrine... of particular beliefs in relation to wider sets of beliefs" (Stirrat 1981: 185). While I agree with him that power and orthodoxy are cognates, I cannot reduce questions of orthodoxy solely to an institutional frame of reference. This would be to fall into the reductionist error of which Kathleen M. Erndl has warned us - ignoring the very divine realities which are the most important features of participants' religious lives (Erndl 1993: 132).

Stirrat's sets of "particular beliefs" are those of each of his charismatic cults, and his "wider sets of beliefs" are those of the Buddhist-Hindu culture which environs Sinhala Catholicism. His protagonists are all Catholics who continue to subscribe to the fundamentals of Christian faith in fairly recognizable ways. So are most of their followers. Many of Maryamma's followers, on the other hand, are and remain Hindus, unaware of officially endorsed, canonical and institutional limitations on doctrine, and open to ever new revelations, which they do not distinguish in Catholic fashion as "private" or "public". A discussion of this distinction is taken up at the end of the chapter. The radical theologico-historical claims of the

Amma cult, such as that *Aiya* is the "Second Coming", the mythology concerning imminent danger to him, and the implicit suggestion of his virginal origins, are intrinsic parts of our discourse. Christology is thus an aspect of the "particular beliefs" of the *Amma* cult. It also anchors the Christian pole of that "wider set of beliefs" which Tamil Christians share implicitly, but mainly through the medium of *Mada*, with Tamil Hindus, whose grasp of Christology is minimal.

By virtue of being Tamil, Catholics share a context of cultural coherence with their Hindu neighbours.¹⁵ A part of the Tamils' taken-for-granted mental furniture is the primacy of the divine feminine. *Mada* is regarded, my friend Fr. Arul Arockiasamy never tired telling me, as the "entrance" to the Church, and to Christianity. Only for clergy and the more theologically sophisticated laity is this primacy superceded by Trinitarian ideas. In Sri Lanka the Virgin seems to be the "dynamic component of the divine, appearing in the world to influence events" (Stirrat 1992: 137)¹⁶ which corresponds to the male Hindu god's *sakti*. It is in a parallel manifestation of this presumption, a principle of common sense which grounds the very coherence of Tamil culture, that we find a readiness for syncretic originality among Sinhala Catholics, as well. In some cases syncretic tendencies have advanced so far in Sri Lanka that "Catholic" has become no more than a social identity. The style of their religiosity, apart from the strictly sacramental life within the churches, has become nearly identical to that of Sinhala Buddhism (Stirrat 1992: 194), itself a synthesis of Hindu and Buddhist features (cf. Pfaffenberger 1979).

While some Catholic purists consider that Sinhala Catholicism has been contaminated or degraded by Buddhist or Hindu influences, Stirrat poses the issue differently:

In Sri Lanka, religion is inextricably linked up with culture, and to distinguish between "religious concepts" and "cultural concepts" is a hazardous operation. Simply by being Sinhalese, Sinhalese Catholics share many concepts and constructs with Sinhalese Buddhists, and among these is the possibility and reality of phenomena such as possession. Thus what can appear

to the priests as Buddhist influence can be seen by the laity as simply part of the taken-for-granted of everyday life (Stirrat 1981: 197).

6.7.4 Gods, Demons, Saints, and Priests

While the Catholic saints and Hindu-Buddhist gods derive their meaning from quite differently structured ideological (or theological) systems, both gods and saints are, to their respective devotees, ethical exemplars and helpers in this world. For those who have eyes to see it, gods and saints are equivalent (Stirrat 1981: 185). The Catholic tradition is, however, not without its reciprocal influence on the religious consciousness of others. In Hinduism, the institution of the *istadevata*, or personally preferred deity, is a common expression of devotion similar to a Catholic's special attachment to a particular saint. I have personal knowledge of Hindus whose chosen deity and household god, worshipped just as one would *Murugan* or *Sakti*, is St. Antony of Padua. Just as each parish has its own patron saint who "owns" the parish and protects its people, even to the extent of patrolling the parish boundaries by night, the gods are protectors of particular localities. Just as the local Hindu or Buddhist god's festival is the major social occasion of the year, so for a parish church or a Christian village this event is the annual patronal feast (Stirrat 1981: 187).

There is also a functional correspondence between saints and priests in Catholicism, and between gods and monks in Buddhism.¹⁷ Priests and monks are, in contrast to the worldly concerns of saints and gods, specialists in the soteric process (Stirrat 1981: 186). The Catholic Church has attempted to represent the gods as negative images, or evil equivalents of the saints, but this has resulted in their both being seen as members of one single graded continuum within the category of supernatural beings (Stirrat 1981: 188).

I found a similar continuity between saints, gods and demons in ideology of the "*Tandai Tuviya Mariyannai Jabakulam*", a Marian apparitional cult in Tanjavur city based on the model of

Velanganni shrine (see note 19). Dr. S. Raja, a devotee and college teacher from Tirucchirappalli, informed me that many Tamil Catholics regard Hindu gods as "fallen angels" (Stirrat 1992: 86, 89), in the same category as Lucifer or Satan and his subordinates. Dr. Raja described two such categories of evil beings, and placed the *pey*, or restless, deceased human spirits, in the subordinate category. Just where the local Hindu demons would fit in the scheme, Dr. Raja was not able to make entirely clear. They may, he suggested, constitute a separate category or be subsumed with the *pey* (Raja 1993.06.25).

Stirrat found that for Sinhala Catholics the highest ranks of demons are populated by the "fallen angels" of the Judeo-Christian tradition (Stirrat 1992: 89). The Hindu and Buddhist gods such as *Siva*, *Kataragama*, *Kali* and *Saman* are included along with fallen humans in an intermediate category (Stirrat 1992: 90). Beneath these are the evil beings of the Sinhala tradition, *Maha Sohona*, *Mohini*, *Kalu Kumaraya*, resulting in a continuous, three-layered demonology (Stirrat 1992: 90). While I have no sources on the identities construed for the Christian saints by Buddhists as I have for some Hindus, the eclectic attitude of Sinhala Catholics toward supernatural beings has resulted in a complex taxonomy of demons.

The process I observed among Catholic Tamils in Tanjavur Diocese of eclectically incorporating the gods and demons of the environing majority culture - which is, in fact, its own culture - is no different from what Stirrat found among the Sinhalas. If, in the Hindu frame of reference, a *pey* or other malign being can be driven out through possession by a Hindu deity such as *Mariyamman*, then, in the Catholic frame of reference, it becomes equally possible for a malign being to be displaced by a benign spirit entity. The difference between Hindu and Catholic possibilities of possession is that the Catholic has a wider set from which to choose, a Christian super-set of benign figures. The malign spirit may be conceived not only as a "fallen angel" or Judeo-Christian

devil, but as a Hindu god or goddess like *Mariyamman* or *Angalamman*, as well (Stirrat 1992: 85). The benign spirit who possesses the victim in order to drive out the evil spirit is likely to be a Christian saint, such as St. Antony or the Virgin Mary.

It is important to understand that in the "orthodox" Buddhist scheme of soteriology, the gods are not yet saved, but remain in bondage, subject to *karma*, *samsara*, and are subject to be reborn eventually in lower forms. In Catholicism, the saints are already saved. This difference explains why the gods are more pragmatically useful. They can be appealed to for less ethical favours. The lowest grade of supernatural beings are the wandering ghosts of people whose spirits are still attached to particular places and people, who have "unfinished business" with their most recent life. These are called *peretayo* or *malaperetayo* in Sinhala [*preta* in Hindi, *pey* in Tamil] (Stirrat 1977: 137, n.7). These dubious beings tend to have distinctive personalities, expressed through the subjects they possess, by which their class may be known (Stirrat 1992: 90). *Mohini*, for example, acts lasciviously and *peretayo* will roll on the ground and eat dirt (Stirrat 1992: 90). Multiple possession is possible, known through the serial manifestation of the characteristic identifiers of the respective spirits (Stirrat 1977: 139, n.10). This appears to be a Sinhala folk representation of what psychotherapy labels multiple personality syndrome.

As Sri Lankan Catholics have come to regard saints and gods as positive and negative mirror images of one another, Buddhists have come to identify individual saints and gods with each other, attenuating the negative-positive polarity. St. Antony is regarded as the god of Kataragama under another name. Mary is regarded as *Pattini*, St. Ann as another form of Mary, St. Sebastian as a "younger brother" of *Mariyamman*, and even Christ and Buddha are sometimes identified (Stirrat 1981: 188). This last correspondence is evidence that the patterns of belief at the

level of pragmatic religion are capable of translation into patterns of understanding at the soteric level as well. This tendency might be understood as a bursting up of overextended popular, and therefore defective, religious notions into the domain of theology and orthodoxy. I prefer to see it as a natural tendency toward coherence which presupposes that there are no radical fractures in the divine-human continuum. It is an expedient which permits Catholics to engage their Sinhala identity by attending Buddhist temples without forfeiting their cultural identity as Catholics (Stirrat 1981: 188).

6.7.5 A Female Saint Holds the Future

In his account of innovative cults on the margins of Catholicism in Sri Lanka, Stirrat tells of Conci, a Catholic woman born in 1955 who routinely becomes possessed by the Hindu-Buddhist gods *Kataragama* and *Kali* (Stirrat 1992: 189-194). In childhood, when her family was struggling against some sorcery, Conci once fell into trance. Her deceased grandmother led her to the god *Kataragama*, who gave Conci a *varam*, or "warrant" to help people by letting him possess her. Now, Conci mediates petitioners' needs to *Kataragama* as his human surrogate, and can satisfy these needs through his *varam*.

Conci maintains a small shrine which displays iconic representations of Christ, St. Antony and St. Sebastian in its entrance; Buddha, *Kataragama* and several other Sri Lankan deities in a sanctuary inside; and, in the innermost sanctuary, a statue of the goddess *Kali* with a picture of her male familiar, *Dadimunda*. Wednesdays and Saturdays, Conci gets possessed by *Kataragama*; Tuesdays and Fridays by *Kali*. Conci is unmarried, maintains her own household, and makes a good living from her shrine. Although she serves Buddhist and Catholic petitioners as a trance medium for the gods, she claims to be, still, a good Catholic.

Stirrat sees developments like Conci's as the future of Sinhala Catholicism. His scholarly interest is religious

transformation in the context of the realities of political power, and argues that a symbolic representation which accepts and adequately reflects factual power relations, in this case through syncretism, will prevail in the future (Stirrat 1992: 193). A more pluralistic, elastic, adaptive attitude to majority symbols is the religious minority's vehicle for moving out of an isolating and increasingly anachronistic symbol-set. Stirrat's other shrines - Kudagama, Mirisgama, Suvagama, and Katunayake - are founded on fantasies of resurrecting Catholic status in a privileged colonial past which exists now only in the imagination (Stirrat 1992: 176-7). Stirrat anticipates that more and more such syncretic alternatives will emerge to cater to the spiritual tastes of Sinhala Catholics as Buddhist hegemony becomes more pervasive and the official Church, and its marginal alternatives which he describes, both decline (Stirrat 1992: 194).

Like Maryamma's, Conci's appeal lies in her personal sanctity and ability to communicate with the spirit world, features of personal saintliness which the sacraments of the institutional Church are perceived as failing to provide. Maryamma has built her *Amma* cult in an *ad hoc* manner with a variety of different signs, issues, and types of miracles predominating, depending on the needs of the moment and the kind of audience she has had to address. Maryamma has succeeded in managing followers of widely differing tastes and levels of expertise in religious and symbolic matters. The *Amma* cult's religious "platform" has become much more nuanced in recent years owing to the increasing sophistication of its recruits. Maryamma now has an impressive array of ideological advisors to help her give an optimal theoretical configuration to the *Amma* cult. Accordingly, its agenda has recently become markedly more eschatological.

Unlike Maryamma, Conci sometimes tends to vacillate by distinguishing between the gods and the saints, while at other times equating them. Conci will sometimes declare that the Virgin Mary, St. Anne, and *Kali Amman* are just different ways of

addressing aspects of the universal Mother (Stirrat 1992: 192). In the same way Conci sometimes identifies *Kataragama* and St. Antony, as both are wonder-workers, while St. Sebastian and the god *Huniyam* are identified, since both are equestrian warriors and protectors. Sebastian has taken on an ambivalent, dangerous, and vengeful character in this transition (Stirrat 1992: 210, note 1) which would make him quite alien to Norbert, discussed above.

Such ambivalence is as thoroughly a part of popular theology as is the logical, epistemological, and ontological stringency of elite theology. People live each day with contradictions and discontinuities. Conci's "solution" straddles the symbolic crevice between formal Hindu-Buddhist and Catholic heterodoxies, but appeals to ordinary people in a way that is personally helpful.¹⁸ It is not clear from Stirrat's brief account whether Conci has advisors similar to Maryamma's who can help her sort out these conceptual discontinuities.

There are a few structural parallels between Conci's story and Maryamma's. Conci moves from being a lay Catholic child whose family is distressed by sorcery, to being possessed by a Buddhist god, to establishing a livelihood and reputation- constructing and maintaining shrine patronized by Buddhists as well as Catholics. She is translated into, and participates professionally in, the symbolic world of the Hindu-Buddhist gods, while remaining in her own eyes a Catholic. Maryamma moves from being a Hindu child distressed by sorcery, to being a "daughter" of the apparitional Virgin Mary, to establishing a livelihood and reputation- constructing and maintaining shrine patronized by Hindus and Catholics. She is translated into the symbolic world of Catholicism and, between official denial and practical affirmation by her client priests, functions as a Catholic. Both Maryamma and Conci are women who, starting as young girls, constructed religious identities having immense appeal for a wide range of people which meet their adherents' needs in similar ways. Both are able to take initiative in arranging the circumstances of their

lives, and in managing power relations in such a way that they have respect and an independent livelihood in cultures where, for a woman, respect normally derives from marriage, and financial independence without a specialist education is impossible.

6.7.6 What it Means to be a Holy Person

While some Tamil cults organized around the Virgin are quite frank about Mary's possession of their seers,¹⁹ the *Anma* cult hesitates to declare that Maryamma is being "possessed" by *Anma*. I have no definitive explanation of this difference. Perhaps it is the result of anticipated objections from the Church, which Maryamma does not wish to alienate. More likely, however, the difference simply derives from the apparitional character of *Anma*'s first hierophany. When *Anma* appeared to Santi at the clothesline, the vision was clearly dualistic. *Anma* is apart from her, objectified, a separate entity (cf. 6.2). Perhaps Maryamma's seclusion was meant to bridge their two distinct identities, but that effort at symbolic construction of the sacred was foiled. Now that *Anma* comes in voice only, conditions may be fitting for her to be thought of as coterminous with Maryamma, and for the distinction between their identities to become minimized and eventually elided. Exactly this has happened in the case of Bangaru Adigal, a contemporary Hindu "saint", to whose story we now turn.

6.7.7 A Tamil Variant on Sacred Personhood

In his study of the goddess *Adiparasakti* of Melmaruvatur in Tamil Nadu, Lee Weissman presents a case in which the goddess' seer, Bangaru *Adigal*, has been accepted as the very embodiment of the deity. Initially, in 1972, Bangaru Nayakar went into trance and spoke with the goddess' voice as a *kuri* [sign], or oracle. This *kuri* came to be called *arulvakku* [speech of grace], and through it the goddess *Mariyamman* spoke of her own greatness as *Adiparasakti* [pristine transcendent power]. She called Bangaru her *mutta mahan* [eldest son], *pesum deyvam* [the speaking god], and *nadamadakkum adiparasakti* [the mobile form of herself]. In 1979,

Adiparasakti instructed devotees to perform *guru-abishekam* for Bangaru. His trance, she declared, was no ordinary possession but a way in which she was progressively homologizing him to herself. January, 1985 was declared the beginning of a new age, the *Sakti-yugam*, and Bangaru the *avatara* of the end of the preceding *Kali-yugam*. Today, it is no longer necessary for Bangaru to enter into trance, as the goddess is believed to inhabit his waking consciousness. Speaking as her, not *for* her, his every casual word and action is responded to as the goddess' own. However, her apologists maintain the goddess has respected Bangaru's human limits, inhabiting him gradually so that he will not be overwhelmed by her living presence.²⁰ Gender reversal, the presence of the goddess in a male body, does not seem to present any cognitive problems for devotees. As Bangaru is the full embodiment of the goddess, it is not intelligible for anyone else to become possessed by her, at least not within the precincts of the Melmaruvatur Temple (*Adhiparasakthi*, etc. n.d.; Moorthy 1986; Weissman 1988).

6.7.8 Gradual Revelation

Although I have come across no explicit comparison or identification between *Arokkiya Mada*, or *Anma*, and *Adiparasakti* in publications about the latter, perhaps it is unnecessary to make such an identification. The *Adiparasakti* pilgrims I met at Velanganni had no doubts about the identity of the two "Ladies" (1.6.8.2; *Chapt.1* note 11). The model is implicit in the culture's preconceptions about deity and deification. Like *Adiparasakti*, *Anma* has declared her seer and mouthpiece her own child, to be obeyed as one would obey herself. The *Anma* cult has seen a gradual revelation of herself, paralleled by her developing relationship with Maryamma, in the shifts from the silent *Anma* of private visions, to the speaking *Anma*, to the prospect of homologizing Maryamma to herself through *tapas* or austerities in seclusion, to the silent, privative *Anma*, to the blundering *Anma* of the "leg question", to the mediatrix of Moses' resurrection. Today, *Anma's*

holiness is tacitly conferred on Maryamma in her "daughter's" everyday functions. Maryamma's ordinary voice is treated virtually as *Anma's* own. A new age has been declared as well, and a child has come to lead it.

6.7.9 Straddling the Gap between Faiths

Anma at Vadiyakkadu frowns on her devotees attending non-Christian institutions or holy places, and on participating in non-Christian rites and holidays (3.7.7.3). The early phase of the *Anma* cult may, therefore, be thought of as a vehicle by which a group of Hindus have attempted to Christianize themselves (2.5.5), without benefit of clergy, until the involvement of Fr. Kulandairaj and others since 1991.²¹

In Mirisgama, Norbert regularly affirms the validity of the sacraments in his exhortations. He is himself a parishioner and regularly attends mass. In his incarnation as a saint, however, Norbert maintains his own chapel, with its own funds, and is supported by a "council" which is not administratively part of the Church (Stirrat 1981: 190).

Norbert's shrine is "a sort of supernatural first-aid station" (Stirrat 1981: 193). There is no need to visit St. Sebastian if one is well. As God is understood to delegate responsibilities (Stirrat 1981: 187), the saints are clearly commissioned as mediators for specific purposes and Sinhala saints have specialized roles. Saint Sebastian's blessings are specific and directed toward existential problems, disease and illness (Stirrat 1981: 193). St. Ann helps with education, St. Antony with business matters. Writing of European Catholicism, William A. Christian views the chain of intercession as enabling:

There is not... a radical separation of the divine from the human. Rather there is a long helping chain that goes from the sinner to God, by way of the souls in purgatory, the saints, and Mary" (Christian 1972: 132).

However, there is a negative side. The saint is real and must not be neglected in this "chain of command". One would clearly not wish to offend the delegate by "going over his head". This hierarchical, sequential ordering of the ~~sacred~~ puts functional

and personal blocks between the worshipper and the principal, God.

The system for soliciting divine help mediated through sacraments and priests in seeking salvation, and for pragmatic assistance in the world by delegation through saints, is a unitary system, each component complementing the other and together making up a comprehensive system of religious belief and behaviour. It is hierarchical, the soteric discourse being officially morally superior to the discourse concerning worldly affairs.

A living embodiment of the saint like Norbert, and perhaps Maryamma, can, however, bid to represent God more directly than any sacrament because the saint is, in some uncommon way, with God while the priest, though ordained, remains with the worshippers as one of them (Christian 1972). Human weakness itself is a sufficient justification both for people's devotions to saints' shrines and for giving their first allegiance to a living saint when one descends among them to found a personal cult.

In the fluid reality where both gods and saints are present, together, to the popular religious consciousness (6.7.4), their properties are exchanged, and saints are enabled to possess mediums as the gods have always done. When this happens, the medium is positioned ideologically to compete with the institution - the Church - in matters also of salvation (Stirrat 1981: 185). In Sinhala Buddhism, the Buddha occupies a comparable position in relation to monks and gods as the Christian God does to priests and saints, and his powers are delegated in much the same way. However, the Buddha is dead, beyond the phenomenal, and the powers delegated to the gods are as good as their own (Stirrat 1981: 187). The gods need not, indeed cannot, intercede with the Buddha for favours and graces. It seems that it is up to the Catholic believer to decide in his own conscience whether a saint must intercede with God each time he or she is called upon or, like these Buddhist gods, simply execute a commission at his or her own discretion (Stirrat 1981: 188). A similar ambivalence is evident in *Anma's kal piracchanai*.

6.7.10 Cult or Church?

The use of supernatural aids to solve worldly problems tends to lead people away from the essential concerns of the faith with salvation. The non-intercessory semi-independence of the Buddhist gods, and the preoccupation among devotees with *laukika* [Sinhala, this-worldly] rather than *lokkotara* [transcendental] concerns it induces, constitutes a problem for Buddhist purists whose object is *nirvana* (Stirrat 1981: 193). The same problem is recognized by the Catholic Church, especially in the wake of the human-centered ethical direction in the relations of its members with the cults of the saints given by Vatican II. In its own eyes, the Church has a monopoly, through Christ, on mediation between God and Christians, and it is up to the institutional Church to decide who will and will not be saints. By virtue of his ordination, a priest is a channel of grace through the sacraments which he is authorized to celebrate, regardless of his personal qualities. A priest may be transferred or replaced at will by his superiors. It is his office, not his person, which provides the mediation for worshippers (Stirrat 1981: 195). Most saints are, for better or worse, deceased and the issue of incumbency, or who in particular is playing his or her role, if it matters at all, ought, in the official view, to be equally dead.

The popular religious imagination, however, continues to throw up living representatives of the saints. These saintly incumbents, if they become popularly recognized, have a vantage from which to criticize priestly incumbents on grounds of personal character and morals. The saints have reached salvation and those through whom, by possession, they are incarnate are tactically positioned to assume a prophetic role as critics of institutions and the persons who control them. Power and orthodoxy are cognates, as I have previously pointed out in agreement with Stirrat's main methodological concern, and when such criticism occurs, it will concern relations of power. But when the prophet of God confronts the institution which purports to serve and

represent "Him", so the saint claims for her or himself, beginning with pragmatic and worldly difficulties, the territory claimed also by the Church as its special preserve - theology and orthodoxy.²²

The followers of Norbert, Conci, and others in their class of sacred specialists in Sri Lanka are well aware of the power relations at work between the Church and their shrines. Their experience is infused with the same suspicion, resentment, and attribution of moral corruption to priests and hierarchy that I found in Vadiyakkadu, Velanganni, and Tanjavur. Norbert's uncle once told Stirrat:

"I tell you straight. All that the priests are interested in is money. They don't care about us or about religion. Thus when we started this place a priest came from [the parish church at] Alutgama. He looked and went away. Then he sent a... collection box, and told us to tell the people who came to put money in the box and then to send the box to him. We refused. We don't want money. This is God's work. Those priests don't understand" (Stirrat 1981: 194).

Identical criticisms echo around Velanganni and among those who suspect the motives of the principals of the *Amma* cult, such as Balraj, Sebastian Raj, Rosemary, and Fr. A. Arockiasamy. Another priest of Tanjavur Diocese, Fr. R. Santhanasamy, who was suspended in 1980 for operating a semi-independent healing ministry in defiance of the Bishop's objections, testifies that when people began coming to him in large numbers, regarding him as a morally superior priest and holy person, Diocesan officials insisted that a collection box belonging to them also be kept at his combination chapel and clinic (Santhanasamy 1993.06.23).

Stirrat found that some devotees who have taken a regular and committed interest in St. Sebastian, even though they had become regular church-attenders at his prodding, had fallen away from the sacraments because they had come to receive the same grace through Norbert that others obtained through the sacraments. "Isn't a saint", said one devotee for whom St. Sebastian had become his sole channel of grace, "nearer to God than a priest?" (Stirrat 1981: 196). This man's attitudes changed radically as he was transformed from being a nominal Catholic rarely attending

church, to a sporadic devotee of St. Sebastian and a regular church-goer upon his urging, to being an almost perpetual, worshipful presence at Mirisgama. This man had shifted his primary, salvation-focussed religious alignment away from the sacraments to the cult, with the result that priests no longer had any importance for him.

A somewhat more complex situation is Fr. Prakash's alignment with the *Anma* cult. Although he is a priest, his experience of the sacraments had gone stale. Visiting Vadiyakkadu regularly, Prakash found emotional fulfilment, a sense of purpose, of vocation, and perhaps even a sense of spiritual adventure. Serving the cult as a minister infused the Eucharist with immediacy and a new meaning which he was able to take back into his sacramental and teaching duties as a seminary instructor (5.1.3.3).

In Sinhala Buddhism, where the gods are not directly involved as exemplars in the soteriological process, and indeed, are not yet saved themselves, the Buddha is in no danger of being displaced by these subordinate figures. In Tamil and Sinhala Catholicism, however, the saints are capable of acting in the domain of soteriology, and so, of functionally displacing God by incarnating themselves in humans. This is quite consistent in principle, by mediating the gap between this world and the other, with the Incarnation of the second person of the Trinity, God the Son, as Jesus.

6.8 Faith and Order on the Margins of the Catholic Church

It should be clear in all that has gone before that, at least from the perspective of the Roman Catholic Church, some very strange things are going on in Vadiyakkadu. Naturally, the Church has an interest whenever claims about contemporary visions of the Virgin Mary are made. Marian seers are usually Catholics and subject to the spiritual guidance, teaching authority, and if necessary, discipline of the Church. William Christian has noted how:

...the Catholic Church in the twentieth century continues to engender movements of piety that escape its control. The Church's acceptance of certain visions and revelations, and their very widespread deployment, has shown lay people how to have direct, public converse with the Saints, which is especially problematic now that the Church has far fewer ways to enforce discipline (Christian 1984: 258).

A non-Catholic seer poses a problem for the Church on both counts - guidance and discipline. In the rare case where the seer is a non-Christian, it may be easier to discount the case simply as an aberration. It would be extremely difficult, even embarrassing, for Church authorities to recognize an alleged vision of its own Blessed Virgin by a seer who stands entirely outside the Abrahamic tradition.

Maryamma's situation departs from the ordinary right from her birth as a Hindu. For an impoverished young Hindu woman with no more than seven years of education, Maryamma's efforts to understand Catholic Christianity are remarkable. Whether her knowledge is a result of private study in an environment largely without books (3.4.2; Baskaran 1993.06.25), or whether it came through *Amma's* catechesis as she claims (2.5.5), is a matter of credence. Maryamma, it seems, intended to incorporate herself into the Catholic church in one way or another. Santi's early attempt to become recognized by the authorities of Velanganni Shrine as a Marian seer was ignored, although that visit to Velanganni conferred a miraculous relic, *Amma's* own *jabamalai*. Santi next sought Christian initiation directly through *Amma* which resulted in her baptismal "mass". Both these attempts - to have a vision and to seek initiation - are legitimate strategies for obtaining recognition in Hindu religious culture, but for reasons Maryamma may not have understood, they rebounded against her in Catholic officialdom. Each one, however, touched a cord in the popular imagination and support, from a broad spectrum of Hindus and Catholics, followed. Whenever an alleged apparition gathers a dedicated following, it is difficult for the Church to judge how much attention to accord to its promoters.

When the Church's own priests become involved in roles of service or leadership in apparitional cults which are at or beyond the margin of its control, Church authorities' concern intensifies. Catholic priests have been attracted to service and leadership in the *Anna* cult, and their sacramental functions have so rapidly become an integral part of the cult's functioning that a Hindu woman, Kamatchiyamma, could ask rhetorically: "So..., do you think we can have a Mass tomorrow? Can we celebrate a birthday without a mass?" (4.2.2).

The Church does not actively promote Marian visionaries, but if a sufficiently forceful case can be made for an apparition by interested parties, an enquiry to determine the facts may be held, placing them *sub judice*. Such an official enquiry is currently underway at the Franciscan shrine of the "Queen of Peace" in Medjugorje, Bosnia-Herzegovina (Bax 1990: 67-72; 1991b: 38, 46). This section examines the criteria by which Catholic authorities evaluate an alleged apparition, and how these criteria apply to the *Anna* cult phenomena.

6.8.1 Approval of Apparitions - Who Judges, and How?

How does the Catholic Church tell a true Marian apparition from a false one? In the first place, no Marian apparition is a part of the "deposit of faith", or public revelation - that which is sufficient to Christians for salvation - finalized in the Canon of the New Testament and the traditions of the Church (Tambasco 1984: 71; Boucher 1994). Marian and other apparitions are conceived by the Church as supernumerary revelations through which the Holy Spirit guides Christians in particular circumstances, and Mary is a messenger of the Spirit (Boucher 1994).

The Roman Catholic Church, through its "Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith", the Vatican department responsible for questions of faith and morals, has issued a set of guidelines for bishops to use in assessing claims of private revelation (Boucher 1994), based on the treatise *De servorum Dei beatificatione* of Pope Benedict XIV (1740-1758) (Zimdars-Swartz 1991: 9). Catholics

are cautioned that if such a claim were to be officially but imprudently recognized, and later proven to be a hoax, much damage to the integrity of both believers and the institution might result. Careful discernment is therefore exercised in judging claims concerning apparitions and miracles. Through patience, false positives and false negatives are avoided. The Church is under no obligation officially to approve any particular private revelation and its usual policy is to let the phenomena run their course with as little comment as possible while, if deemed necessary, closely monitoring events (Boucher 1994).

Judgement is generally withheld until the popular devotion becomes established, as at Lourdes, which is officially recognized, and Velanganni, which is not. The most famous claimant today for recognition is the Medjugorje phenomenon in the Diocese of Mostar, Hercegovina, and the Church is in no hurry to render a judgement (Bax 1990, 1991a, 1991b; Zimdars-Swartz 1991: 233-244; Ryan, 1993). In the case of the *Amma* cult, the Church's monitoring process was initiated by Fr. Sammanasu's visit to Maryamma at Viraiyan's home in 1989 at the time of her breast surgery miracle, and continued in the assignment, separately, of Balraj and Sebastian Raj to gather information. Archbishop Arokiaswamy's personal visit to Vadiyakkadu, and the prohibition of Mass there marked a deepening engagement and commitment by the Church to set bounds, at least to its own priests' participation.

Even formal authentication of apparitions is permissive in the sense that sufficient evidence of a phenomenon's supernatural reality has been judged to exist to justify belief in it (Nolan and Nolan 1989: 372). However, unless recognition of the phenomenon is promulgated as a universal doctrine or article of faith, no Catholic's faith can be impugned for not believing in it (Zimdars-Swartz 1991: 9; Boucher 1994). This position opens the way for a variety of beliefs which, depending on one's point of view, either enhance or detract from the core of essential doctrines concerning what is deemed necessary for salvation. The

fantastic miracles depicted in the *Annai Velanganni* film, for example, are accepted by priests as enhancements to a story they believe to be "true" at its core, even while admitting the elaboration to be not strictly "factual".

The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith declares that the local bishop is the primary authority in judging cases of alleged private revelation, which include apparitions (O'Carroll 1982:47-49). If the bishop determines that judgement is beyond his competence, he defers to the Congregation. In either case, the Church's judgement concerns whether the revelations and events are supernatural or not. The evidence is weighed by these criteria:

- 1) whether the facts are free of error,
- 2) whether the person receiving the messages is psychologically balanced, honest, moral, sincere and respectful of Church authority,
- 3) whether doctrinal errors are attributed to God, Our Lady, or to a saint,
- 4) whether theological and spiritual doctrines presented are free of error,
- 5) whether moneymaking is a motive somehow involved in the events,
- 6) whether healthy religious devotion and spiritual fruits result, without evidence of collective hysteria (Boucher 1994:4).

If a private revelation passes all these tests, it may be considered *eligible* for approval, yet the Church is not obliged to approve it officially. Even when apparitions or miracles, including those used as evidence in beatifications and canonizations, are officially accepted by the highest authority in the Roman Catholic Church, no Catholic is required to believe that they "really" occurred in the material sense (Zimdars-Swartz 1991: 9; Boucher 1994). Official approval merely means that nothing associated with the apparition or or miracle is contrary to faith

or morals as understood by the *magisterium*, or the teaching authority of the Church.

This indeterminacy leads to confusion among lay people when a devotion has been neither approved nor disapproved. Since the third century C.E., nearly 80,000 apparitions of Mary have been reported, according to the International Marian Research Institute in Dayton, Ohio (Boucher 1994: 2). Only seven of these have received official recognition from the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. These are Guadalupe (1531) in Mexico, Paris (1830), La Salette (1846), and Lourdes (1858) in France, Fatima (1917) in Portugal, and Beauraing (1932-33) and Banneux (1933) in Belgium (Zimdars-Swartz 1991: 11; Boucher 1994: 2). The vast majority of Marian apparitions are marginal cases, neither approved nor positively disapproved, and there are huge disparities in the responses of the official Church to their claims. In some cases, such as Velanganni, the bishop's patronage and encouragement amount, for all practical purposes, to official approval.

An example of the opposite case is that of Mary Ann van Hoof (1909-84) of Necedah, Wisconsin in La Crosse Diocese, who began seeing apparitions of Mary in 1949 (Wood 1991; Zimdars-Swartz 1991: 259-67, 299 note 74, 317f. notes 38-59). Church authorities in La Crosse examined the evidence, found it insufficient, and refused their approval. Advocates of this private revelation felt so disempowered and persecuted that by 1979 more than five hundred of them left the Catholic Church (Boucher 1994: 3) to form a new, schismatic church around these Marian revelations, called the "American National Catholic Church, Roman Catholic Ultrajectine" (Wood 1991:116).

Few Catholics are concerned that the grounds of a particular devotion, like that at Velanganni, have not been investigated nor received official approval as actual apparitions (6.7.1; Santos 1933). Devotees treat Velanganni just as they would Lourdes, Fatima, or Guadalupe, each of which has been investigated

and approved. This attitude seems to be generally true of the devotees of some other claimants for approval such as San Damiano (Italy), Garabandal (Spain), or Heroldsbach (Germany), where there is a greater awareness of the difference between approved and non-approved shrines. Zimdars-Swartz notes that pilgrims are indifferent to bishops' attitudes toward such shrines and even negative decisions after official appraisal has little effect on popular feelings, and may actually spur on the devotees (Zimdars-Swartz 1991: 10-11).

There have been, over the past two hundred years a remarkable number of alleged apparitions of Mary in Europe. The Nolans record that of forty-seven such European visions which led to the founding of pilgrimage centers, approved or not, all but one were primarily Marian (Nolan and Nolan 1989: 287). It is striking that the kind of devotional interest which promotes visionary and pilgrimage phenomena has such strong correlation in Europe with allegiance to the Virgin Mary. It seems that Tamils respond with equal enthusiasm to the call of the same Mother.

6.8.2 Marian Priority

The popular attitude which places Mary at the center of devotions and sees her as the preferred channel of approach to God is, among alleged hierophanies of the various saints, angels, and persons of the Trinity, the basis for most claims to what the Church calls "private revelations". The most innovative and forceful advocates of Mary make effusive claims for her power in the economy of salvation, attributing virtual equivalence with Christ to her through her sharing in his redemptive suffering (O'Carroll 1982; Perry and Echeverria 1988).²³ Once Mary is imagined as "Co-redemptrix", the continuing flow of logic confers on her a kind of common-sense ontological precedence as mother to the son, without whom Christ would not have been. Partisans of this view are sensitive, however, to the ontological priority of the divine Christ to the Jesus of history, so Mary is exalted as "Queen of Heaven" and her role as "Mother of God" is projected

back in time, and beyond time, to before the creation of the world.

The doctrine of the "Communion of Saints" asserts that, whether living or deceased, all Christians are alive to God, in the Holy Spirit, and may pray for each other (Tambasco 1984: 68-9). This is the foundation for the cult of the saints, in which living people appeal to the holy dead to intercede with God for them in prayer (cf. Christian 1972: 132). It is as the first Christian that Mary takes precedence in this Communion and is able to care for Christians in prayer (Tambasco 1984: 75).

For those who advocate a triumphalist Marianism, maximizing Mary's role in the scheme of salvation, she is conceived not merely as the most effective channel, through her maternal ties, of access to her Son (and in a serial manner to God the Father), but since they believe that Jesus can deny his own mother nothing, pleading with her is sufficient (cf. O'Carroll 1982: 186-9). When she appears in devotees' experience dispensing private, often idiosyncratic, revelations Mary may come to substitute fully for God, since in such conditions she fulfils not only pragmatic needs through worldly favours and graces, but satisfies the soteriological need as well. This entire scheme hangs upon two propositions: The first is that Jesus (known in the Canon and in church doctrine as the embodiment of love and only Mediator with the Father) (Tambasco 1984:69) is presumed to be an angry judge, distant and ever ready to wreak his just vengeance upon sinners. The second is that Mary's special relationship with her Son becomes the nexus for a jostling of wills between feeble, sinful and helpless humans, on one hand, and the power and *fiat* of God, on the other, by smoothing over in a maternal way his anger toward us, who are figured, also, as Mary's children (*Catechism* 1994: 251-3 [No.963-70]).

6.8.3 Recognition of Apparitions and Miracles.

Orattur and Vadiyakkadu

True believers commonly attempt to have "their" apparition recognized by the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. In our case, Maryamma and her followers have been careful to retain all physical evidences of miracles, such as bleeding pictures and statues, blood-soaked gauze bandages, and Moses' open grave. Apart from the use that photographic evidence of miracles has for convincing prospective devotees, the video coverage of Moses' resurrection was arranged explicitly as evidence for presentation to the Congregation, through the offices of Abbe R. Laurentin, to obtain "approval" for the cult's hierophanies. Most devotees regard the phenomena at Orattur and Vadiyakkadu to be of the same order as those at Lourdes, Fatima and Velanganni, in India the three best known Marian apparitions. Devotees are unaware of any difference in official status among these three. In spite of its popularity, Velanganni differs from Fatima and Lourdes as being not among the miniscule number of "approved" apparitions. Similarly, there is no evidence that the principals of the *Amma* cult are aware of the tens of thousands of unrecognized Marian claims, among which their own now takes its place.

Contrary to the cautionary warning which has been printed in every edition of the Velanganni shrine history published since 1933, pilgrims to Velanganni regard the shrine as a fully approved Marian apparition site. They justify their belief by the conversions and healings which have been attributed to *Arokkiya Mada*, as evidenced by Velanganni's Museum of Offerings overflowing with *ex votos*, and through the graces which they have experienced in their own lives.

The authenticity of private revelation and the discerning of it lie in common sense. "You will be able to tell them by their fruits. Can people pick grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles? In the same way a sound tree produces good fruit but a rotten tree

bad fruit.... I repeat, you will be able to tell them by their fruits" (Matt. 7: 16-17, 20). In the light of this passage, I have considered in my own reflection what might be proper tests for the authenticity of private revelation, but these are more subjective than the institutional criteria set out by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. Do those who have received an alleged Marian message, and are trying to *live* it, manifest the hierophany in God-centeredness or in self-centeredness, regarding the revelation in a proprietary way? Do they express it through a deeper love for others, without preying on others' need for intimacy with the seer's gift? Is there a spirit of surrender of one's talents and energy in an attitude of service, not "doing God's work" but allowing God's action to become clear through their own lives, or an exclusivity and self-aggrandisement? Are believers drawn to detachment and evangelical poverty, or to satisfaction of their own social and psychological needs? As humans are imperfect, subject to failure and error, their responses, even to a "true" revelation, may lack perfect saintly ingenuousness, but a "true" revelation will not produce malice or deceit as its fruits. Thus, discerning the quality of the tree from its fruits can not be a simple task and should not be undertaken lightly.

St. Ignatius of Loyola, in his *Spiritual Exercises*, is the authority not only for the Jesuit order which he founded, but for all Catholics, in matters of the "discerning of spirits". He was well aware of the possibility of erroneous affirmation, or what we would call the "false positive". Ignatius found in response to the struggles of spiritual life two tendencies, consolation and desolation. Consolation is expressive of approaching the will of God and desolation in moving away from it. But sometimes it was in desolation that God's word for Ignatius was best heard, and sometimes the experiences of consolation were false and misleading. False consolation was a greater enemy of good discernment than was desolation. False consolation is an

obscuration of one's sinfulness and separateness from God in a smokescreen of half-believed holiness (Green 1984: 97-118).

For those Catholics, especially Jesuit priests, who may take a serious interest in the revelations of *Amma* concerning *Aiya* through Maryamma, and who are also seriously engaged, as they must be, with their own tradition of spirituality, this danger of false consolation provides the strongest of warnings. Maintaining orthodoxy among a laity culturally diverse and often spiritually astray is a perennial task of the Church. Priestly heterodoxy combined with ideological leadership based on lay trust in the personal qualities of the priest, who critiques or quietly and expediently exploits institutional norms and symbols, as we find priests doing at Vadiyakkadu, has in the past produced many new institutions. It has also generated new parameters and criteria for doctrinal truth.

6.8.4 Eschatology - Incomplete Revelation

The Church distinguishes between a fixed public revelation - the "deposit of faith" - which anchors believers, and private revelations, which enhance faith experientially to meet believers' emotional and intellectual needs. These private revelations, regardless of their apparent source, must "never be placed on a par with or above public revelation" (Boucher 1994: 2). At Vadiyakkadu, we have found a new dispensation, emerging from the Church's category of private revelation, which claims to bridge the gap between these categories by projecting a "private" revelation into the domain of the public (cf. Obeyesekere 1981). This dispensation inaugurates a new age of revelation presented as the fulfilment of that canonical age in which the Church founds its authority (Fr. Peter 1993.06.16; Josephine 1993.06.17). This new age is built upon, and is a natural sequel to, the "Age of Mary" inaugurated by the solemn and "infallible" Papal declaration of the Doctrine of the Immaculate Conception in 1854 (Laurentin 1967).

In the four centuries between the Council of Trent and the Second Vatican Council which bracket the period of European colonial expansion and hegemony the Roman Catholic Church planted the seeds for many divergent eschatological visions and hopes in the status which it conferred, consensually or officially, on a variety of popular devotions to Mary and to other saints. In the symbolic alternate realities of the non-European cultures where these devotions took root, they have engendered syncretic wonderlands of spiritual creativity.²⁴ The standing question is, are these imaginative worlds less "true" than Euro-centric varieties simply because a certain range of parallels, of seminal convergences, may be traced between the foreign imported and the indigenous symbolic worlds? What, emerging from non-European social and theological reflection, might constitute a substantive challenge to the Church's dichotomy between public and private revelation?

In an encyclical letter on the character of the Church's teaching, Pope John Paul II writes:

The Church has always taught and continues to proclaim that God's revelation was brought to completion in Jesus Christ, who is the fullness of that revelation and that "no new public revelation is to be expected before the glorious manifestation of our Lord" (*Dei Verbum* 4, quoted in Boucher 1994: 2).

It is not the position of the Roman Catholic Church that divine revelation is absolutely complete, as such a claim would limit God's absolute freedom and sovereignty. The Church is a people and an institution waiting, in faith, for the eschaton. It is clearly the eschatological position of the Church that - until the return of Christ - there can be no new public revelation which will alter its faith and moral authority. The challenge of Vadiyakkadu is precisely that this time has arrived.

Chapter 7

"The Web of Time Entangles and Enslaves": Conclusion

If culture consists of the ideas people have
about their world, an anthropological theory
is *our* conceptual and abstract rendering
of *their* conceptual and abstract rendering of their world.

- Gananath Obeyesekere (1981: 10)

The purpose of this chapter is three-fold - to understand the *Amma* cult as a sequential development, to describe the contributions of this study, and to anticipate how the processes at work in the *Amma* cult may represent new trends in what Catholicism is becoming in today's world.

The cult of the Virgin Mary in south India is a dynamic tradition which, as I have shown in this study of the *Amma* cult, is capable of creative variation. The Tamil Marian cult is directly connected to a world-wide network of Catholic devotions and, at the same time, through Mary's presence in the indigenous *Arokkiya Mada* at Velanganni, to a culturally syncretic, distinctive mode of Indianness. Velanganni's *Mada Kulam* (1.6.1) and Vadiyakkadu's *Aruḷ Arai* allow worshippers to enter the mythic domain. In the form of Velanganni's holy water, prints and photographs, statues and blessed oil, *Mada* can be carried home to sanctify a million family shrines. At Vadiyakkadu, as *Amma*, the Virgin is perceived as reaffirming the maternal interest she first offered India by her appearances at Velanganni. *Mada* may be visited in person and spoken with by inquirers through her intimately accessible manifestation in Maryamma. Her holy child, *Aiya*, will be seen to mature and to realize his divine purpose in the believer's own lifetime. Our Lady of Vadiyakkadu and

Velanganni is simultaneously the protective Mother of all and the special favourer, for the present, of a select few.

7.1 Sacred Personae and Private Motives

I have shown how the enlivening symbols of the *Amma* cult take their origins from Tamil Marianism, especially as enhanced and celebrated at Velanganni Shrine, and how Maryamma's public persona is tied to *Velanganni Mada's* own. The five-century-old Marian presence in Tamil Nadu represents an infusion of Christian symbolism into a Hindu milieu, into a meaningful world, common to Hindus and Christians alike.

Fluidity in the expression of the persona of *Amma* at Vadiyakkadu is a key modality in the construction of the sacred within her cult. What *Amma* meant at the onset of her apparitions to the Hindu, Santi, in 1985 differs radically from what *Amma* signified at the time of my study - a focus for resistance to institutional authority within the Catholic Church. Her transition from laundress, to supernatural surgeon, to resurrection directress is a radical one expressive of equally radical shifts in pragmatic purpose, which in turn require corresponding shifts in apologetic representation. The identity of her protégée, Maryamma, has followed a similar course. Its complexity has grown with each influx of more sophisticated patrons, and with each of *Amma's* revelations to incorporate them.

Personal and collective self-images in the *Amma* cult have always been predicated on events framed as tangible "facts", events often confirmed by credulous witnesses, and reductive of the processes by which they came about. To whose needs do these facts and shifts in representation respond? As the interests of the cult's clientele have shifted, the epistemological premises for what constitutes a new sets of facts have required confirmation by cycles of more sophisticated witnesses. Their tastes have been expressed in new styles of devotion.

Many private motives are at work in the definition of the *Amma* cult and of *Amma's* identity. Fr. Kulandairaj's proactive

advocacy for the *Amma* cult and his adoption of Fr. Francis' Medjugorje experiences as his own appear to be components of a personal agenda for constructing a popular public persona. Leadership in the Charismatic Renewal combined with promotion of the *Amma* cult was the perfect vehicle to prove his worthiness to the Virgin. Kulandairaj seems to relish the opportunity the *Amma* cult provides him for symbolic resistance to episcopal authority, and *Mada's* summoning him by name was the surest proof of his call to its service. Fr. Prakash is rewarded when his celebration of the sacraments is filled with love and reinvigorated after a visit to Vadiyakkadu. Balraj secures another kind of emotional reward simply from his abhorrence of Maryamma for causing him to be torn between his fervent desire to believe in her and his certain knowledge that she was faking her "miracles". Maryamma's repertoire of symbolic resources has proven to be flexible enough to address the multiple personal agendas and meanings served by the cult, all the emergent responses and external exigencies, with the exception of the suspicion and hostility of the Church.

In labelling Maryamma's and others' accounts of the *Amma* cult as flexible narratives, I have had to keep the following processes constantly in mind while tracing the cult's evolution:

- 1) how *Amma* has changed as events unfold in the stories,
- 2) how the character of the stories' claims have varied through time and from source to source,
- 3) how events have been introduced to justify certain needs and to validate particular purposes and intentions,
- 4) how the narratives have been kept open, and what has been lost in the process.

Marcus and Fischer observe that "Intellectually,... the problem of the moment... is... one... of exploring innovative ways of describing at a microscopic level the process of change itself.... a jeweler's eye view of the world" (Marcus and Fischer 1986: 15). I have attempted such a close inspection of a thaumaturgical and narrative tradition in this study, demonstrating how personal

perceptions and motivations have shaped public, symbolic events which would not have occurred without them.

Maryamma has always pressed the limits in enacting her identity. Each of her actions asks, "How much more might be claimed for this situation? How much more credibility can be extracted from it?" If Maryamma has fitted the construction of her sacred identity to any model, it appears simply to have been a stochastic one - developed through practice, trial and error. *Amma's* enactments to secure the allegiance, for example, of Mr. Thomas, Josephine's husband (3.7.3.2), and Francis Regis' family (4.1.3) appear to have been trials which worked, while trying to convince Christians in Tanjavur (3.6.1) of her breast surgery miracle was a gambit which failed.

There appear to be no transparently unambiguous models for Maryamma's Marian personification in the cultural context of Hindu Tamil Nadu and it is uncertain whether Maryamma could have been influenced by the Sinhalese Sri Lankan models that Stirrat describes. In the *Amma* cult, *Amma* is spoken of as "coming", just as the Hindu goddess "comes" on her human vehicle. Ann Gold defines Hindu spirit possession as "any complete but temporary domination of a person's body, and the blotting [out] of that person's consciousness, by a distinct alien power of known or unknown origin" (Gold 1988: 35 note 1). This displacement of personal consciousness and memory is taken as evidence of a genuine possession. Maryamma's condition when encountering *Amma* resembles, but does not immitate this Hindu model in its entirety, for she always seems to know what has transpired during *Amma's* visits.

The symbolic strategies Maryamma has used for positioning herself in a society which minimizes the value of women - unless they are, like goddesses, sacred women - have produced for her an identity which affirms her personal value and denies the stigma of being a third, unwanted, daughter. However, even such a modest, minimal affirmation would not have been possible without her

appeal to sacral authority and the approbation of a host of advocates and supporters. It is Maryamma's ability to draw simultaneously from both Hindu and Christian sources, and to draw successfully from the popular and the sophisticated levels of both traditions, which makes the highly cathected dramaturgy of her holiness so ambivalently intriguing. The personal circumstances of poverty and gender expectations in which Maryamma began her life, combined with her personal resourcefulness, have produced symbols which are readily adopted by both Catholics and Hindus, since these symbols speak simultaneously to Tamil Hindu notions of *apotheosis* (0.4 [re Kannagi]; MacPhail 1988) and to Catholic desires for the tangible presence of *Mada* in their *kovi*ls (1.4; Chapter 1 note 11; 4.6.4).

Maryamma has used every available strategy to establish her authority and mystically embody the sacred in herself - affliction, vision, materialization, healing, seclusion, and a "dark night" of separation from the source of sacred power. From this weakened condition Maryamma was awakened, with her shift of place, to a renewed vision which enabled a host of new and ever more imaginative miracles (cf. Eade and Sallnow 1991: 16-24). A sense of the unprecedented runs through everything she does.

Maryamma must stand at the very center of her world of meaning. Pushed repeatedly to a place at the margin of her family's world, to the point of death itself, Maryamma is now determined to be central to her world, and to be fully in charge of things.

7.2 The Construction of Maryamma's Holiness

The construction of holiness is not without its costs. Localizing the sacred in a person facilitates public response by personalizing the sacred, giving it a human face, and making it more intimate and approachable. At the same time personalization interferes with allegiance to institutions and complicates response to abstract theological principles. At Velanganni the human face of Mary, her motherly nurturing intimacy, must be

imagined behind and through the distant and regal bearing of the stiff icon of *Arokkiya Mada*, holding a dour-faced child. At Vadiyakkadu, one proclaimed as *Mada's* daughter, through whose human face worshippers may more easily imagine *Mada's* virtues shining, possesses a living child, claimed to be *Mada's* own.

In this section, I discuss the ways in which the sacred personhood of Maryamma has been initiated, constructed, challenged, reconstructed, and dramatized. In the section which follows it, I examine how Maryamma's sacredness has been revalued - reduced, reinterpreted, enlarged and subverted.

I found several aspects of the cult surrounding Maryamma at Vadiyakkadu to be especially intriguing. First were the transitions she made, according to the official discourse, from a possession-afflicted child, to a teenager favoured by visions and able to bless others, to an ascetic, reclusive purveyor of healing and nocturnal visions. Disobedience, though not her own, disrupted her sacred career. Powerless and suffering through separation from *Amma*, the source of life who had first found and helped her, Maryamma was once again favoured through afflictions. The most dramatic of these was loss of both her legs, and Maryamma was able to reassert her sacral authority through even more profound, and more public, miracles. These are remarkable transitions by any standard for one to pass through between the ages of twelve and twenty.

Secondly, I was intrigued by the varied types of people who patronize Maryamma, and by the manner in which her clientele has changed through the phases of her career. Her clients range from rustic peasants to foreign-employed Non-Resident Indians (N.R.I.'s), from nuns of local religious congregations to Jesuits and seminary professors. Maryamma's legitimacy within each of these constituencies amplifies and enhances her credibility for each of the others.

Many of Maryamma's followers are Hindus and Christians who are familiar with the apparitional history and truth-claims of

Velanganni Shrine. We may even think of the *Amma* cult, and others like it, accreting on the margins of Velanganni's symbol system, as a mode of domestication and personalization of the cosmopolitan shrine. Velanganni pilgrims and devotees have been sensitized to the notions of the Mother as primal and universal, but also local, specially gracing this district by her holy presence and demanding a worshipful response. *Mada's* local precedence over Hindu deities like *Mariyamman*, at least in this geographical region, the Kaveri delta coast, is uncontested. Worshippers also understand the authority of the Catholic priesthood as marginal to enactments of popular religion while recognizing that it is important for conferring legitimacy on them, as we saw in the organization of the Velanganni shrine and roadside Hindu *Arokkiya Amman* shrines in Madras (cf. 1.6.7.2; 4.6.4).

The more discerning among adherents at Vadiyakkadu or Velanganni may even have seen what I have observed: that the construction of institutional holiness at Velanganni is not so forthright and natural as casual visitors might think. The shrine's official guidebook betrays an anachronistic attitude which implies that its doubtful apparitional history is much more established and elaborate than it is, and that the particular style of devotion practiced there has great antiquity. Those who approach the *Amma* cult via Velanganni expect from Maryamma the same range of help in the healing of physical and social ills, personal advice and blessings as they have learned to expect from *Arokkiya Mada*.

The third feature of the *Amma* cult that intrigued me was the persona of *Aiya*, what is believed about him and the secrecy and protection which surround him. *Aiya's* identity is an open secret, but details and predictions about his future and purpose are privy only to the inner circle of the *Amma* cult. The particular expressions his role will assume must wait until he has matured a little, but for now, he makes a perfect little

Balasubramanian (baby *Skanda* or *Murugan*), the most popular of the Tamil Hindus' child gods (Thani Nayagam 1970: 186; Zvelebil 1973).

7.2.1 Transitions

In the official discourse, Maryamma makes some remarkable transitions, a "correct" understanding of which is essential for construing the meaning of the events of her life. At the time of my investigation, Maryamma's life was understood as alternately cursed and blessed, graced and frustrated. Her life seems not to have been conceived as a unitary development, and its major events appear as gratuitous and unexpected. There were hints from such people as Josephine that the times of crisis like the leg affliction and, *perhaps* the initial affliction, were inflicted by an evil power intent upon preventing the greatness which was in store for Maryamma which followed from being chosen by *Anma* from the beginning.

However, I received no impression from those with whom I spoke that being chosen by *Anma* should be understood as a special series of moments, represented by signal events through which a deeper understanding of the meaning of her "chosenness" is being gradually revealed. This lack of a teleic, sequential perspective surprised me. I suggest that the *Anma* cult is so focussed on the present and the future that this kind of cognitive connectedness with the past is treated as unimportant. Miraculous events of the past are simply "digested" and eclipsed, and their meaning reconstrued as present needs may require. *Anma's* breast surgery, a partial success at best, for example, has been eclipsed by Moses' resurrection. Furthermore, I expect that the meaning of all the miracles will be subject to revision and reinterpretation when the significance of *Aiya* comes to be more fully understood, that is when *Anma* communicates current esoteric discourse about him to the public.

In speaking with me, Maryamma was reticent about her early childhood and refused to entertain any questions about it. When asked, she brushed the matter aside with a word and a gesture,

"Leave that out," drawing her hand horizontally, palm downward, then cutting down sharply and vertically with the hand at the end of the stroke (3.1.3). For Maryamma, her story began with the earliest afflictions. Does she not remember the time before she was twelve? Is there something from that period she wants to hide which might compromise the interpretation of later developments? Is she, as I see it, intentionally and pragmatically building a living hagiography which need include only specific elements of "fact", editing out all life-events which fail to contribute to, or which might detract from, the most useful version of her story?

Maryamma began life in a poor peasant family as Santi, its unwanted third daughter. She was given away to be raised by relatives. Returned to her natal family at the age of twelve, Maryamma found in it a younger brother she may have seen as an usurper, the "*tambi*" whom she ought to have been, and a continuing absence of emotional affirmation for herself in the circle of the family. According to my own, relative outsider's interpretation of Maryamma's history, the condition of continuing rejection at least enabled, and at most produced, the hallucinatory and hysterical effects which her family identified as possession by a malign spirit. The family members attempted every solution in their repertoire to rid her of this affliction, but without success. Santi appealed to the Virgin Mary, who is regarded as a final but sure resort for sufferers, and was blessed with a healing vision which affirmed and empowered her personally, first within her family, then among a wider public. Santi made an early, abortive attempt to obtain priestly recognition as a seer at Velanganni Shrine, but the Virgin compensated her for this failure when she celebrated an extraordinary baptismal Mass in which *Amma* gave Santi her own name. Maryamma's seclusion, as an anchorite in obedience to the Virgin's instructions, was to have inaugurated a new shrine centered on her family's house. This plan, too, was aborted by her family's impatience when they expelled the apparitional Mary from their home as a nuisance, and Maryamma lost

all the power and authority she had constructed through these thaumaturgical strategies.

A series of bodily afflictions and miraculous resolutions followed which renewed and reasserted the special relationship between Maryamma and the Virgin, culminating in a resurrection, a premillennial Second Coming of Christ, and spreading fame for Maryamma as a religious specialist. Throughout Maryamma's career, somatic symbols of bodily suffering have been generated to address social and psychological problems, and these symbols have attracted her clientele (cf. Danforth 1989: 5). Spontaneous and unhesitating affirmation of the verity of these symbols is the basic criterion for membership in the *Amma* cult (4.2.3-4).

For the purposes of discussion and analysis, I have periodized Maryamma's personal history as it pertains to the cult under the following categories:

1) Santi's "Childhood" from her birth on 14 December, 1970, through early experiences of rejection and being left to live with relatives, to age twelve and a half in June, 1983, about six months after she had been taken back by her natural parents in the course of their relocation from Kattur to Orattur.

2) The "Affliction Period" from June, 1983, when her afflictions began, to 9 February, 1985, when at the age of fourteen Santi pleaded to a picture of *Irudaya Mada* for release from her suffering by either death or the Virgin's saving grace.

3) The "Apparition Period", Santi's fifteenth and sixteenth years, from 10 February, 1985, until 1 November, 1987, when she was forcibly removed from seclusion and *Amma's* visits ceased. This is the time of innocent wonders and healings with the adoption of *Arokkiya Mada* imagery, leading up to the empowering and legitimating miracle of Santi's baptism as Mary. Terminating this period is a "Seclusion Sub-period" from 19 May to 1 November, 1987. During this period *Amma's* promise of a shrine and grotto at Orattur is frustrated.

4) The "Period of Absence" from 1 November, 1987, to 9 February, 1989, during which *Amma* refused to come when Mary called. *Amma's* sulky, silent petulance evokes the character of a Hindu village goddess who brings affliction to her people when her worship has been neglected (1.2.4; Whitehead 1921; Beck 1981; Bayly 1989: 133). Maryamma's legs became paralyzed and members of the Chosen Families arranged to separate her from Orattur and from her birth family. Very near the end of this period, *Amma* returned to Maryamma, but in voice only, summoning her as and when *Amma* herself chose.

5) The "Surgical-Visitation Period", 10 February, 1989, when the shrine room at Vadiyakkadu superceded that at Orattur with the sign of *Amma's* shining footprint, until 13 November, 1990. During this period, *Amma* surgically removed Maryamma's breast tumour, then replaced her lost legs, allowing her to walk again. *Amma* showed a vision of dead Irene Thomas and promised to give new life, first to her, and then to Rajendiran and Pirabavati's dead baby.

6) The "Resurrection-Consolidation Period", beginning with the giving of *Aiya* on 13 November, 1990. This period saw the resurrection of Moses, the introduction to the cult of large numbers of Catholic nuns and a few priests, and the systematic incorporation of Roman Catholic liturgy into cult worship.

These divisions are organized around phases in Maryamma's mutual relations with *Amma* and other periodizations might be equally useful. Devotees, however, think in terms of major miraculous events which puncture the flow of normalcy, rather than in periods. For me, however, what happens interstitially between dramatic events is far more interesting. If Maryamma's life is seen in terms only of such events, and her public identity comes to be constructed from them alone, the processes underlying the organization and presentation of events are liable to be elided. Each of these periods begins with a turning point in Maryamma's life which is, in retrospect, clearly the start of some new phase

of development. Each begins with a crisis in which she must find new ways of managing her personal experience and external circumstances, which include managing the varying outlooks and responses of all the people around her.

As for any history, the import of the most recent turning points are the most difficult to discern, as their fruits remain obscure. Thus when I mark the beginning of the last period as 13 November, 1990, in the middle of an otherwise undistinguished, "empty" period between July, 1990, when Moses' remains were reinterred at Vadiyakkadu, and May, 1991, when *Amma* directed the daily watering of his grave, I am anticipating *Aiya's* future centrality to the meaning of the *Amma* cult.

Throughout this study, I have been calling the adherents of Maryamma a "cult" without problematizing the term. I have done this for convenience, as the "*Amma* cult" is not easily categorized as a sect or cult by definitive scholarly criteria. Stark and Bainbridge (1978) distinguish between a sect, which results from a schism within a religious tradition, and a cult, which is a new phenomenon, either through innovation or importation, in relation to pre-existing religious traditions in a given social context. Stark and Bainbridge then modify the meaning of sect to include a schismatic group with reference also to a cult. The burden of their argument is to show how a theory of sect formation can not serve as a theory of cult formation (Stark and Bainbridge 1978: 126).

While interested primarily in "cult movements" as the outcome of cult formation processes, they identify two preliminary kinds of cults-in-the-making, what I would call proto-cults, an understanding of which may help in interpreting the phases of Maryamma's sacred career. "Audience cults" require virtually no organization. Membership is merely a consumer activity, and consumption need not be a face-to-face experience. Audience cults purvey mythology, which represents and explains reality as it seems to be. "Client cults" are similar to therapist-patient

relations, using thaumaturgical ideology and methods. While organization may be highly developed among client cult principals, the clientele tends to show little evidence of it. More integrated "cult movements" are true religions, offering solutions to questions of ultimate meaning and prescribing a course of action for its realization. Such movements tend to become acknowledged as legitimate "religions" as they receive community recognition through time.

At the outset, Santi's visions and auditions of *Amma*, and later her speech heard by others, fit Stark and Bainbridge's audience cult category. A client cult quickly developed with a core of extended family deeply involved in responding to, and reorganizing their life around, *Amma's* imperatives. A peripheral clientele was attracted almost immediately, requiring reorganization of space and time in the Orattur household, and provision of hospitality as guests would remain several days at a time. Some of these guests, like Josephine, became *Amma's* "Chosen" and were drawn into the inner circle. The institution of "Chosen Families", to distinguish cult principals from more distanced clientele, marks the transition from audience to client cult. For most of the *Amma* cult's history, it has remained an informal, highly personalized client cult with *Amma's* great surgical miracles and the vision of Irene Thomas typifying this model. The transition to cult movement is marked by the advent of *Aiya* in November, 1990. In rapid succession thereafter, *Amma* reiterated her earlier promise in January, 1991 to resurrect Moses; the local Roman Catholic Bishop began problematizing the cult by the first quarter of 1991; Moses was resurrected in June; and Catholic liturgy was introduced in July. There was general knowledge of the cult among Diocesan priests, one of whom informed me sketchily about it, by December, 1991. In March, 1992, the Bishop visited Maryamma at her home, in person. This visit was followed by a prohibition against priests serving the cult in a liturgical role.

7.2.1.1 Holiness Initiated and Constructed

The transition from troubled to specially favoured child is marked by the most charming and gracious of the many stories describing Santi's early relationship with *Amma* - her first appearance at the clothesline on 10 February, 1985. Steeped in guilelessness, it tells of *Amma's* first anonymous, silent favour to Santi. In hindsight, *Amma's* first contact with Santi was the earlier gift of rose petals and peppercorns at Papa Kovil, but then her identity had been uncertain. Despite the tangible and efficacious gifts Santi found under her pillow, *Amma's* washing and hanging of the clothes was a waking apparition, qualitatively different from dream. Other blessings flooded upon this first apparition, culminating in Santi's 25 March, 1987 baptism as "Mary".

Indeed, *Amma* proved to be useful in very many ways. She gave treats of food, came when called, combed her "daughter" Santi's hair, abjured elder family members to do Santi's will, and generally conferred much helpful notoriety on her. This privileged attention empowered Santi in the ways which Obeyesekere (1981) describes in his work on the uses of possession by holy women in Sri Lanka (0.1). Thus it was that because *Amma* likes fish, Santi would assuredly be given fish to eat. While this transition from malign to benign supernatural influence was a relief to the family, *Amma's* presence remained ambivalent.

This novel situation confronted a family of uncertain, vulnerable and impoverished Hindus not merely with an affliction to be exorcised, but with their own daughter acting as an oracle and mediator for *Amma*, who seemed to be a repository of divine knowledge, insight, and blessings. This model presupposes the continuity, rather than the polarization, of the sacred, in which the good sacred displaces the evil sacred. This style of hierophany is more complex than the predominantly polarized style of sacred presence in European hierophanies (Stirrat 1981, 1992: 86). The family members had to ask themselves who this new

familiar in the household actually was, what she might mean to them, and whether she was unqualifiedly beneficent.

Why did all efforts to exorcise the possessing demon fail? Why did *Amma* appear to Santi so gracefully? Both questions may be resolved in a single answer. Viewing Maryamma's experience in the context of the tradition of Tamil Hindu possession, it makes sense to suggest that *Amma* had been possessing Santi all along, and it took only Santi's heart-rending appeal to *Amma*, and worshipful acknowledgement of her, to have *Amma* release the possession symptoms which she herself had inflicted on Santi. Why had the whip-weals and snake-bites Santi suffered healed so quickly? In this view, these afflictions represent *Amma*'s motherly attention to Santi long before the first appearance at the clothesline. The end and purpose of the affliction was Santi's recognition of the one who desired worship from her. Carroll describes Mary as "a powerful goddess, who demands worship and who is willing to use her immense power over nature to coerce human beings into honoring her" (Carroll 1992: 68). His model of Mary, derived from 16th century Italian peasant sources in the records of the Inquisition, is not a model with which Santi was likely to have been directly familiar.¹

Amma, as an ambivalent stranger and frequent visitor in their Orattur home, must have been nearly as onerous and disruptive of normal family life as had the presence of Santi's "demonic" attendant. The family's ambivalence shows through their present commitment to believe in Maryamma's genuineness, for even today Baskaran is still able to express his doubts in the case of the missing watch which *Amma* "returned" to Santi at Velanganni (3.4.2). They were a Hindu family, after all, and had their own gods to honour who might take offense at this newcomer, *Amma*. Two weeks after the first apparition, *Amma* began to speak aloud to all the family. Outsiders heard and flocked to their house, obliging Santi's parents to provide hospitality. Rajendiran, a relative, underwrote the cash expenses, but still there was a continuing

disturbance of family life. The requirements of Santi's new "possession" by *Amma* were more compelling, in the long run, than the earlier obligation to seek exorcism to rid her of a persistent demonic affliction. Santi's benign condition carried within it values which, at first, induced her family not to attempt to dispense with it - a holy presence, admiring neighbours, unaccustomed status among relatives, visitors from afar, and, at least for some time, the proceeds of a collection box.

At Velanganni, claims for *Mada* are the products of myth and folklore, supported by a generations-old community of believers, and since the 1970's by an enhanced cinematic version of its miraculous and apparitional tradition. Maryamma's claims concerning *Amma* and her miracles come straight from the seer herself, and so have in their immediacy a basis for credibility which Velanganni's claims lack.

7.2.1.2 Holiness Challenged

Maryamma's transition from seer to recluse was a public embarrassment to the family. She had attracted a clientele and become too prominent to ignore. Local people speculated that either she was being imprisoned against her will, or had gotten pregnant and was being kept away from public view.

Seeking help or a spiritual gift, a *varam*, from a saint or local deity through trials of psychic and physical endurance - *tapas*, *sadhana* - is a universal Indian technique of spiritual discipline (Ojha 1981; Stirrat 1992: 190). In the framework of such a model, affliction may be conceived as the potential grace of the god who is yet to become known through a desired epiphany (Erndl 1990: 176; 1993: 133-4). Taking this logic one step further, the deity, rather than the aspirant, may be in control during the time of trial preceding the epiphany. According to this model, the distress experienced by the aspirant results from resistance to the deity, still unknown, who desires a breakthrough as much as does the aspirant. Surrender to the power of the deity is often unwilling initially. This resistance is natural, for the

symptoms of malign possession and benign possession are not distinguishable at first (Gold 1988: 35). Virtuosity as a medium develops only gradually and in mutuality with a community which validates the divine-human relationship (Erndl 1993: 134).

Here, the context of Santi's visions - *Anma's* identity and ways - were shaped by the associations in Santi's own imagination constructed out of her early experience of Marian symbols. Without the support of her family and neighbours, and their validation of *Anma's* early miracles, Santi's perceptions would have been seen as a continuation, in a new form, of her affliction.

In seclusion Maryamma, following *Anma's* instructions, remained unseen inside the family shrine room while continuing to receive visits from *Anma* and to hold audiences with visitors. Santi did not make the exact purpose of her seclusion, the establishment of an *alayam* and holy spring, known until afterward. Under social pressure and *Anma's* demands for the family to finance certain costly telegraphic communications and ceremonies - the purpose of which also was not forthcoming - for the completion of Mary's seclusion, it is not surprising that the patience of the family dissipated.

When family members finally broke Mary's seclusion and removed her from the shrine room, *Anma* would [could?] come no more. Mary was abandoned, separated from her source of power, and thrown back into her former isolation and suffering. This time, however, the family's impatience and suspicion made them less sympathetic. They made no further attempts to seek healing for Santi. Her healing through *Anma* had, after all, become nearly as troublesome as her affliction had been. Mary did not revert to the earlier state of communion with *Anma*, but instead gradually lost the power in her legs, and finally was able only to crawl.

7.2.1.3 Holiness Reconstructed

It is at this point that the "Chosen" people outside Maryamma's immediate family took charge of her. First she was evacuated to her cousin Yobu's house in Vadiyakkadu and later,

when the family objected and attempted to keep her in Orattur against her will, she was removed to her uncle Sivasubramanian's home in Tanjavur. With Mary away from the inhibiting influence of her natal family, *Amma* resumed her visits. Her signs of wonder took on three quite new forms - bodily miracles, visions involving other humans, and vitalization of inanimate religious objects such as crucifixes, pictures, and statues.

Maryamma's transitions follow a pattern of advance, resistance, retrenchment, and new advance. Each phase required a different style of social relations, rationale, and type of clientele. Maryamma converts a personal rite of passage into a collective one, turning private symbols into public ones. Recent circumstances have required multi-level strategies and an ability to respond to a sophisticated clientele which had not been contemplated in the early stages. What is so remarkable is Maryamma's skill in reaggregating or reincorporating herself in her society as a holy person (Van Gennep 1960), by means of this clientele, on her own terms, without obvious coaching or assistance from anyone else. Initially, I had doubts that Maryamma had the sophistication to handle these processes alone and I sought for someone who might be assisting, or even "managing" the development of her sacred career.

The affliction period had involved only Santi's immediate family. Its rationale was that of demon-possession in village Hinduism, and exorcism was attempted in which Santi became the client of religious specialists called *mandiravadis*. The initial apparition period was based on the personal power of *Amma* to dispel the evil which others could not, and to confer blessings, heralded by her anonymous earlier visit in a dream which connects these two phases. The very intimacy of *Amma*'s relationship with Santi seems meant to balance the exceptionally horrid nature of her affliction. Santi's family, *Amma* herself, and a widening group of relatives - the "Chosen Families" - along with some of the local people, constructed a small community of believers which

sought to come to terms emotionally and intellectually with *Anma's* advent among them. At the same time, they were prepared to accept any advantage which might accrue to them from her presence.

Psychological tensions resulting from poor family relationships may readily be seen as the impetus for Santi's original affliction and apparition phenomena, if *Anma* is regarded as if she were a Hindu goddess. The sequence of attributed inadequacy and rejection resulting in possession is typical of such phenomena, especially among disempowered women, all over India (Whitehead 1921: 116-7; Elmore 1925: 59-79; Yocum 1982: 316-20; Meyer 1986: 15-6; cf. Obeyesekere 1981). It is at this point that interpretive frames of reference diverge and remain separated for the rest of Maryamma's story. A psychoanalytic interpretation will presume to explain all the details in this narrative, and so will the interpretations of believers who see only divine activity.

Both views, however, are dismissive of the complex, syncretic cultural currents which underlie Tamil Marianism. Appreciation is both more difficult and more rewarding if we respect the seer's early experiences and attempt to see their congruence with later, and increasingly public, experiences. Is it possible to draw a line between this discrete, private, psychological world, and the social world of the *Anma* cult, with all its demands and expectations? *Anma's* originally intimate exchanges with Santi later became the instrument for issuing instructions to perform expedient public, almost political, acts. As more people, and more sophisticated people, became involved, *Anma's* instructions became more explicit, her works of wonder ever more amazing and efficacious. It is a long, long way from laundry to resurrection.

There was nothing special about Kattur, Orattur, Vadiyakkadu for miracles to occur in such obscure places, being neither the sites of churches or other holy places before these events, nor were they even places sanctified by wayfaring pilgrims

who might stop there to rest. What they share with Velanganni is its own preapparitional obscurity. They are all, however, within the seventy-five kilometer radius, or a half-day's journey, forming the immediate hinterland of *Arokkiya Mada's* shrine at Velanganni. She is the prevalent holy figure in this region and, both logically and intuitively, its natural protectress.

The common understanding of Maryamma's seclusion period is based on *Amma's* promise to create a grotto, at its completion, in the house at Orattur, with a spring of healing water as at Lourdes (Maryamma 1993.06.14). There is another version of the purpose of Mary's *tapas*, about which I have some doubts, considering the reliability of its advocate, Fr. Kulandairaj. Upon the successful completion of her seclusion Maryamma was to have emerged, like a butterfly from its chrysalis, as the living incarnation and worldly presence of *Amma* (Kulandairaj 1992.04.09), an epiphany which would at last "ground" her in the world.² Kulandairaj accepted this interpretation with alacrity when I suggested it to him in the course of an interview.

It is tempting to suggest that one might consent to be afflicted when the solution to a problem is imminent. Carroll reports that just such a process is operative in Italy in the affliction called "tarantismo". This disorder seems to proliferate in anticipation of the approaching Feast of San Paulo, since only San Paulo can provide release from the sickness (6.5.1; Carroll 1992: 79). Similarly, the final phase of Maryamma's initial affliction, just as she acknowledged *Amma*, and her seclusion with all its public uncertainties, but private certainties, may be thought of as such "timely" afflictions. In each case, Maryamma seems to have reached an emotional preparedness for the onset of an existential resolution and her anticipations for the end of her seclusion appear to have been modeled on *Amma's* resolution of her initial affliction. Her private knowledge of the promise of a healing spring exemplifies the argument I have proposed with regard to the dialectical enhancement of Maryamma's sacred

reputation. Fr. Kulandairaj's affirmation concerning Maryamma's transformation into the embodiment of *Anma* herself reinforces this interpretation. The emotional intensity of the seclusion period was magnified for visitors by the fact that, as previously could only hear but not see *Anma*, they likewise could now only hear, but not see, Maryamma. Enquirers from more distant places, such as A. Balraj of Tanjavur, visited her at Orattur, were intrigued, and came to believe.

Josephine Thomas and members of other Chosen Families came into prominence as motivators in the hopeless period of *Anma*'s absence. Josephine, Yobu, and Viraiyan set the stage for *Anma*'s - in both senses - graceful return, and prepared the way for the dramatic surgical-visitation phase to begin. Miraculous modifications to objects and the creation of religious relics began to assume importance.

7.2.1.4 Holiness Dramatized

Maryamma herself became a kind of living relic through similar modifications to her body through her breast surgery and leg affliction. She established a firm reputation through such wonders over a wider geographical area, separating herself from her birth family and the locality of Orattur where the first apparitions and miracles took place. In this phase, Maryamma lived in her Vadiyakkadu relatives' home at the cost of her parents' explicit disapproval, but with the support and approval of her larger public. This resulted in the marginalization of her immediate family, and her closest relatives. Just as St. Joseph protected the Virgin Mary and her child in the Biblical account, so Yobu became a protector to Maryamma and *Aiya*. Yobu demonstrated this forcefully when Maryamma's parents came to return her from Vadiyakkadu to Orattur. Yobu assaulted her father, Panjabakesan, when *Anma* instructed him to do whatever was "necessary". Pressing this protective relationship a little farther, we find in the world of village goddesses a male body-guard god (Erndl 1989),

from which model Yobu's role may receive interpretation on the Hindu side.

The *kal piracchanai*, or leg affliction, may be seen as Maryamma's punishment for the premature ending of her seclusion, even though she was not directly responsible for it (Chapter 6 note 2). We may see Maryamma as guilty by association, as a member of the erring family. As its most vulnerable and sensitive member, it is she who is also the victim. A radically different perspective on her situation as innocent of the offense against *Anma* might be that her suffering was unearned, and so was "Christic" suffering. With the Catholicization of the *Anma* cult, it will be interesting to see whether such an interpretation emerges in future cult apologetics. However, the vindictive *Anma* as source of Maryamma's suffering accords better with the overall pattern of the model of the Hindu goddess.

A vision of *Anma* as having a vindictive side (cf. Carroll 1992: 67-75) conforms better to south Asian notions of the continuity, the differentness but not otherness of the sacred, in both good and evil modes (Stirrat 1992: 86, 94), than it does to Western Christian models of evil as radically different from good, and the human world as radically "other" than the sacred (Stirrat 1981: 188; Erndl 1993: 153-8; 6.2.4). Carroll provides evidence that this notion of the sacred as combining nurture and danger is also not alien to European local religion (Carroll 1992: 87). *Anma* herself injects a strong dose of ambivalence concerning the genuineness of hierophanies into her cult's ideology and expectations when she says in Santi's "baptismal" sermon that the Antichrist will appear as Jesus and as herself. Yet, I have no record of anyone expressing suspicions along this line in such well-accepted stories as that in which *Anma* appears as Angelamma, leaving a shining footprint in the *Arul Arai*, or in which she and her son are impersonated by *Anma* and *Andavar* (4.1.4).

In the most recent phase as a cult movement, the public of the *Anma* cult has expanded to include residents of Tamil Nadu's

metropolitan city, Madras, the neighbouring states of Kerala and Andhra Pradesh, cosmopolitan Bombay, and the distant Persian Gulf. Most importantly for the future of the movement, Catholic religious sisters and priests have become interested, have begun promoting Maryamma, and begun to serve her by officiating in a Eucharistic cult at Vadiyakkadu, and wherever Maryamma visits. Maryamma's attractiveness to such new constituencies results from her careful articulation of the story of her early afflictive experiences in the absence of anyone who might challenge her authority, and the innocence which characterizes *Amma's* first intimate apparitions and personal favours. The miracles of clothes-washing, gifts of milk and fruit, rose petals and peppercorns, even her catechism and baptism testify to a definitively unproblematic, ingenuous innocence. Dedicated priests, especially, like to dwell on this feature of guilelessness which they ascribe to Maryamma's rustic origin. Wily peasants respond approvingly to the effectiveness with which Maryamma holds the favour and attention of these priests, who represent the powers and resources of complex and influential institutions beyond the horizons of their own rustic existence. This is a powerful dialectic of mutual reinforcement.

Maryamma's seclusion, while reinforcing her innocence, translated her into the role of anchorite - one who has a definite spiritual goal or purpose which she means to accomplish. Her *tapas* initiates and provides a cultural logic for the intentional character of all subsequent miracles. The visions of smoky projections of *Arokkiya Mada* (5.2.4), intense coloured lights (5.2.5), and taped conversations in various languages (5.2.6) experienced by Balraj were events that took place during the seclusion which foreshadow a careful management of impressions and events, through scripting and special effects, to bring about calculated results. The breast surgery, Irene's *katchi*, the leg affliction, the resurrection miracle, and the advent of *Aiya*, the

"gift child", may all be regarded as virtuoso presentations of the same intentionality.

Moses' resurrection, in the exoteric view, was at the time of my enquiry the keystone for the construction of Maryamma's sacred reputation. It is a convincing miracle because, unlike the most impressive of those which preceded it, the resurrection involves not just an effect upon Maryamma herself but a miracle which made a crucially important difference in the lives of others. It is the miracle which brought Maryamma forcefully to the attention of the Bishop of Tanjavur, and which reached the press in France.

There is something too self-conscious in the keeping of relics of *Anma's* miracles as evidence to be presented one day for Vatican recognition of these phenomena. This presentation will be made only when *Anma* gives permission, as Kennedy states in his letter to Fr. Rene Laurentin (Kennedy 1993). Prearrangement of video coverage for the predicted miracle of Moses' resurrection bears the same self-conscious character. In the descriptions of the process of opening Moses' grave, Maryamma is sometimes inside, sometimes outside the house. She is constantly moving about, and no one could say just where she is most of the time. *Anma's* voice of instruction to the diggers and witnesses sometimes comes from deep inside the house, sometimes from the window just above the grave. When Maryamma enters the grave and partially dislodges the broken board in the top of the coffin, the child's cry is heard coming inches away from her own mouth. To the skeptic, this is no surprise. In the believer's testimony, this is potentially another wonder - that the child awakened from death in Maryamma's proximity, perhaps at the touch of her breath. Even the video lights do not penetrate the box so the child is not yet visible at this point.

Shortly thereafter, everyone is called inside, leaving the opened coffin outside, presumably with the living child alone inside it. All the windows and doors are closed until *Anma* gives

instructions to return to the grave, complete the removal of the little earth which remained, and lift the child from the coffin. Since Maryamma, who alone was supposed to first touch the child, is overcome with emotion and unable to lift him out of the grave as commanded by *Amma*, a stretcher is then brought to remove the whole coffin. The command that the stretcher be built had, oddly enough been given the previous day, implying that its use had been anticipated. This, of course, only amplifies *Amma's* prescience, but suggests to a more skeptical observer that Maryamma's sudden shock and incapacity, which amplify the wonder of the miracle - even Maryamma herself was overcome by it - had been scripted (4.5.3).

Moses' physical resemblance to his father, Rajendiran, is evidence either of a genuine miracle or of a much deeper deceit. The child may well never have died at birth at all, but been born alive, hidden by his parents, or from his mother by his father, until the resurrection "miracle" could be arranged nearly a year later. Moses appears at disinterment about the size and age he ought to have been had he been born at the natural time.

Aiya bears such a remarkable physical and temperamental similarity to Maryamma that it is difficult not to believe that he is her natural child. In order to appear about two years of age in the resurrection video, he would have to have been born sometime around June or July, 1989, give or take about two months. It is possible, accordingly, for him to have been born in April, 1989, at the time of the breast surgery in Tanjavur as Sebastian Raj and Kulandaishami, Balraj's friend, allege (5.2.11). This time of birth would place his conception in about July, 1988, nearing the end of Maryamma's stay in Orattur, still unable to walk, but before Angelamma and Josephine contrived to remove her to Vadiyakkadu. An August, 1989, birth date would place his conception at just the time Maryamma first moved to Yobu's home (5.3). In either case, when her parents attempted to keep Maryamma at Orattur when she attended Baskaran's marriage, they may have been dealing with an

unmarried daughter who was already from four to eight months into a pregnancy. Local rumours that her seclusion resulted from a pregnancy do not correspond with the dating of *Aiya's* birth, but this is no proof that she was not pregnant at the time. If I permit myself to regard Maryamma's miracles as entirely contrived, her emergence from seclusion with a newborn child as the embodiment in the world of *Amma*, whose feet would have touched the earth at last (3.4.1), would not merely have enhanced, but radically transfigured Maryamma's sacred reputation.

This sacred reputation began modestly by establishing her initial credibility, passed through a widening circle of local people, and was confirmed through miracles at Velanganni Shrine. Although she did not receive the definitive recognition by its authorities which she probably desired, dressed in unambiguously Marian garments of blue and white, with a large picture of *Arokkiya Mada* in the household shrine as backdrop, Maryamma's healings and blessings brought a further widening of her circle of clients. After rejection by her family, Maryamma's personal sacred discourse entered new levels of sophistication and defence against the challenge and opposition of the Church. Recent participation by "rogue" priests, awareness of the cult in seminaries, and the attention it has attracted from at least two foreigners, have induced modes of response which the early experiences of Maryamma could never have anticipated, and which have somehow to be woven into Maryamma's public persona.

The teleic pattern of cult ideology becomes evident as a response to these influences. There is a definite purpose in every one of *Amma's* actions. Maryamma likes to present herself as innocently charming and rustic, but this impression has become more difficult to maintain now that Maryamma and Yobu have their own car, which belies the desired impression of simplicity in an economy where a car represents substantial wealth. Maryamma is gracious and hospitable to guests and gives deference to Yobu. She shows no signs of arrogance and if something expected cannot be

done, she gladly offers apologies. When Heather and I arrived unexpectedly, she exhibited impatience with Yobu when he found it a chore to get us a fresh green coconut immediately. My impression was that despite her public courtesy, Maryamma will manipulate Yobu and others to do exactly what she wants. While Maryamma preaches against anger and the harbouring of grudges (5.1.2.1), she will not herself forgive her own parents, insisting that they first approach her and apologize. This resistance runs counter to the normative expectations. In Tamil culture, one does not demand an apology from one's elders. While Kanakambujam and the rest of the family seek a reconciliation, Panjabakesan, perhaps, does not (cf. 3.4.9; 5.2.10).

Maryamma is emerging, in the view developed here, less as a prodigy than as a young woman who is prepared to take a lot of long and narrow chances. One miracle, however, for which I cannot do more than suggest an unlikely material explanation, is the *kal piracchanai*, the removal of Maryamma's legs, and their replacement. It remains the one major public miracle of Maryamma's post-Orattur career for which I cannot produce an alternative, rational explanation. The visual evidence for it is the photographs kept in the *Arul Arai* which depict Maryamma writhing in agony on the room's solid concrete floor. There is no possibility that her calves might have been concealed in, say, holes in the floor. If her calves had been bent back under her thighs, and a piece of meat attached to each knee (as a bone is clearly visible protruding from one leg), she might conceivably have been made to appear as she does in the photos. Maryamma appears, then and now, however, to be too plump to conceal her calves entirely beneath her thighs. Unable to walk after her seclusion, Maryamma's lower limbs may have atrophied and she may have become accustomed to sitting on her calves for long periods. Her head and shoulders do appear in the photos to be raised on a cushion. There is, again pressing the skeptical view, the possibility that her paralysis was nothing but a blind, a

diversion, for Mr. and Mrs. Balraj tell how she was roaming about, at the age of seventeen during the very period when she is supposed not to have been ambulatory, in Nidamangalam and Tanjavur, becoming involved with various men, including a poet and a male relative, who fought over her (5.2.9).

I leave this, the first of *Amma* cult mysteries to which I was exposed, to be resolved in the reader's own imagination. The true believer's response will be, of course, that if one piece of evidence is so recalcitrant, should the other miracles not be treated more generously, without suspicion of scripting and staging?

7.2.2 Holiness Revalued

Antistructural, liminal religious people like Maryamma are presumed and reputed to possess the sympathy, personal knowledge, and experience needed to mediate the day to day struggles of ordinary people in the practical world, with all its ambivalences. Structural mediators such as the priests at Velanganni, by contrast, are in "their own world", a world more and more of their own making both symbolically and pragmatically in which every material effort is taken to reduce the world's challenge. People seeking solace and emotional support at Velanganni do not expect it to come from the shrine's priests or through other personal contacts. They expect intimate, unmediated contact with *Arokkiya Mada* herself, and although people believe that she responds to their prayers, she is only indirectly seen and heard these days. In comparison, the same *Amma* came to the people of Orattur because of their simplicity and their suffering. Although these first beneficiaries eventually rejected *Amma* because of their own weaknesses and failings, her grace continues to be present at Vadiyakkadu, and wherever Maryamma may go, including to Velanganni. It seems only natural for people to desire that great cosmic events take place close to home, according them the special grace of participating directly and intimately in eternal matters. I believe this to be the major appeal of Maryamma, *Aiya*, and the

Anma cult. People like Fr. Kulandairaj are convinced, and will do virtually anything to prove that they have been specially chosen to participate in events of millennial significance.

What motivates the varied types of people who patronize the small shrine at Vadiyakkadu? What brings this odd combination of people together, around Maryamma, knitting them wherever they come from, and to wherever they return, into one body of devotees? What are they after? What is in it for them? Each person seems impelled to Vadiyakkadu by an inner momentum, and together they form an unpredictable impulse that is almost frightening, for no one controls it - neither Maryamma nor the coterie of Chosen Families around her. At Vadiyakkadu, we witness the same intersubjective drama as Erndl has described in her account of possession states (6.1.1; Erndl 1993: 133-4).

Membership in the cult creates tensions between its Catholic devotees and their own Church through conflict between the Marian hierophany and its teaching authority. There are also tensions between long-time devotees and newcomer priests (and the people they attract), between recognized and emergent Christologies, and between the common loyalty of cult members to each other as believers on one hand, and their outside religious affiliations as Catholic or Hindu on the other.

Key to understanding contests for meaning in the *Anma* cult today are the personal and vocational concerns of its Catholic nuns and priests, stimulated by second-hand news and personal experience of the Medjugorje apparitions, who have come to influence interpretations of miraculous phenomena, even perhaps to steer the course of miraculous events. The presence and sacramental activities of these religious specialists serve both to legitimate and to enhance the credibility and reputation of Maryamma as the cult's seer and religious leader. At the same time, these specialists contest the authority and interpretations of lay people, both Catholics and Hindus, who have been involved, even as "Chosen Families", from the beginning. Moreover, since the

priests perform their sacramental functions at the *Amma* cult's shrine in defiance of an explicit prohibition by the local Catholic Bishop, they challenge hierarchical authority within their own Church, disobeying human and institutional authority in the name of the Virgin Mary. Thus, these priests assert the authority of the Church by which they were ordained *within* this Marian cult, while asserting the moral authority of the cult *over* the Church.

Each devotee gives a personal meaning to the events at Vadiyakkadu. At the shallowest level are the idle curious from the locality who take an interest in the odd happenings at their neighbour's house, and in the even odder strangers converging on it. There are those who come out of some deeper interest in the supramundane and are able to hang out at the periphery, never quite comprehending the events and truth-claims surrounding Maryamma in any depth, for they never really question any of them, and are content with the fragments of sensationalism dispensed by people more or less in the know.

There are some who come at the cost of great difficulty and personal discomfort to Vadiyakkadu in search of healing - coming out of the darkness, as it were, and returning into it again, with no way of knowing if their need has, indeed, been met. Absence of response and follow-up poses problems of ambiguity. If the ill come once only, have they been healed or not? Is non-complaint a sign of satisfaction, of indifference, or of just one more failure to find a solution? Do the transient visitors find some comfort in their contact with sanctity? Do they experience sanctity at all? What do fluctuating numbers of visitors mean? Such transient visitors can have, at best, only a thin slice of understanding of the particulars of this hierophany, but will at a distance yet influence others' understandings of it. One might conceivably return home relatively untouched by the meanings and apologetics as construed by cult intimates and yet somehow have

contributed during the brief contact to the evolution of the meaning of events for those at the core of the cult.

Then there are those like Parameswary, Sri Lankan refugee and school teacher, fully convinced of the sacredness of the events at Vadiyakkadu, though all she had for evidence were the eyewitness accounts of miracles - accounts which, to a seriously questioning mind, stimulate more doubts than answers. Such people are sometimes able to successfully approach the core group of cult members. Their rite of passage into full membership in the core appears to be based on an explicit acknowledgement by *Amma* or to derive from witnessing and announcing some new, unambiguous hierophany such as a bleeding statue, which can be construed as a divine favour initiating the witness to the group (Sr. Jacinta, 4.4.3; Mrs. Lobo 1993.06.17; Parameswary 1993.09.02).

The voice of *Amma* seems, sometimes, to take some cues from her devotees - even, perhaps, from foreign visitors. I wonder, for instance, how much the questions put to Kamatchiyamma by Heather and myself about Maryamma's marital status (Kamatchiyamma 1993.06.19), may have influenced *Amma's* instruction, received on 10 July, 1993, just two weeks after we had left Vadiyakkadu, that Maryamma and Yobu should be married - that is "properly" - in the Church, and their subsequent formal engagement just ten days later? According to a letter received from Parameswary, the Lord Jesus [as *Aiya?*] hosted the meal and four priests were in attendance (Parameswary 1993.09.02).

7.2.2.1 Holiness Reduced

Most *Amma* cult seekers hope to integrate their interpretations of the hierophanies at Vadiyakkadu into the comfortable, commonplace furniture of their everyday lives. This process of interpretation situates the meaning of their lives in a structured dependence on the taken-for-granted personal attention of *Amma* to the needs of cult members, and on the tangible presence of God in *Aiya*, the core of the new messianic secret. This desire for meaning requires an unambiguous account of Maryamma's

miraculous life, that is, a canon. Maryamma has, accordingly, done her best to eliminate from enquiry any part of her life, and the people who represent it, which preceded her first affliction at the age of twelve. Her age at the time of *Amma's* first apparition, fourteen, is projected back into the past by three years to permit the official account to make her just eleven at the time. Only Maryamma has the personal authority to convey a definitive or "canonical" account. The inadequacy of the account provided by members of the cult's core group for all but the most credulous, when I collected it in 1992-93, explains why my introduction to Maryamma's story had to be a composite one.

7.2.2.2 Holiness Reinterpreted

Maryamma claims privileges attributable to the exceptional identity which she and her adherents have confirmed in her, and exemptions from many of the usual consequences of what would normally be classified as antisocial behaviour for such a young woman in her culture.

There are tensions between Maryamma's questionable marital relations with Yobu, and her even more questionable parenthood of *Aiya*, and her proper place as a holy woman. These tensions were well expressed by Chandrasegaran: "Why, if she is consecrated to God, should she go and get married?" ^(3.7.7.3) Maryamma seems to be able to break all the rules and still remain credible. Balraj, though outraged at her behaviour still admits that *Aiya* is *Amma's* own child, implying reluctantly that she must be somehow at work in Maryamma. In July, 1993 Maryamma was at least engaged to Yobu, and they have probably since become married.

The distinctiveness of Maryamma began as a modest, simple appeal to the sacred to affirm her existentially, to remove the stigma of being a third, unwanted, daughter. It is therefore quite remarkable, and a measure of how well she has constructed her sacred identity, that Maryamma now has extensive powers of discretion and seems able to bypass so many of the normative social rules. She has rejected her parents, removed herself from

the control of relatives, cohabited unmarried with a man, and had a child while still unmarried. All this she does without in the least compromising her holiness. Maryamma advises males and elders, including priests, on major decisions. She is privileged at every Mass to be the first to receive communion. She owes each exemption from the usual social consequences, and each privilege, to this exceptional identity which her adherents have confirmed in her.

7.2.2.3 Holiness Enlarged

Several factors have amplified Maryamma's holiness, not least of which is the gift of the holy child, *Aiya*, whose presence in her home makes it unique among reported Christian-derived Indian holy places. Maryamma has been able to tap the ubiquity of the Hindu feminine divine milieu and blend it successfully with the universal, cosmological, Catholic symbolism of the Virgin Mary. Much of this work was, of course, already done for her by Velanganni Shrine which she has been able to use as a power centre. Taken annually on pilgrimage to Velanganni as a child by her foster parents, she attempted early in her sacred career, but failed, to make it a recognized locus, or *ksetra*, for her visions (3.4.2). At several subsequent points in her career, Maryamma went to Velanganni herself, as, when convalescing after the *kal piracchanai*, she first attempted to walk. While Maryamma does not speak now of going to Velanganni herself, she encourages her supporters and guests to go there. It is good soil for the cultivation of future believers.

Soteriological dimensions of the cult's evolving meaning emerged at about the mid-point of the cult's career, to date. After her own crisis with the *Irudaya Mada* picture, Maryamma's first occasion for concern with death was when her friend Irene died. She herself was brought close to death by the leg affliction. Moses' resurrection was the definitive expression of *Anma's* mediation between life and death, and the "giving" of *Aiya* was her promise of greater miracles to come, and wider stages on

which to enact them. Thus, millennial concerns entered the *Amma* cult's self-understanding as late as 1990.

7.2.2.3 Holiness Subverted

No leading actor in a well-crafted drama likes to be upstaged. Josephine, a trusted spokesperson for the *Amma* cult, reveals a living "alternative" apparitional tradition within the cult itself in her accounts of *Amma's* instructions to Angelamma that Maryamma be removed from Orattur (2.6.1; 4.1.5.3), and *Amma's* impersonation of Angelamma when Maryamma was able neither to see nor to hear *Amma* herself (2.6.2; 4.1.4). As I was barred from meeting Angelamma, I must ask, with only this constraint as supporting testimony, whether some tension or conflict exists between Angelamma's loyalty to Maryamma and some thaumaturgical talents of Angelamma's own, that are not in Maryamma's interest to be made public. I felt that Josephine was somehow "on probation", entrusted to provide the cult's official, canonical account to me as a test of faith. The bounds of this unidimensional account were burst when I was able to talk with her in the freedom of her own home, where the multiform tales of Angelamma were told. The range of special events which Josephine describes, such as bleeding images and Fr. Francis' struggles with demons, in combination with her emotional effusiveness, may diverge too much from the hagiography Maryamma wishes to propagate, and may be reasons why Josephine has been marginalized (3.7.3.2; 5.1.3.4).

Josephine deplores the role that priests and nuns have recently come to play in the *Amma* cult, and expresses her apprehensions: "Now all these new people have come, and I don't know... I don't like some of them... I don't like the way they talk..." (5.1). These newcomers may represent a greater danger than Josephine could ever be to Maryamma's management of both her own and *Amma's* identities. Until the arrival of Catholic religious specialists, it was possible for Maryamma to interpret *Amma's* intentions in her own way. In the presence of priests, who bring with them a theological education and a vision quite different

from Maryamma's own, anything that *Amma* says may take on radically new and, even for Maryamma, unexpected meanings. It thus becomes difficult for *Amma* to manage what her audience may think she might be saying, and no one except *Amma* can shape these devotees with the voice of authority. *Amma's* voice is not heard so often as it once was, and the acumen of the new listeners may be a part of the reason. It is possible that the psychological forces which initiated and sustained the apparitions and auditions are being compromised by the influence, interpretation, and agendas of these priests.

Now that priests may hear *Amma's* voice and draw their own meanings from it, the looseness and ambiguity which represented Maryamma's freedom of expression is constrained. Obeyesekere cautions that conventionalization of personal symbols, when their articulation and meaning are taken over by "learned virtuosos", reduces their capacity for leverage and maneuverability, traits which derive from a fruitful ambiguity (Obeyesekere 1981: 51). Today, although still central to the *Amma* cult's functioning, Maryamma appears to be "leading from behind" as she struggles to keep up with the increasing sophistication of her adherents. (2.9).

7.2.3 A Prospectus for *Aiya* and the *Amma* Cult

A millenarian approach to Christian history has now been systematized within the esoteric discourse of the cult which speaks of four ages, of God the Father, God the Son, God the Spirit, and the "Age of Mary" which is the current Age (Josephine 1993.06.17; Pope 1985: 173). The advent of this age arrived with the definition of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception in 1854 (O'Carroll 1982: 179-82) by the Roman Catholic Church. Its initial phase culminated in the proclamation of the "Queenship of Mary" (O'Carroll 1982: 301-2) in the "Marian Year", 1953-54, which provided Catholics with a new focus for their piety (Laurentin 1967: 28). *Amma* cult faithful understand the Age of Mary to have invited Christ's "Second Coming",³ believed now to be a tangible reality in the person of *Aiya*. The encounter of lay and clerical

Catholic ideas with those of village Hinduism which the *Amma* cult represents has produced a novel model for understanding the nature, and contemporary actuality, of the eschaton.

Maryamma's charismatic leadership and use of Marian symbols has produced religious solidarity even as it has generated controversy. Maryamma still prefers to minimize differences between herself and the Church, and the stress of divided loyalties with which some of her clerical devotees must cope. Her overt, verbal critique of the Church has softened, even as her representations of *Amma* and *Aiya* come to pose profounder challenges to its authority. The *Amma* cult may, owing solely to its internal dynamics, be expected to enhance its claims, positioning itself to compete with Velanganni. The Catholic character of Velanganni Shrine is guarded by a dominant institution, the Catholic Diocese, and its religious specialists.

Lack of clear boundaries between the Christianity of Velanganni Shrine, from which its symbols have been borrowed, and the *Amma* cult, have made the advent of *Aiya* ambivalent - a nuisance to the institutional Church and a focus of ardent millennial hope for believers. *Aiya*'s status remains indefinite as he has not yet been widely publicised. This matter raises once again the indeterminate question of whether Maryamma is being managed by anyone, is acting entirely from her own self-developed skills and resources, or is being guided, as she claims, by *Amma*. What resources will be called upon to groom *Aiya* to fulfil the potential ascribed to him? What will he, as the focal point of the cult's millennial vision, actually do?

The answers to these questions must rest on an answer to the prior question of management. If Maryamma alone is the moving intelligence behind the *Amma* cult, with Yobu and Rajendiran acting at most as advisors, the same expedient, *ad hoc*, but very effective management of hybrid symbols will continue. If Rajendiran and Yobu, key members of the inner circle, are coaching and controlling Maryamma, their influence will continue with *Aiya*

and the same pattern will ensue. If Fr. Kulandairaj, other priests, and Sr. Jacinta have assumed control, they will already have become instrumental in *Aiya's* formation. This model will result in a more conventionally Christian persona for *Aiya*, and a distinctively Christian identity for the cult, as he grows. If *Anma* is in charge, rather than some human manager, a divine freedom or *lila* is in play, and no prediction of this order will be valid.

As *Aiya's* career unfolds, it may be expected to produce a heightened hostility within the institutional Church through a more public and determined rejection of *Anma* cult claims concerning him. Such a development would be relished by the clerical members of the *Anma* cult who resent the hierarchy's monopoly concerning which institutions the sacraments are meant to support. For these clerics such a development would involve a clear drawing of the lines of conflict between "truth" and the prevailing liberal ecclesial expediency. At some time, then, the heterodoxy inherent in *Aiya's* identity will produce an overt conflict and *Aiya* will become the center of a much wider-ranging conflict between popular and official religion. This conflict will focus on the ownership of symbols.

When the the *Anma* cult's contemporary Marian apparitions and engaging personal ways do finally confront the shrine's thoroughly institutionalized charisma, the Church will be obliged to find ways either to control and absorb the cult, or to put an end to it. The heterodoxy of *Anma* cult claims, especially with regard to *Aiya* make absorption unlikely, while the cult's non-Christian base of support effectively sets it outside the full authority of the Church. Hence, neither course of action has prospects of an easy success.

An individual Catholic's loyalty to the cult will be tested in the tension between its claims to tangible, unmediated contact with the divine plan of salvation through officially interdicted sacraments at Vadiyakkadu, and a sense of allegiance

to the institutional Church. Experience of the *Amma* cult has infused some Catholics' private experience of the Church's sacraments with a deeper life and meaning. The question for Indian Marian devotees may resolve itself into this: Why seek the Blessed Virgin in a glass-encased statue in the Basilica at Velanganni if she can be contacted through a living woman in a nearby rustic village? This logic, I expect, will in time become more cogent to a growing minority of Indian Marian devotees.

Hindu patrons of the cult who pattern their aspirations after Maryamma and hope for acceptance, like Josephine's baptised Hindu neighbour (5.1.1), into the fellowship of the *kiristuva sabai* ["Christian assembly"] will sense, and fail to understand, their rejection by the Catholic Church. Further modification of the identities of *Amma*, Maryamma and *Aiya* may be required to resolve these tensions and a Hindu interpretation may be found to work better in sustaining long-term loyalty to their persons than a Christian interpretation.

7.3 Contributions of This Study

In this study, I set out to show how sacred personhood is represented through narratives which are edited in response to emergent contingencies in a stochastic manner to construct and enhance a desired sacred reputation. I have shown how Maryamma's and *Amma*'s identities have been strategically reconfigured, in an environment in which their meanings are publically contested. I have shown also how efforts to prevent the perceived integrity of *Amma* and Maryamma from being undermined have been only partly successful. The reductive pattern on which Maryamma's public persona is constructed obscures the integral process by which this persona is crafted, while the reified product, the identity which she desires, has demonstrably succeeded by becoming the basis for a polyvocal symbol upon which religious claims have been effectively predicated (cf. Fernandez 1974: 120). For cult devotees, systematic attention to the fictive static products rather than to the process of fabrication itself affirms the

epistemological premises which underly the events produced, which facts, in turn, uphold Maryamma's sacred self. The partial view suffices as an "economy of truth" (Clifford 1986: 7).

My study has examined the sacred other, as *Amma*, the sacred self, as Maryamma, and the sacred community, as the *Amma* cult. I have also focussed on the ways in which the meanings of the public symbols of Tamil Marianism have been borrowed and altered, and on how symbolic boundaries have come through design and accident to demarcate the *Amma* cult from both its Catholic and Hindu contexts. I have examined Maryamma's childhood psychic dissonance and how she appealed to a community of support through a personal resolution of this distress. I have followed the process whereby the symbols she adopted to bring about this personal integration became public, and I have shown how the community which formed about Maryamma both failed and supported her through a career of eight years, from 1985 to 1993. The articulation of Maryamma's and other participants' personal desires and needs through the *Amma* cult's symbols and other personal and social resources for the construction of a tacitly meaningful world are seen as the sources of the cult's early formation and adaptation, as well as the roots of its conflict with the Catholic Church. I have examined how these Catholic symbols have been altered, especially as they pertain to the roles of *Amma* and *Aiya*, and how a millenarian perspective has emerged.

Amma cult participants experience psychic dissonance as they attempt to straddle two credibilities between doubt and belief, and two allegiances, between cult and Church. Ambivalences - ideological, interpersonal, and thaumaturgical - are seen to pervade the cult. My sources' sacral reality bears the same fictive features - systematic, contestable exclusions and silencing of incongruent voices - as does my ethnographic reconstruction and interpretation of the cult which necessarily has involved reduction and editing.

It is not, as I noted in the introduction, my role to create some definitive interpretation of *Amma* cult meanings when such a meaning eludes my sources themselves. Discord pervades the *Amma* cult and a plurality of voices has, I hope, avoided the dangers of hegemony. While I make no claims to pure understanding, I have, however, explored the structural correspondences between possession states in Hindu village goddess religion and Maryamma's unusual relationship with *Amma*, for which no obvious local model exists. Syncretic Hindu-Christian symbolic patterns are strongest at this nexus. I have proposed, in accord with the patterns of affliction and relief of the local goddess tradition, that the logical source of Maryamma's afflictions was *Amma* herself, a conclusion which for cult devotees would not be amenable to the construction of the sacred identities of either *Amma* or Maryamma.

I had hoped, since beginning to write, as I searched through my field materials, to find my own "Balinese cockfight" (Geertz 1973), some paradigmatic event which could provide the transformational key to understanding in some common and essential way what my sources are communicating by their multitude of voices. I was unable to find such a master key. Rather, I found that my subjects experienced just the same problems of interpretation and representation as I did. Quoting Hayden White,⁴ Marcus and Fischer refer to the problems experienced by anthropologists in representing accurate portraits of conditions and events discursively:

Any historical... work exhibits emplotment, or quest, and ideological implications.... These three elements may be at odds with one another as well as being in an unstable relation to the facts they attempt to encompass and order. From these instabilities come shifting modes of writing which also show connections with broader social currents. The struggle to reconcile conflict among these elements... poses problems of methods (Marcus and Fischer 1986: 12-13).

Such a perspective "translates the problem of historical explanation,... into the writer's problem of representation". It does more, however. Just as "strategies of emplotment" have produced my account, similar narrative strategies likewise have generated the phenomena, the information communicated to me by my

sources, which it describes.

Models of explanation, that is of reductive theorizing, necessarily ground even the most partial attempts to communicate a modicum of understanding (Erndl 1993: 132). If the ethnographer's task is to mediate between worlds of understanding rather than merely to fabricate definitive "flattenings", or *ex-plan-a-tions*, of complex, finely nuanced systems of meaning, there must be tacit acknowledgement that tropes used within the studied culture to communicate such transformations as "possession" states involve, and tropes used to communicate across the cultural boundaries between the research field and publication, utilize figurative language strategies of the same order (cf. Fernandez 1974, *passim*).

The processes by which meaning is constructed through reduction and structured exclusion in both domains, the studied as well as the studying culture, are, likewise, of the same order, as indicated by the quotation from Obeyesekere with which I opened this chapter. My sources are at least as much aware of the consequences of incorrectly interpreting events, as am I while I write. *Anma* warned in her March, 1987 sermon that the Evil One will come in *Anma's* own form. "The end is nearby. Anti-Christ will... cheat you. Coming in disguise as myself and God and will be telling 'I am Mary, I am Jesus Christ'. So you please pray.... There will be no room for Satan" (Josephine 1993.06.27). The sacral reality remains diffuse, uncertain, requiring trust while leaving faith naked and vulnerable. The hermeneutics of this sacred manifestation are not fixed. I have attempted throughout this study to show how some participants, not least of all myself, must straddle two credibilities, two ways of perceiving and interpreting events as these participants attempt to be both skeptics and believers, like Balraj, or double agents, like the priests who serve both their Church and the cult.

I set out in this study to interpret just a few of the multiple meanings of the Virgin Mary in Tamil culture. I have

demonstrated how borrowed symbols have been translated into the sacred personhood of Maryamma and how the needs and desires of her associates have provided the dynamism to produce a religious phenomenon with depth of meaning, wide appeal, and capable of flexible adaptation to a variety of circumstances. The contests for meaning manifested in the *Amma* cult by no means exhaust the range of multiple meanings, and much scope for enquiry remains. Other healing cults in India which unequivocally acknowledge the possession by *Mada* of, or her "coming" upon, their medium would make engaging studies, as would private exorcists and healers such as one Tanjavur priest whose emerging healing vocation is judged by his Bishop to be incompatible with parish work, obliging the priest to choose between his charism and his vow of obedience.

7.4 The Significance of the *Amma* Cult for Catholicism in India and Beyond

I am uncertain how the *Amma* cult will change in the future from its form during my personal contact with it from December, 1991 to July, 1993. Today, I do not know whether the *Amma* cult will decline and disappear in a few years, or whether it will emerge as a rallying point, a substantial challenge to the Church in India, and perhaps even abroad. The cult is well on its way from being a client cult to becoming a fully fledged cult movement, that is, a religion in its own right (Stark and Bainbridge 1978).

The cult will continue to develop in ways which can only be known with certainty by those in control of its esoteric discourse which situates the advent of *Aiya* in a burgeoning Age of Mary at the close of the Age of the Spirit, the age of the institutional Church, with the onset of Marian apparitions in the nineteenth century. "This whole scheme of God," says Peter, a Roman Catholic priest, "does not want interference from His previous scheme of the Catholic Church. This has to be allowed to grow without the Canon Law threatening it" (4.2.4).

The priests who have recently become involved despite their superiors' prohibition seem intent - as true believers, as leaders of the charismatic movement, as seminary instructors forming the spirituality of a new generation of priests - on using the symbolic resources of the cult to alter the Church they serve. I expect, therefore, that in the immediate future the cult will be guided to remain discretely at the margin of Tamil Catholicism for as long as possible, rather than to make a definitive break with it.

The syncretic development found in the *Amma* cult rests on two religious traditions - the local goddess and the Marian - which have coexisted in India for half a millenium. While the cult is constituted from an innovative treatment of cultural resources, it is not a result of transient contacts between symbol sets. Similar developments may be expected in other places such as Latin America, the Philippines, and former Portuguese Africa where immigrant Catholicism and indigenous religions interacted intensively during the colonial encounter. I do not expect major theological reinterpretation within the Catholic Church to result from such phenomena as the *Amma* cult, but I do expect movements like it to pose local challenges to the Church which will tend to splinter the allegiance of its members.

The Catholic Church is experiencing the beginnings of a postmodern fragmentation. New epistemologies, new social combinations and coherences from the margins of the Christian world, especially the South, are gradually undermining many rigid presuppositions of scholastic theology. Encouraging the ferment of new ideas, the Church trusts that its central principles will remain intact while their substructure of cultural differences may be radically transformed in the process of inculturation, permitting the essentials of faith to be affirmed and enlivened by non-Western, vigorous social processes (*Gaudium et spes* in Flannery 1989: 860-9).

The boundaries of Catholic identity have always been subject to modification, been vigourously defended and resisted. The Catholic Church has demonstrated remarkable durability over two millenia in European and European-derived cultures in spite of these disputes. It remains to be seen whether this durability can continue as the Church moves into a postcolonial relationship with the Others it has attracted, converted and challenged.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Chronology

Maryamma's Childhood

- 1970.12.14 Santi was born on 1970.12.14 according to her foster mother, Ramamani [R]. She was born on 1973.12.14 according to the chronologist, Josephine Thomas [J].
- 1972.12 Panjabakesan, her father, gave her to her maternal uncle, Pakkirisami, at age two - 1972.12 [R] or 1975.12 [J's logic].
- From 1978 to 1983, Santi's parents were in Kattur, but she was not living with them.
- 1982.06 She did 5th Standard in Kattur, and went to Orattur in 1982 or 1983 at age 10 to stay with her parents [R]. This happened in 1982 at age 12, according to Baskaran [B].

"Affliction Period" - 1983.06 to 1985.02.09

- 1983.06 While Santi is 12, attending the government school at Orattur, the "Affliction Period" begins [M 2]. According to [J], she is in 7th Standard. Mary says she was 12 in 1984 [M 2]. This more or less tallies with Ramamani's version.
- From mid-June, 1983 for 1½ years, Santi suffers. During this period, she visits the Papakovil Dargah. Santi dreams of receiving a rose and seven peppercorns. This gives her relief for seven days [J].
- 1983.12.14 Santi's 10/13th Birthday.
- 1984.12.14 Santi's 11/14th Birthday.
- 1985.02.09 "Cousin Raja" hangs picture of Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary in the house at Orattur [J]. Santi's mother says "Die and go away" [M 2] and Santi pleads with Mother Mary (*Amma*) for death or release.

"Apparition Period" - 1985.02.10 to 1987.11.01

- 1985.02.10 First apparition and miracle, the washing of clothes. Second apparition and miracle, giving of milk. First close-up view of *Amma* in white gown and blue veil [M 2]. Third apparition and miracle, curd [yogurt] [M 1].
- 11 Fourth miracle of the *elandapalam* [J]. Ramamani says she had bought the fruit initially [R]. Fifth miracle of the Wafting Prayer written by the Hindu *Mada* devotee [M 2].
- 12 According to [J] the Wafting Prayer miracle took place on this day. Sixth miracle of the sea bath took place this day.
- 20-25 Up to this time, only Santi heard *Amma's* voice.

Then, after 10-15 days, everyone could hear it. Santi would call her. When she came, *Anma* would always call "Tambi" (little brother) [B]. People would come, pray, ask questions, ask favours, and *Anma* would bless them. *Anma* said she was duty-bound to come to "her daughter's" call [B].

1985.03.12 Apparition at Velanganni. Miracles of the watch, [B, J] the rose, and the Rosary. [B, J, M 1, M 2]
- *Anma* said, "I appeared at Velanganni, Fatima and Lourdes." [K/R]
- "There are 101 miracles like that since then." [M 1]
- During this period, *Anma* comes whenever Santi calls, up to ten times in three hours [B].

1985.12.14 Santi's 12/15 Birthday.
1986

- Some time in 1986, a woman with heart problems came to Orattur and was cured. She left a written testimony. Her family wanted to build a church there, but Santi refused the money [J].
- Some time in 1986, an atheist came, asking Mary to call *Anma*. When she did, *Anma* came and he was convinced [J].
- Daughter of the Hotel Parisudam owner in Tanjavur was cured [B].
- Santi refused money, accepting only candles and flowers [B].
- Josephine Thomas first came around the end of 1986. Her daughter, Irene, and Santi would sing together. Irene's husband killed her (as punishment for something she wrote in a letter) [B].

1986.12.14 Santi's 13/16 Birthday.
- *Anma* gives two years of religious instruction to Santi, beginning with the first apparitions.

1987.03.25 *Anma* celebrates a "Mass" and baptises Santi as "Mary" [J]. Baskaran tapes the "Mass" [B]. There were at this time 8 to 10 "Chosen Families" [B].

"Seclusion sub-period" - 1987.05.19 to 1987.11.01

1987.05.19 Mary enters Seclusion [J]. *Anma* secretly promises to create a grotto in the house in Orattur, with a spring of healing water, at the end of the seclusion [M 2].

1987.06.23 Irene dies [J].

1987.08/09 Mary Magdalene and Santiago (St. James) and appear as Angelamma and her son. They leave a handkerchief [J].
- Length of the Seclusion is: 187 days [B]; 5 months, 21 days [M 2]; 6 months, less 10 days []; 6 months, less 19 days [M 1]; [I count 165 days - RDM].

1987.10.25 Baskaran and Mary's sister, Amarajoti, curse *Anma* for interference [J].

31 They decide to remove Mary from Seclusion, forcibly if necessary [J].

1987.11.01 Baskaran breaks down the door and removes Mary [J].
- *Anma* ceases to visit Mary, as she is not wanted by the family in Orattur [RDM]. Mary's legs gradually become weaker [J].

"Period of Absence" - 1987.11.01 to 1989.02.09

1987.12.14 Mary's 14/17 Birthday.

1988.09.26 Josephine and some Hindu children's prayers restore Mary's faith in *Amma* [J].

1988.10.14 Angelamma comes from Tanjavur to visit Josephine. A 3-D picture of Jesus bleeds [J].

- Angelamma dreams that she and Josephine should take Mary to Vadiyakkadu [J].

1988.11.29 Yobu takes Mary to Vadiyakkadu to live [J].

- Mary stays one month with Yobu, then with "another uncle", and so "one whole year passed" [M 2].

1988.12.14 Mary's 15/18 Birthday.

"Surgical/Visitation Period" - 1989.02.10 to 1990.11.12

1989.02.10 *Amma* resumes visits on the first Friday in Lent [J].

- *Amma* comes as Angelamma and leaves a radiant footprint in Vadiyakkadu. Mary is able only to crawl at this time [J].

1989.03.30 On the occasion of Baskaran's marriage, her parents do not want to permit Mary to return to Vadiyakkadu. *Amma* calls "*Tambi*" ten times and tells Mary to return there. *Amma* orders Mary's parents to summon Yobu, Josephine, Rajendiran, and Sivasubramanian. *Amma* says that Mary needs surgery on her breast and is to be taken to Sivasubramanian's home in Tanjavur [J].

1989.04.01 Mary is taken to Sivasubramanian's home [J].

06 *Amma* comes and administers a blood transfusion to Mary in preparation for surgery.

08 *Amma* performs "Breast Cancer Surgery". Josephine, Viraiyan, Sivasubramanian are present [J]. Ramamani is present [R].

10 Doctors come from the Medical College and are amazed [J].

13 Mary is taken back to Vadiyakkadu. *Amma* gives good butter to help her recover [J].

15 Mary is taken to Pabanasam, where *Amma* dresses the wounds twice [J].

- During this visit in Pabanasam, The picture of Jesus bleeds from the five wounds. Mr. Thomas, a scoffer, believes.

23 Balraj visits Pabanasam with Kulandaisami to see Mary [Ba].

24 Mary taken back to Vadiyakkadu.

1989.05.26 *Amma* gives a vision of Irene at Vadiyakkadu to 1000 witnesses [J]; to 2000 witnesses [M 2].

1989.09.25/26 2000 [M 2] people are invited for healing of Mary's legs. Miracle of the "Leg Affliction".

- Mary's new legs fester.

1989.10.15 *Amma* takes the legs for two hours (9:00 - 11:00 a.m.) [M 2]; from 9:00 p.m. to 11:00 a.m. (14 hours) [J] for *Andavar's* (Christ's) blessing. Yobu takes more photos.

- 1989.11.01 Mary goes to Velanganni where she is able to walk a little [J].
- 1989.12.14 Mary's 16/19 Birthday.
- 1990.06.04 Pirabavati (Lucia) loses male child at 7½ months of pregnancy [J 1992.08.16].
- 1990.07.04 Child's remains disinterred from Tirutturaippundi and reinterred at Vadiyakkadu, according to *Amma's* instructions [J].
- 1990.08.11 Elsamma first comes to Vadiyakkadu, but Mary is in Pattukkottai. She takes photos, which are all blank. Is it a test [E]? [I had heard of this photo problem before from [A] -RDM]
- 1990.10 Fr. Kulandairaj [pseudonym] gives a talk about Medjugorje attended by Sr. Jacinta, who tells him of *Amma's* apparitions at Vadiyakkadu [K/R].

"Resurrection/Consolidation Period" - 1990.11.13 to date

- 1990.11.13 *Aiya*, a "special child", is given to Mary by *Amma* [K/R].
- 1990.12.14 Mary's 17/20 Birthday.
- 15 Crucified head of Jesus sheds tears [J].
- When *Aiya* was about one month old, the statue of St. Joseph in a church yard bowed to him three times. Mary and some children witnessed this [K].
- 1991.01 *Amma* announces that *Andavar* would resurrect Lucia's baby [J].
- 1991.01.16 *Amma* announces at 7:15 a.m. that Gulf War will surely happen [J].
- 1991.02.01 Sr. Jacinta writes to Fr. Kulandairaj. *Amma* asks for him by name to say Mass at Vadiyakkadu [K/R].
- 1991.03 Sebastian Raj goes to Vadiyakkadu during Lent. He meets a priest (or seminarian) from Cuddapah [S].
- 1991.04.03 Fr. Kulandairaj, not wanting to come, writes to Jacinta, excusing himself [K/R].
- 1991.04 Plastic radiant crucifix sheds blood, 7:00 a.m to 12:15 noon [J].
- 1991.05.16 *Amma* asks grave to be watered each morning and evening [M 2].
- 1991.06.07 Elsa is summoned to Vadiyakkadu by *Amma* [E].
- 09 *Amma* tells to hire video crew, to keep video with Elsa and Josephine for Fr. Laurentin [J].
- 16 *Amma* tells 1) to make stretcher; 2) to call Fr. Kulandairaj to come 16 days later; 3) to tell Lucia's family to come [J].
- 17 2:30-6:30 a.m. Child resurrected, disinterred. Mary touches the child [J].
- 28 Sr. Jacinta visits Fr. Kulandairaj in Madras. Asks him for July 2 baptism. Miracle of the "free date" [K/R].
- 1991.07.01 *Amma* tells people not to compel Fr. Kulandairaj to

perform baptism.

- 02 Fr. Kulandairaj says first mass at Vadiyakkadu [J]. He saw Fr. Maria Arokiam re baptism of 20-30 people [K/R]. Kulandairaj came with Sr. Jacinta and a layman to Mandalakkottai parish house [MA].

- The resurrected child is taken on a tour of Coimbatore District and Kerala State.

- 14 *Anma* says to call the resurrected boy "Moses". Second mass celebrated by Fr. Kulandairaj at Vadiyakkadu at 10:00 a.m. Cost of celebration is Rs. 1.5 lakhs. There are 3000 guests [J]. [K/R confirms numbers.]
- 1991.09 Sr. Rosa and 15 nuns from Tirucchirappalli visit Mary at Vadiyakkadu.
- 1991.11.13 *Aiya's* 1st Birthday. *Anma* blesses all present. She offers special blessings to those who will attend Mary's Birthday next month.
- 1991.12.14 Mary's 18/21 Birthday. A special celebration is held for her 18th Birthday.
- 15 I first hear of the *kallar* girl who does miracles from Fr. A. Arockiasamy at Velanganni.
- 1991.12.30 I first visit Vadiyakkadu and meet Kamatchiyamma (*Ammacchi*) and three other women. I am shown still photos of the resurrection of Moses and Mary's leg affliction. I am disturbed about Mary's welfare.
- 1992.01.02 I interview Fr. Leo Ambrose at *Ammapettai*. He denies any knowledge.
- 03 I write letter to Fr. Kulandairaj in Madras.
- 17 I search for Fr. Kulandairaj at Dhyana Ashram, Madras.
- 20 An Indonesian Jesuit at *Aru'l Kada'l*, Madras, confirms that Mary is alive and well.
- 1992.02.15 Fr. A. Arockiasamy introduces me to Fr. A. S. Maria Arokiam, of Mandalakkottai Parish in which Vadiyakkadu is located.
- 1992.03.14 Bishop Arockiaswamy, Fr. K. S. Sebastian, and Fr. Maria Arokiam visit Vadiyakkadu. [K/R]
- 25 Fr. Maria Arokiam forbids Kulandairaj to say Mass at Vadiyakkadu. I learn of *Aiya* [A].
- 1992.03.26 I visit Vadiyakkadu for the second time. I meet Kulandairaj, Mary, Josephine, Kennedy, and others. Interview with Maryamma. I see the resurrection video.
- 1992.04.08/09 Interviews with Kulandairaj in Madras.
- 1992.06.18 At 6:00 a.m., a cry is heard from the shrine room. Blood flows for 3 to 4 minutes from a straw crucifix picture. Kulandairaj takes some of the blood on cotton swabs [L].
- 1992.08.16 Interview with Josephine, Kennedy, and Sr. Jacinta at Pabanasam, with S.P. Kuppuraj.
- 1992.11.13 *Aiya's* 2nd Birthday.
- 14 Vision from car at night of *Anma* by Kulandairaj, Fr.

- George Sebastian, and Sr. Jacinta [K, G].
- 1992.12.14 Mary's 19/22 Birthday
- 1993.05.17 Blood flows from *Anma's* statue's eyes at Vadiyakkadu Shrine [K, P].
- 1993.06.14 My third visit to Vadiyakkadu; Heather's first visit. As we arrive, someone runs for the cookhouse with *Aiya*.
- 15 In evening, we are feasted on noodles cooked by Mary.
- 16 10:15 p.m. mass. We sleep at Vadiyakkadu, I on the porch, Heather next to Maryamma. Heather demonstrates reflexology techniques to her.
- 17 Second anniversary of Moses' resurrection. 7:30 a.m. Mass - Fr. Peter [pseud.]. 10:00 mass. Birthday cake, blessing of Moses, lunch, resurrection video. We return to Mandalakkottai.
- 18 We record our experiences on dictaphone, go to Pattukkottai, not to Vadiyakkadu as expected.
- 19 We go to Vadiyakkadu to find all but Kamatciyammal and Mrs. Regina Camillus had left.
- 20 We leave for Tanjavur.
- 21 We interview N. Viraiyan in Tanjavur, the house where the breast surgery took place.
- 26 We visit Orattur, meet Mary's parents and uncle, Baskaran.
- 27 We interview Mary's uncle, Sivasubramanian, in Tanjavur. Interview Josephine Thomas at Pabanasam. Obtain photocopies of her documents.
- 1993.07.07 We interview Mrs. Ramamani Pakkirisami, Mary's foster mother, in Kattur.
- This is effectively the termination of my direct contact with the *Anma* cult and Vadiyakkadu. On September 2, Parameswary wrote to bring us up to date, and to solicit funds for a charity.]
- 10 *Anma* asks 23 people to go to Coimbatore for preparations. [P]
- 20 Engagement celebrations for Mary and Yobu. Four priests concelebrate. "Some people" invited for it. [P]
- 25 Mary, Yobu, *Aiya*, Ammacchi, Parameswary, and some others go to Francis Regis house in Madras. [P]
- 26 Mass celebrated at 8:30 p.m. [P]
- 27 9:05 a.m. blood flows from a cross (crucifix?). Paramaswary sees it and shouts for others to witness. All run up and pray. [P] In evening, Yobu, Mary, *Aiya*, Ammacchi go to Mrs. Lobo's in Bombay. [P]
- 1993.08.08 *Anma* to take Mary away for a few days. [P]
- 10 All return to Vadiyakkadu from Madras. At 8:30 Mary is also brought back. [P]
- 15 All stay at Vadiyakkadu for Feast of Assumption. Four priests concelebrate. [P]
- 1993.09.02 Mary to Coimbatore. To return by 8th [P].

- 1993.11.13 *Aiya's* 3rd Birthday.
 1993.12.14 Mary's 20/23 Birthday.
 1994.08.09 I write to Fr. Kulandairaj for any further news or predictions.
 1994.08.17 Fr. A. Arockiasamy sends me a letter indicating that Maryamma "has gone for another child, perhaps a girl - to show that God is also much interested in women". I do not know if he is joking or serious.
 1994.09.03 I visit Pattukkottai, intending first to find Parameswary and inquire about Maryamma. Parameswary has gone away to a teaching job elsewhere. Maryamma and her family, I learn, have gone to Madras for an extended period.

Key to Sources:

- [A] Dr. Alagappan - 1992.03.25 interview with a Hindu devotee, in Tanjavur.
 [B] Baskaran - 1993.06.25 interview with Maryamma's father's younger brother, in Orattur.
 [Bal] Balraj - 1993.06.21 interview with a disillusioned former devotee, in Tanjavur.
 [J] Josephine Thomas - interviews with *Amma* cult chronologist, on several occasions, in Vadiyakkadu and Pabanasam.
 [E] Elsa - 1993.06.17 interview with a prominent devotee from Coimbatore, in Vadiyakkadu.
 [G] Fr. George Sebastian - 1993.06.17 interview with a Roman Catholic priest from Kerala, in Vadiyakkadu.
 [K/R] Fr. Kulandairaj - 1992.04.08/09 interviews with a Jesuit priest, prominent devotee and ritual specialist in the *Amma* cult, Chairman of the National Service Team of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal in India, at Madras.
 [K] Fr. Kulandairaj - 1993.06.17 interview, at Vadiyakkadu.
 [L] Mrs. Margaret Lobo - 1993.06.17 interview with a homemaker from Bombay, in Vadiyakkadu.
 [M 1] Maryamma - 1992.03.26 interview with *Amma* cult principal by Richard MacPhail, at Vadiyakkadu.
 [M 2] Maryamma - 1993.06.14 interview with *Amma* cult principal by Heather MacPhail, at Vadiyakkadu.
 [MA] Fr. A.S. Maria Arokiam - 1993.06.18 interview with Roman Catholic parish priest responsible for Vadiyakkadu, at Mandalakkottai.
 [P] Parameswary - various communications with a Sri Lankan Tamil refugee schoolteacher from Pattukkottai, at Vadiyakkadu and by letter.
 [R] Ramamani - 1993.07.07 interview with Mrs. Pakkirisami, Maryamma's foster mother from ages 2 to 10 or 12, at Kattur.
 [RDM] My field notes.

[S] Sebastian Raj - 1993.06.21 interview with a Catholic layman, at Tanjavur.

Appendix 2: Identification of Characters.
Dates of Interviews

Notes:

- 1) Tamil Lexicon transcriptions of names as they are commonly spelled in English are in parentheses, eg. (*alakappan*).
- 2) Interview dates are shown in brackets, eg. [yyyy.mm.dd].
- 3) Several pseudonyms have been used for the sake of a minimal privacy - "Fr. Francis", "Sr. Jacinta", "Fr. Kulandairaj", "Fr. Peter", and "Fr. Prakash".

"Aiya" (*aiyā*)

- "Holy Child" given to Maryamma on 13 November, 1990.

Dr. M. Azhagappan (*aḷakappan*) [1993.03.25]

- Physician at Child Jesus Hospital, Tiruccirappalli; I first learned of *Aiya*'s existence through him.

"Alias" (*ēliyac*), alias "Elias". See G. Rajendiran.

Ms. Albudha Pragasam (*alpūta pirakācam*) [1993.06.21]

- Neighbour of Mrs. Rosemary Packiam in Tanjavur; participated in interview with Rosemary.

Ms. P. Amarajoti (*amaracōti*)

- Santi's *Akka*, older sister; married to a relative of Yobu; living in Vadiyakkadu for several years.

"Ammacchi" (*ammacci*). See Kamatchiyamma.

"Aṅgāḷamman"

- Hindu local goddess, by whom Balraj believes Maryamma to be possessed. Not to be confused with "Angelamma".

Angelamma ("*ēṅcalammā*")?

- *Dalit* woman in whose form *Amma* came and left a shining spot, which is usually covered with an overturned brass bowl, on the floor of the *Arul Arai* at Vadiyakkadu; a friend of Josephine Thomas; her dream inspired Josephine to find means to take Maryamma away from her family, to Vadiyakkadu, after *Amma* abandoned her following her failed seclusion; I had no opportunity to interview her and have reason to believe she was intentionally isolated from me.

Ms. Antoinette

- Young school-teacher in Tanjavur who pointed out to Balraj that Maryamma had carried milk into the room of the house she visited in Tanjavur to give an audience with *Amma* and distri-

buted it, claiming it had been given by *Anma*.

Mrs. M. Antoniyamma (*antōniyammā*) [1991.12.30]

- One of my earliest informants; met on 30 December, 1991 at Vadiyakkadu; resident of Kumbakonam; friend of Josephine Thomas.

Fr. A. Arockiasamy (*ārōkkiyacāmi*) [personal communications]

- Tanjavur Diocesan priest; editor of *Velanganni Kuraloli* magazine; my first research contact; corresponded with him from Canada since 1990.

Most Rev. Dr. P. Arokiaswamy, (*ārōkkiyacāmi*)

D.D., M.Sc., B.T. [1992.03.30]

- Archbishop-Bishop of Tanjavur; formerly Archbishop of Bangalore. Bishop responsible in the Roman Catholic Church for faith and order in the Diocese where Vadiyakkadu is located; evaluation of apparitional phenomena connected to Catholic practice and tradition are his responsibility from the Church's point of view; responsible to his peers in the Tamil Nadu Bishops' Conference and the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India.

Mr. Arokkiyadas (*ārōkkiyatāc*) [1993.06.21]

- Neighbour of Rosemary Packiam in Tanjavur; one of a group of young men who challenged Maryamma when she was staying at Viraiyan's home in Tanjavur after the "breast surgery".

Mr. M. A. Arokkiyasami (*ārōkkiyacāmi*) [personal communications]

- A *dalit* from Velanganni; my "research assistant" who initially helped me to get in touch with the *Anma* cult at Vadiyakkadu.

Mr. A. Balraj (*pālṛāc*) [1993.06.21]

- Residents of Tanjavur; husband of Guyon Balraj; was an early promotor of Maryamma and her visions; became disillusioned and stridently opposes her now.

Mr. B. Baskaran (*pācukaraṇ*) [1993.06.25]

- Alias "Francis"; resident of Orattur; paternal uncle of Maryamma; best informant about her affliction and early visionary period; he broke down the door, ending Maryamma's seclusion.

Mr. Camillas Perambaloth [1992.03.26]

- Father of Ancy Thomas; husband of Regina Camillas, of Ernakulam, Kerala.

Mr. V. Chandrasegaran (*cantiracēkaraṇ*) [1993.06.21]

- Son of N. Viraiyan of Tanjavur; younger brother of V.

Sivasubramanian.

"Elias" (*ēliyac*), alias "Alias". See G. Rajendiran.

Mrs. Elsa, Elsamma (*elcamṁā*) [1993.06.17]

- *Amma* cult devotee from Coimbatore; especially liked by *Aiya*; presented Moses' resurrection story at length for newcomers at his anniversary.

"Francis" (*pirāncic*). See B. Baskaran.

Fr. Francis, s.j. (*pirāncic*) [1993.07.12] - a pseudonym.

- Instructor at *Satya Nilayam*, the Jesuit Philosophate at Madras; Medjugorje devotee; Chairman, Catholic Charismatic Renewal in Tamil Nadu; claims Fr. Kulandairaj [pseudonym] has taken his stories and tells them in the first person, as if they had happened to himself; friend of Josephine Thomas.

Mr. Francis Regis (*pirāncic rṭcic*) [1993.06.17]

- *Amma* cult devotee from Madras; formerly resident in Singapore; affluent; takes no major decision without consulting Maryamma.

Rt. Rev. Fr. S. L. Gabriel (*kāpiriyē*) [1991.10.29-30]

- Bishop of Tiruccirappalli; parish priest at Velanganni Shrine from 1982.09.15 to 1990.12; responsible for a major part in the growth of the Shrine's pilgrim amenities; Maryamma tells how a rose given to her by *Amma* wilted in his hand, allegedly showing that his heart is impure.

Fr. George Sebastian [1993.06.16]

- A diocesan priest from Kerala; concelebrated Mass at Vadiyakkadu.

Mrs. Guyon Balraj ("*kuiyōn*") [1993.06.21]

- Wife of A. Balraj of Tanjavur; her unusual first name is of French origin.

Dr. Hanifa (*kanipa*)

- Muslim physician at Tirutturaippundi; at his hospital Moses was declared dead and was buried.

Ms. Irene (*airṭṇ*)

- Anglo-Indian headmistress of a school in Tanjavur; embarrassed Balraj when milk Maryamma distributed as a gift from *Amma* was found to have been carried into the vision room in her house by Maryamma in a handbag.

Ms. Irene Thomas (*airṭṇ tāmāc*)

- Daughter of Josephine Thomas of Pabanasam; died on 1987.

06.23, allegedly by violence at the hands of her husband; appeared mysteriously in the *Arul Arai* twice on 1989.05.26, witnessed by at least 1000 people.

Sr. Jacinta, o.s.m. (*cacintā*) - a pseudonym
[1992.08.16; 1993.06.17]

- Servite sister at Pabanasam; learned through Josephine Thomas of Maryamma; brought Fr. Kulandairaj into the cult as a sacramental specialist; transferred to Karaikal, possibly as a result of her involvement with the *Amma* cult.

"Job", alias "Yobu". See N. Sethupati Raja

Mr. V. S. John (*cāṇ*) [1993.03.26]

- Instructor in economics at Loyola College, Madras; interpreted Maryamma's story for me in our first interview on 1993.03.26.

"Johnny" (*cāṇṇi*)

- B. Baskaran's white Pomeranian; Maryamma's only regular visitor during her seclusion in the shrine room at Orattur.

Mrs. Josephine Thomas (*cōcepṭṇ*) [1992.08.16; 1993.06.17 & 27]

- Semi-official *Amma* cult historian; a nurse; introduced Sr. Jacinta to cult; mother of Kennedy; participated in removing Maryamma from Orattur and in *Amma*'s surgery to her breast; resident of Pabanasam (*papanacam*).

Mrs. Kamatchiyamma (*kāmaṭciyamā*) [1991.12.30; 1993.06.19]

- Mother of Yobu; my first contact at Vadiyakkadu; extremely suspicious of me as investigator; encouraged *Aiya* to call me "*buchandi*", demon.

Mrs. Kanakambujam Panjabakesan (*kaṇakāmpucam*) [1993.06.25]

- Santi/Maryamma's mother; Orattur.

Mr. Thomas Kennedy (*tāmas keṇṇaṭi*) [1992.08.16]

- Responsible for preserving and showing the video of Moses' resurrection; Josephine's son; Pabanasam.

Fr. Kulandairaj, s.j. (*kuḷantairāc*) - a pseudonym.

[192.03.26/1992.04.08-09/1993.06.17]

- Chairman of National Service Team, Catholic Charismatic Renewal at time of research; instructor in English literature, Loyola College, Madras; introduced to Maryamma by Sr. Jacinta; proselytizer for *Amma* cult through contacts in the Roman Catholic Church; first priest to celebrate mass at Vadiyakkadu; may, or may not, have baptised Moses.

Mr. Kulandaisami (*kuḷantaicāmi*)

- A. Balraj's friend; charismatic; went with Balraj to see Maryamma at Josephine Thomas' house Pabanasam after her breast surgery.

Dr. René Laurentin

- French Marian scholar; published an account by T. Kennedy of Moses' resurrection, with a cautious commentary, in the journal *Chrétiens Magazine*, Paris; *Amma* cult members are collecting documentary evidence which they hope they can present to the Vatican through Fr. Laurentin, after *Amma* gives her approval, to have Maryamma's apparitions recognized formally.

Mrs. Margaret Lobo [1993.06.17]

- Devotee from Bombay; her husband, Mervin, is a captain in the merchant marine.

"Lucia" (*lūciyā*). See Mrs. Pirabavati Rajendiran.

Mr. P. Madavan (*mātāvan*)

- Maryamma's younger brother, Orattur.

Fr. A. S. Maria Arokiam (*marīya ārōkkiyam*) [1993.06.18]

- Parish priest at Mandalakkottai, the boundaries of which include Vadiyakkadu; refused to baptise unknown Hindus brought to him by Fr. Kulandairaj and Sr. Jacinta; conveyed Bishop P. Arokiaswamy's prohibition against celebrating Mass at Vadiyakkadu to Fr. Kulandairaj.

Fr. M. S. Mariadoss (*mariyadāc*) [1993.06.27]

- Parish priest at Pabanasam, Kumbakonam Diocese; gave insights into character and *modus operandi* of his parishioners, Josephine Thomas and Sr. Jacinta.

"Maryamma" (*mēriyamma*). See Ms. P. Santi. (Note Tamil transliteration from English to obtain the pronunciation, "*meri*", in contrast to the previous three entries.)

"Mereena" ("*marīna*"?), alias A. Parameswary

A. Moses (*mōcac*)

- Child resurrected at Vadiyakkadu on 1990.06.17; son of G. Rajendiran and Pirabavati of Kaḷliyur.

Ms. Padma (*patmā*)

- Sri Lankan Tamil refugee resident at Pattukkottai; married V.S. John of Loyola College, Madras.

Ms. Padmamavati (*patmā mavati*)

- Kanakambujam and Pakkirisami's elder sister.

- Mr. Pakkirisami (*pakkiricāmi*)
- Santi's maternal uncle and foster father between ages 2 and 12; husband of Ramamani; officer in the Tamil Nadu agriculture department at Kattur, west of Tiruvarur, Nagappattinam District.
- Mr. S. Panjabakesan (*pañcāpakēcaṇ*) [1993.06.25]
- Santi's father; husband of Kanakambujam; elder brother of Baskaran; owner of house at Orattur where *Amma* first appeared; alleged by Balraj to have threatened Maryamma's life for bringing shame on the family by her disobedience, especially by roaming about and living with Yobu while not married.
- Ms. A. Parameswary (*paramēcuvari*)
- Alias "Mereena"; Sri Lankan Tamil refugee, Pattukkottai; a teacher; openly discussed *Aiya*'s identity with me.
- Br. Peter [Correspondence 1993.04.09]
- British Marian devotee; visited India searching for Marian apparitions; heard of five, investigated two, Srivilluputtur (1973.07.27) and Vadiyakkadu; concerned to protect Maryamma and *Aiya* from too much scrutiny; Queen of Peace Community, Walsingham, England.
- Fr. Peter (*pīṭṭar*) - a pseudonym.
- A priest of the Diocese of Nellore in Andhra Pradesh; questioned me intensively on my motives for being in Vadiyakkadu for Moses' anniversary; attempted to become our patron in the *Amma* cult; celebrated mass at Vadiyakkadu; believes he has been chosen by the Virgin Mary to be involved in her work at Vadiyakkadu.
- Mrs. Pirabavati Rajendiran (*pirapāvati*)
- Alias "Lucia"; wife of G. Rajendiran; mother of Moses.
- Ms. Piragalata (*pirakalatā*)
- Second of Maryamma's elder sisters who was married in June, 1993 to a man she did not like, threatened suicide, which caused her mother, Kanakambujam to urge us to carry a message from her to Maryamma.
- Fr. Prakash (*pirakāc*) - a pseudonym
- Instructor at Sacred Heart Seminary (Madras-Mylapore Diocese), Poonamallee, west of Madras; an old college friend of mine at Madras University before he was ordained; occasionally celebrates Mass at Vadiyakkadu.
- "Priscilla" (*piricilla*)
- Daughter of G. Rajendiran and Pirabavati.

"Rajan" (*rācaṇ*). See "Aiya".

Dr. S. Raja (*rācaṇ*) [1993.06.25]

- Instructor in sciences at St. Joseph's College, Tirucci-rappalli; devotee of *Tandai Tuviya Mariyannai Jabakulam* at Tanjavur; provided information about demonic possession among Tamil Catholics.

Mr. G. Rajendiran (*rācēntiraṇ*)

- Alias "Elias" or "Alias"; husband of Pirabavati; father of Moses (accounting for the spelling of his name as "A. Moses" rather than "R. Moses"); resident of Kuccikkadu, Kaliyur, located near Tirutturaippundi.

Mr. Sebastian P. Raj (*cepācitiyaṇ rāc*) [1993.06.21]

- Member of Cathedral Parish, Tanjavur; had been interested in news of Maryamma's breast surgery; introduced me to Mrs. Rosemary and other informants.

Mrs. Ramamani Pakkirisami (*ramāmaṇi*) [1993.07.07]

- Wife of Pakkirisami, Kattur; foster mother of Santi between ages of 2 and 12.

K. Ramesh (*rāmēc*) [1993.06.21]

- Boy from Vadiyakkadu attending school in Tanjavur; arrived while Viraiyan was being interviewed in his home, Tanjavur.

Mrs. Regina Camillas [1993.06.19]

- Mother of Ancy Thomas; husband of Camillas, Ernakulam, Kerala.

Mrs. Rosemary Packiam (*rōcmēri pākkiyam*) [1993.06.21-22]

- Had been interested as a prospective devotee when news of *Anma's* surgery on Maryamma was circulating in Tanjavur; now rather skeptical; took me to Viraiyan's house where the miracle took place; introduced me to Viraiyan.

Ms. P. Santi (*cānti*) [1992.03.26; 1993.06.14]

- Alias "Mary", "Maryamma"; seer of St. Mary and central figure of the *Anma* cult.

N. Sethupati Raja (*cētupati rācā*)

- Alias "Yobu", "Job", Vadiyakkadu; "protector" of Maryamma and Aiya; son of Kamatchiyamma; owner of house at Vadiyakkadu where Moses' grave and the *Arul Arai* are located.

V. Sivasubramanian (*civacuppīramaniyaṇ*) [1993.06.27]

- Son of N. Viraiyan, Tanjavur; head of a "Chosen Family".

Mrs. Ancy Thomas and Mr. Thomas

- Daughter and son-in-law of Camillus Perambaloth and Regina; they reside in the Persian Gulf. they invite Maryamma, Yobu, and *Aiya* to their house in Kerala whenever they visit India; donated a diesel Hindustan Motors Ambassador car to Maryamma.

Dr. Tribhuvanasundari A. (*tiripūvaṇacūntari*) [1992.03.25]

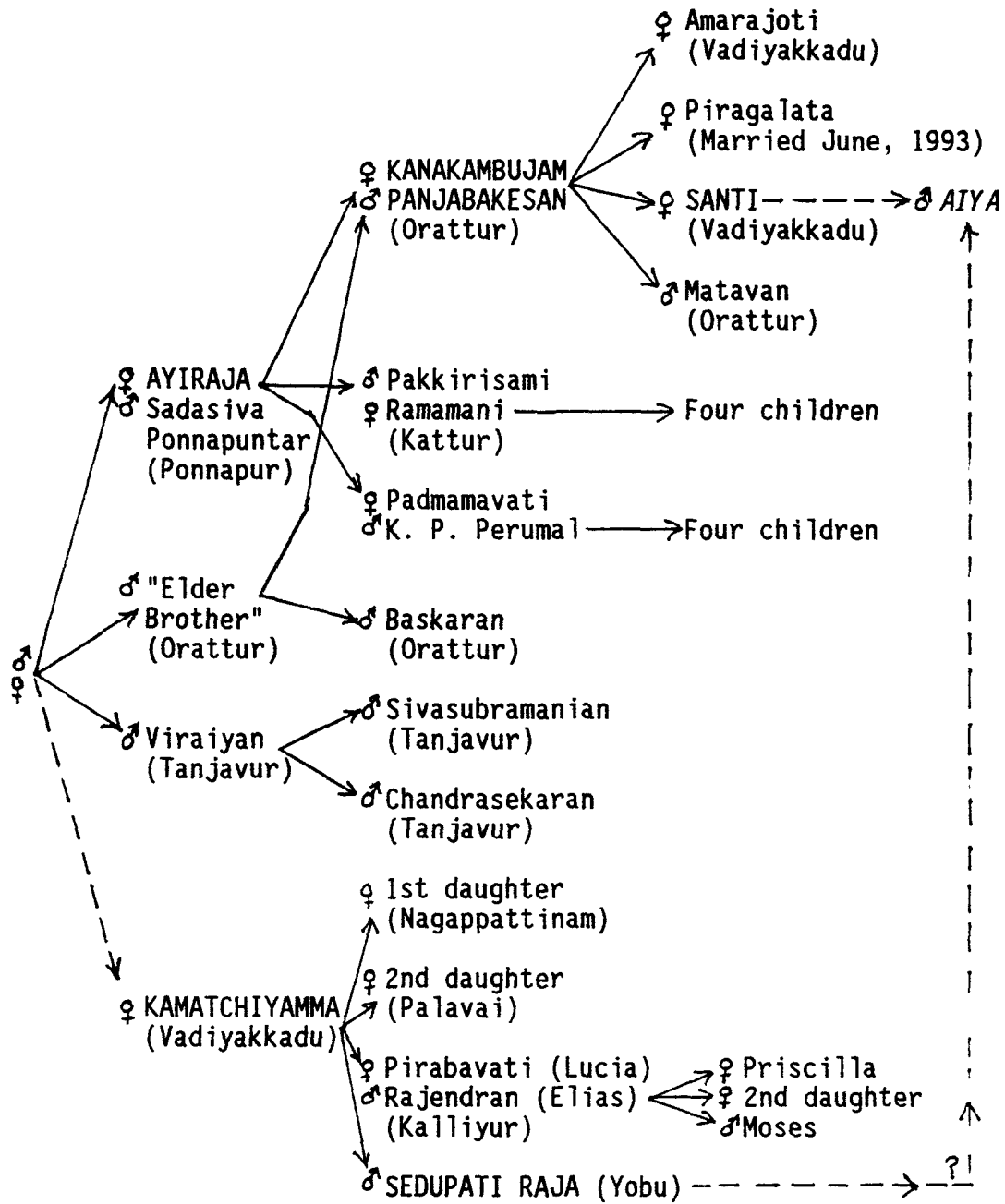
- Physician at Child Jesus Hospital, Tiruccirappalli; wife of Dr. M. Azhagappan.

N. Viraiyan (*vīraiyan*) [1993.06.21]

- Sister of Santi/Maryamma's maternal grandmother; *Amma's* breast surgery took place in his house in Tanjavur.

"Yobu" (*iyōpu*), alias "Job". See N. Sethupati Raja.

Appendix 3: Genealogy of Maryamma and Aiya



Appendix 4: Vocabulary

agambattiyar	=	<i>akampaṭṭiyar</i> - same as agamudaiyar.
agamudaiyar	=	<i>akamūṭaiyar</i> - a <i>jati</i> .
Agni	=	<i>agniḥ</i> (Sanskrit) - fire; the god of fire.
aham	=	<i>akam</i> - form of "inner" Sangam poetry.
Aiya	=	<i>aiyā</i> , <i>aiyaṇ</i> - vocative, "sir", a person of status, a <i>Smarta Brahman</i> or a Catholic Bishop, is called an " <i>aiyar</i> " (honourific); the holy child of Vadiyakkadu.
alaippidal	=	<i>alaippitaḷ</i> - invitation.
alayam	=	<i>ālayam</i> - place, abode; a holy place.
"amakalam"	=	<i>amakalam</i> - onomatopoeic expression connoting confusion.
Amma	=	<i>ammā</i> - vocative of <i>ammaḷ</i> or of <i>ammaṇ</i> ; how <i>Amma</i> cult members refer to the Virgin Mary.
Ammacchi	=	<i>ammacci</i> - "grandmother", in this case, Yobu's mother, Kamatchiyamma.
ammaḷ	=	<i>ammaḷ</i> - lady; woman; mother.
ammaṇ	=	<i>ammaṇ</i> - goddess; ambivalent term, masculine grammatically, but referentially feminine.
Andavar	=	<i>āṇṭavar</i> - Lord; Jesus Christ; a Hindu god.
Angalamman	=	<i>āṅkāḷammaṇ</i> - a ferocious village goddess.
annai	=	<i>annai</i> - vocative form, same as <i>ammā</i> .
Annamma	=	<i>annamma</i> - St. Anne, mother of the Virgin Mary.
appa	=	vocative of <i>appan</i> , father.
Arokkiya Mada	=	<i>ārōkkiya mātā</i> - Our Lady of Good Health at Velanganni and, more recently, elsewhere.
Arokkiyasami	=	<i>ārōkkiyacāmi</i> - male name - one whose lord (lady) is the lord (lady) of healing.
aruḷ	=	<i>aruḷ</i> - divine grace, or favour.
Arul Arai	=	<i>aruḷ arai</i> - "room of grace", household shrine room at Vadiyakkadu.
Arul Mary	=	<i>aruḷ mēri</i> - "gracious Mary" name used of Ms. P. Santi.
aruvamanai	=	<i>aruvamaṇai</i> - a kitchen knife and scraper.
attai	=	<i>attai</i> - aunt; mother-in-law.
avarna	=	<i>avarṇa</i> - without <i>varṇa</i> ; "casteless", and so, outside of the formal order of Hindu society.
"ayoyo"	=	<i>aiyōyō</i> - colloquial exclamation expressing surprise, dread, or wonder.
bali pitham	=	<i>baḷi pīṭham</i> (Sanskrit) - carved stone on which animal sacrifices were traditionally made.
Balraj	=	<i>pālraṇ</i> - "Paul-Raj".
bhiksuni	=	<i>bhikṣuṇī</i> ; <i>piccaikkāri</i> - holy beggar; nun.
brahmana	=	<i>brāhmaṇa</i> ; <i>pirāmaṇar</i> - Brahmin.
buchandi	=	<i>pūcāṇṭi</i> - a demon.
Chera	=	<i>cēra</i> - dynasty of Sangam rulers of the south-west coast of India and the southern portion of the Western Ghats.

chettiyar	=	<i>ceṭṭiyar</i> - usually, a merchant <i>jāti</i> .
chambu	=	<i>campu</i> - vessel; pot.
Chandrasegaran	=	<i>candraśekharaṇ</i> (Sanskrit) = <i>cantiracēkaraṇ</i> (Tamil) - a name for the god, Siva, who wears the moon, <i>candra</i> , in his hair.
Chola	=	<i>cōḷa</i> - dynasty of Sangam rulers based in the Kaveri basin; 9th to 12th century imperial rulers of southern India and Sri Lanka.
Cholamandalam	=	<i>cōḷamaṇṭalam</i> ; Coromandel - Chola "circle".
dalit	=	<i>taḷit</i> (Tamil) - "politically correct" term for panchama, harijan, untouchable.
darshanam	=	<i>darśanaṃ</i> (Sanskrit); <i>darucaṇam</i> (Tamil) - a vision, conceived of as a mutual looking by god and devotee.
- das, - doss	=	- <i>tāc</i> - nominal suffix meaning servant or slave of the being or person who precedes it.
dhvaja-stambha	=	<i>dhvajastambha</i> - same as kodimaram.
doopakar (Hindi)	=	incense.
draksha rasam	=	<i>tirakṣa racam</i> - grape juice.
dvija	=	<i>dvīja</i> (Sanskrit) - "twice-born"; a member of the three upper varnas in the Brahmanical social order.
Harijan	=	<i>harijan</i> (Hindi) - a dalit.
illai	=	<i>iḷḷai</i> - "No!".
Irudaya Mada	=	<i>irūtaya mātā</i> - the Immaculate Heart of Mary.
irumudi kettal	=	<i>irumuṭi keṭṭal</i> - "tying two knots", the ritual presentation of a bag of food for the journey, and gifts for the god, to a pilgrim setting out for the shrine of Aiyappan at Sabarimalai.
jabam	=	<i>cāpam</i> ; <i>jāpam</i> (Sanskrit) - recitation.
jabamalai	=	<i>cāpamalai</i> - rosary.
jallikkattu	=	<i>callikkattu</i> - bull-baiting.
jati	=	<i>jāti</i> (Sanskrit) = <i>cāti</i> (Tamil) - "birth"; one's status and conventional ritual-economic position ascribed by inheritance in brahmanically ordered society.
kadavul	=	<i>kaṭavūḷ</i> - god.
kal piracchanai	=	<i>kāl piracchanai</i> - literally "leg question", or issue; Maryamma's loss and replacement of her legs.
kallar	=	<i>kaḷḷar</i> - "thief"; a <i>jāti</i> .
kalyanam	=	<i>kaḷyāṇam</i> - "auspicious event"; euphemism for marriage.
Kannagi	=	<i>kaṇṇaki</i> - heroine of <i>Cilappadigaram</i> , a post-Sangam epic; goddess of chastity.
kanni	=	<i>kaṇṇi</i> - "virgin girl"; often used to refer to a local goddess; because of this association, Velanganni is often misspelled <i>vēḷāṇkaṇṇi</i> .
Kanniyakumari	=	<i>kaṇṇiyakumārī</i> - "virgin girl"; southernmost tip of continental India.
karpu	=	<i>karpu</i> - wifely chastity.

kashtam	=	<i>kaṣṭam</i> - difficulty; trouble.
kasupetti	=	<i>kācupetṭi</i> - cash box, "dum box" from "dom" (Portuguese = donation, gift).
katchi	=	<i>kāṭci</i> - a vision.
Kattur	=	<i>kāṭṭūr</i> - a village in Nagappattinam District.
kavi	=	<i>kāvi</i> - orange coloured clothing associated with renunciation and asceticism.
khadi	=	rough; hand-spun and hand-woven cotton cloth.
kodimaram	=	<i>kōṭimaram</i> ; <i>dvajastambham</i> (Sanskrit) - the flagpole in a Hindu temple on which a flag is raised to mark the period of a festival.
Kotravai	=	<i>korravai</i> - goddess of desert landscape in the Sangam literature.
kovil	=	<i>kōvil</i> - "king's house"; a temple or Catholic church; not normally a Protestant church.
koyil	=	<i>kōyil</i> - same as <i>kōvil</i> .
kshatriya	=	<i>kṣatriya</i> - second-ranking varna.
kshetra	=	<i>kṣetra</i> (Sanskrit) - a field; a place where civilized events occur.
kudirai	=	<i>kutirai</i> - horse.
kuḷam	=	<i>kuḷam</i> - clan, family.
kuḷam	=	<i>kuḷam</i> - bank, pond, edge of stream.
Kulandai Yesu	=	<i>kuḷantai yēcu</i> - Infant Jesus (of Prague).
Kulandaisami	=	<i>kuḷantaicāmi</i> - "god, the child", referring to the Infant Jesus; friend of A. Balraj, a charismatic Catholic.
kuraloli	=	<i>kuṛalōḷi</i> - "voice which calls"; <i>Vēḷāṅgaṇṇi Kuṛalōḷi</i> is the Tamil counterpart of the English shrine journal, <i>Vailankanni Calling</i> .
kurinji	=	<i>kuriñci</i> - the forest terrain in the Sangam literature.
kuttuvillakku	=	<i>kuttuvillakku</i> - a large oil-lamp with many wicks.
L.T.T.E.	=	a Tamil nationalist and separatist military movement in Sri Lanka which, until their assassination of Rajiv Gandhi, received sympathy and covert support from Indian Tamils.
Lurdu Mada	=	<i>lūrtu māṭā</i> - Our Lady of Lourdes.
mada	=	<i>māṭā</i> - mother.
Mada-amma	=	combined form of <i>māṭā</i> and <i>ammā</i> used by some cult members in reference to <i>Amma</i> as she appeared to Maryamma.
Madavi	=	<i>māṭavi</i> - dancer-courtesan, and later Buddhist nun in the post-Sangam works, <i>Cilappatikāram</i> and <i>Maṇimēkalai</i> .
madavu	=	<i>māḍavu</i> (Malayalam) - same as <i>Māḍā</i> .
Madukkur	=	<i>matukkūr</i> - market town near Pattukkottai, in Tanjavur District of Tamil Nadu.
Maiyilapur	=	<i>māyilāpūr</i> - Mylapore, ancient temple town; now a part of Madras.
maḷam	=	<i>maḷam</i> - excrement.
maman	=	<i>māman</i> ; <i>māmā</i> (vocative) - one's mother's

	=	brother.
mandiya janmam	=	<i>mantiya canmam</i> - human birth; condition of weakness, ignorance.
Manimegalai	=	<i>maṇimēkalai</i> - post-Sangam Buddhist epic.
Mannargudi	=	<i>maṇṇārkuṭi</i> - a town in Nagappattinam District of Tamil Nadu.
mappillai	=	<i>māppiḷḷai</i> - "big child"; bridegroom.
maravar	=	<i>maṇavar</i> - a <i>jāti</i> ; traditional rulers of the territories to the south-east of Madurai.
mariyadai	=	<i>mariyātai</i> - ritual honours.
Mariyamman	=	<i>māriyamman</i> - village goddess, afflicter and protectress.
marudam	=	<i>mārutam</i> - fertile, well-watered agricultural terrain in Sangam literature.
Maryamma	=	<i>mēriyammā</i> - Ms. P. Santi's honourific name, derived from her baptismal name, Mary.
Minakshi	=	<i>mīnakṣi</i> (Sanskrit) = <i>mīnaṭci</i> (Tamil) - "she whose eyes are like fish"; goddess of the city of Madurai.
mor	=	<i>mōr</i> - buttermilk.
mora ponnu	=	<i>mora ponnu</i> - a girl eligible for marriage by being one's sister's daughter, or a father's sister's daughter.
mukulattor	=	<i>mūkulattōr</i> - the three <i>jātis</i> , Maravar, Kallar and Agamudaiyar, collectively.
mullai	=	<i>mullai</i> - forest terrain in Sangam literature.
murti	=	<i>mūrtti</i> - a human-made image of a god.
muwendra kulam	=	<i>mūvēntira kulam</i> - same as Mukulattor.
nadar	=	<i>nātar</i> - "lord", as <i>nāthaḥ</i> (Sanskrit); <i>jāti</i> name assumed by tappers of tree-sap for producing country liquors; now a powerful merchant community.
Nagappattinam	=	<i>nākappaṭṭiṇam</i> - capital city of District of the same name; ancient center of Hindu and Buddhist dissemination to south-east Asia; Portuguese and Dutch colonial administrative center.
nandri	=	<i>nanri</i> - "thank you".
neydal	=	<i>nēytaḷ</i> - sandy, coastal terrain in Sangam.
Nidamangalam	=	<i>nītāmaṅkaḷam</i> - town about 26 km. east of Tanjavur.
nirvana	=	<i>nirvāṇa</i> - "blown out"; Buddhist soteriological term.
Orattur	=	<i>orattūr</i> - village near Nidamangalam, Tanjavur District; site of Amma's first appearances.
oru madiri	=	<i>oru mātiri</i> - literally "one thing"; an exclamation expressing that something is wrong.
"oru madiri aiyiduttu"	=	<i>oru mātiri aiyiṭuttu</i> - colloquial expression meaning something untoward happened.
Pabanasam	=	<i>pāpanācam</i> - a town on the Kaveri River, near Tanjavur; home of Josephine Thomas.

padayattirai	=	<i>pāṭayāttirai</i> (from Sanskrit <i>pādayatrā</i>) - a walking pilgrimage.
Padroado	=	15th century Spanish/Portuguese agreement to divide the world between themselves, with the agreement and approval of the Vatican.
Pakkirisami	=	<i>pakkiricāmi</i> - Santi's maternal uncle and foster father at Kattur.
pal tirtham	=	<i>pāl tīrttam</i> - milk received from divine a source.
palai	=	<i>pālai</i> - desert terrain in Sangam literature.
palaiyakarar	=	<i>pālaiyakārar</i> - <i>Maṇava</i> local ruler.
palaya	=	<i>palaya</i> - old; Palaya Velanganni is <i>Mādā Kuḷam</i> .
pallar	=	<i>paḷḷar</i> - dalit agricultural labouring <i>jāti</i> .
panchama	=	<i>pañcama</i> - the "fifth <i>varṇa</i> "; people below caste in the Brahmanical social system.
pandal	=	<i>pantal</i> - a temporary structure to protect a public event from sun and rain.
Pandiya	=	<i>pāṇṭiya</i> - Sangam age rulers of the southern portion of Tamil Nadu, from around Madurai to Kanniyakumari.
paraiyar	=	<i>paraiyar</i> - "drummer"; dalit agricultural labouring <i>jāti</i> .
paravar	=	<i>paravar</i> - fishing <i>jāti</i> of south tip of India; first Tamils to become Catholics under Portuguese influence.
Patima Mada	=	<i>pātimā mātā</i> - Our Lady of Fatima.
Pattukkottai	=	<i>paṭṭukkoṭṭai</i> - a town in Tanjavur District.
peralayam	=	<i>pērālayam</i> - "great holy place"; Basilica.
pey	=	<i>pēy</i> - ghost of a dead person which possesses and afflicts vulnerable victims.
peyar suttī vila	=	<i>peyar surri viḷā</i> - naming ceremony, or baptism.
pillisuniam	=	<i>piḷḷicūṇiyam</i> - possession by <i>pēy</i> or other malevolent beings.
puram	=	<i>puram</i> - "outer" genre of Sangam poetry.
pudisi nyayiru	=	<i>pūtici nyāyiru</i> - Easter Sunday.
pudiya	=	<i>putiya</i> - new; Pudiya Velanganni is the Basilica.
Ramanadapuram	=	<i>irāmanātapuram</i> - District of Tamil Nadu which reaches toward the island of Sri Lanka.
rubam	=	<i>rūpam</i> (Sanskrit/Tamil) - form.
sadhana	=	<i>sādhana</i> (Sanskrit); <i>sātanaṭai</i> (Tamil) - spiritual discipline; literally, going straight to the goal; succeeding.
(Sada) Sagaya Mada	=	(<i>catā</i>) <i>cakāya mātā</i> - Our Lady of (Perpetual) Help.
saiva	=	<i>śaiva</i> (Sanskrit) = <i>caiva</i> (Tamil) - pertaining to god Siva; vegetarian (local usage).
sakti	=	<i>śakti</i> (Sanskrit) = <i>cakti</i> (Tamil) - "power";

		the operant capacity of Hindu gods, conceived as female.
sammanasu	=	<i>cammaṇacu</i> - angel.
sambirani	=	<i>cāmpirāṇi</i> - camphor.
sami	=	<i>cāmi</i> - god; priest
sangam	=	<i>sangham</i> (Sanskrit) = <i>caṅkam</i> (Tamil) - period of literary efflorescence in the Pandiya kingdom around the beginning of the Common Era.
sapparam	=	<i>capparam</i> - a vehicle for carrying statues of gods in procession on people's shoulders; adapted by Christians for carrying saints; similar vehicles are common in religious processions in Mediterranean Europe as well.
sardarji	=	(Panjabi) a Sikh male.
sedupati	=	<i>cēṭupati</i> - lord of the bridge, or causeway, the mythical land bridge from Ramanadapuram to Mannar in Sri Lanka; title of Marava rulers.
Seyon	=	<i>cēyōṇ</i> - Siva = <i>sivah</i> (Sanskrit) = <i>civan</i> (Tamil)
Shaitan	=	"Satan".
shudra	=	<i>śudra</i> - Fourth, and lowest, varna in the Brahmanical social order; see dvija.
Silappadigaram	=	<i>cilappatikāram</i> - post-Sangam Tamil literary classic.
siluvai dollar	=	<i>ciluvai tāḷḷar</i> - crucifix.
siluvai padai	=	<i>ciluvai pātai</i> - Way of the Cross.
Sivasubramanian	=	<i>śivasubrahmanyam</i> (Sanskrit) = <i>civasūppira-maṇiyaṇ</i> (Tamil) - the god Skanda, Karttikeya.
snanam	=	<i>snānam</i> (Sanskrit) - ritual bath.
Sokkanadar	=	<i>cōkkanātar</i> - the god Siva at Minakshi Temple.
Sundaresvara	=	<i>sundaresvara</i> - same as Sokkanadar.
svayambhulinga	=	<i>svayambhuliṅga</i> - "self-manifested sign"; a natural stone object of worship which is believed by Hindus to have emerged from the earth of its own volition in order to be known and worshipped.
tai masam	=	<i>tai mācam</i> - Tamil month of mid-January to mid-February; begins with pongal festival.
talai	=	<i>talai</i> - head.
tambi	=	<i>tampi</i> - "younger brother"; how <i>Amma</i> summons Maryamma for a visitation.
Tamil Nadu	=	<i>tamiḷnāṭu</i> - state in India where the Tamil language is spoken by a majority of people; most southerly and easterly state.
Tanjavur	=	<i>tañcāvūr</i> - Tanjore
tapas	=	<i>tapas</i> (Sanskrit) - "heat" generated by renunciation and asceticism.
Tarangambadi	=	<i>tarankampāṭi</i> - Tranquebar
tarantismo	=	Italian exorcism of spider bites.
tata	=	<i>tātā</i> - "grandfather"; term of respect for a sufficiently elder male.

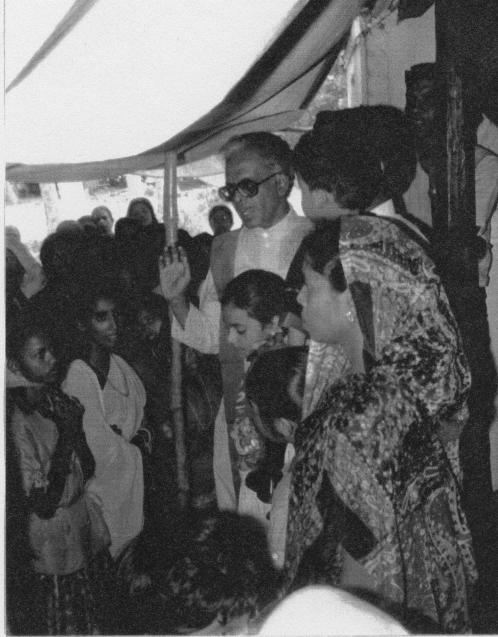
tay	=	<i>tāy</i> - "mother"; Tamil literary purists prefer this term to others.
tay mama	=	<i>tāy māmā</i> - a woman's mother's brother, or one of his sons (see <i>mora ponnu</i>).
Tirucchirappalli	=	<i>tiruccirāppalli</i> - capital city of District to the west of Tanjavur; seat of the neighbouring Catholic Diocese.
Tirujnanasambandar	=	<i>tirujñānacampantar</i> - a Hindu child saint.
Tiruvarur	=	<i>tiruvārūr</i> - a town in Nagappattinam District.
Tondaimandalam	=	<i>tonṭaimaṇṭalam</i> - region of Tamil Nadu to the north of Cholamandalam to the borders of the Andhra country.
toppu	=	<i>toppu</i> - an agricultural plot.
udaiyar	=	<i>ūṭaiyar</i> - land-owning <i>jati</i> ; dominant <i>jati</i> among the priests of Tanjavur Diocese.
undiyaḷ	=	<i>uṇṭiyaḷ</i> (Tamil) = <i>hunḍi</i> (Hindi) - donation box.
ur	=	<i>ūr</i> - city.
Vadiyakkadu	=	<i>Vāṭiyakkāṭu</i> - village where Maryamma, <i>Aiya</i> , and Yobu reside; <i>-kāṭu</i> = "forest".
varna	=	<i>varṇa</i> (Sanskrit) - "colour"; the four hierarchized categories of birth-status in the Brahmanical social order, the <i>dvija</i> varnas of Brahmana, Kshatriya, and Vaisya, and the subordinate Shudra non-dvija varna; see "avarna", "panchama".
varna-dharma	=	<i>varṇadharmā</i> - the prescribed functions and natural duties of the four varnas.
Varunan	=	<i>varuṇaḥ</i> (Sanskrit) = <i>varunan</i> (Tamil) - Aryan god associated with water, storms, thunder, and cosmic order.
Vaishya	=	<i>vaiśya</i> - third dvija varna; merchants and cultivators in the Brahmanical social order.
vana	=	<i>vanam</i> (Sanskrit) - forest; a wild place.
vanga	=	<i>vāṅka</i> ; colloquial for <i>vāruṅkaḷ</i> - "please come".
Velanganni	=	<i>vēḷāṅkaṇṇi</i> - village south of Nagappattinam on Coromandel coast; site of the shrine of <i>Ārōkkiya Mādā</i> ; also Vailanganni, Vailangunni, Velankanni, etc., and erroneously <i>vēḷāṅkanni</i> .
vellalar	=	<i>veḷḷālar</i> - cultivating <i>jati</i> of the Kaveri River basin, and other parts of Tamil Nadu; patrons of the large Brahmanical temples in this region; subordinate <i>jati</i> among Catholic priests in Tanjavur Diocese; see "Udaiyar".
veshti	=	<i>veṣṭi</i> - a male's lower garment; dhoti.
Vinayagar	=	<i>vināyakar</i> - the god Ganesha.
Vishnu	=	<i>viṣṇuḥ</i> (Sanskrit) - Hindu god.
Viraiyan	=	<i>vīraiyāṇ</i> - informant at Tanjavur in whose house Maryamma's breast surgery was performed

	=	by <i>Amma</i> .
vivaram	=	<i>vivaram</i> - maturity, social and spiritual.
yajnamani	=	<i>yajñamāni</i> (Sanskrit) - the one who possesses the sacrifice; for whose primary benefit it is enacted.
yavana	=	<i>yāvāna</i> - "strangers"; Greeks, perhaps Romans; Sangam age Tamil kings used yavanas as mercenary guards.
Yesu	=	<i>yēcu</i> - Jesus.
"Yesuve"	=	<i>yēcuvē</i> - "Oh, Jesus".



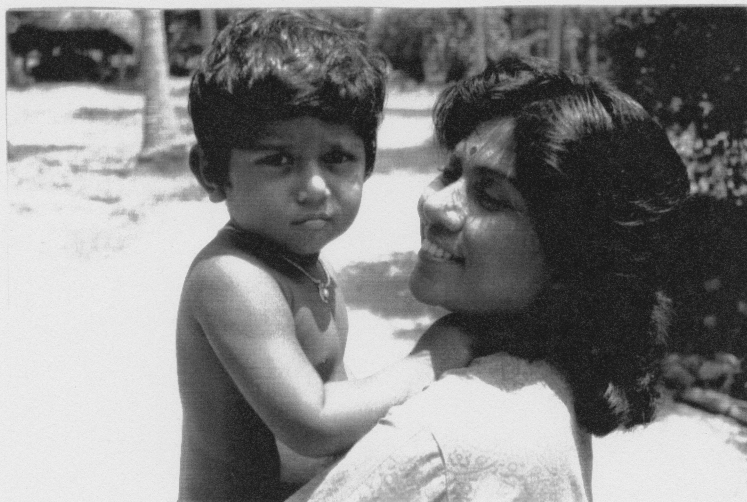


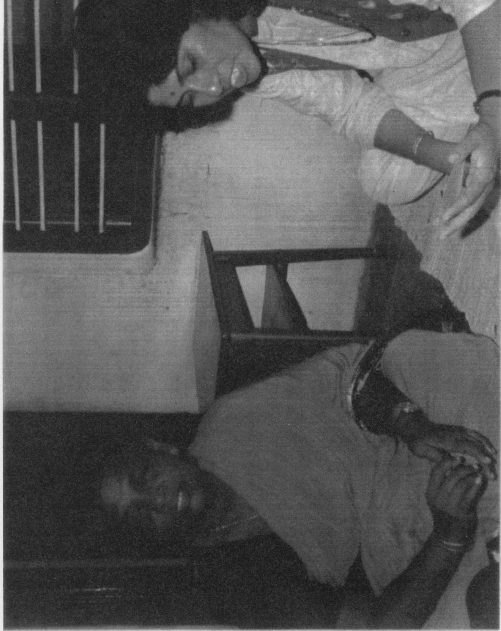
Maryamma



Priest at Vadiyakkadu

Aiya with Heather





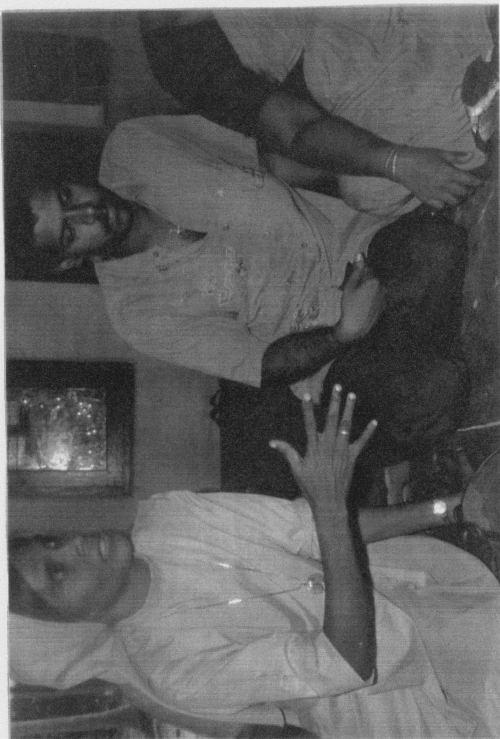
Josephine Thomas



Aiya's Blessing



A gift for Moses



T. Kennedy and a Sister

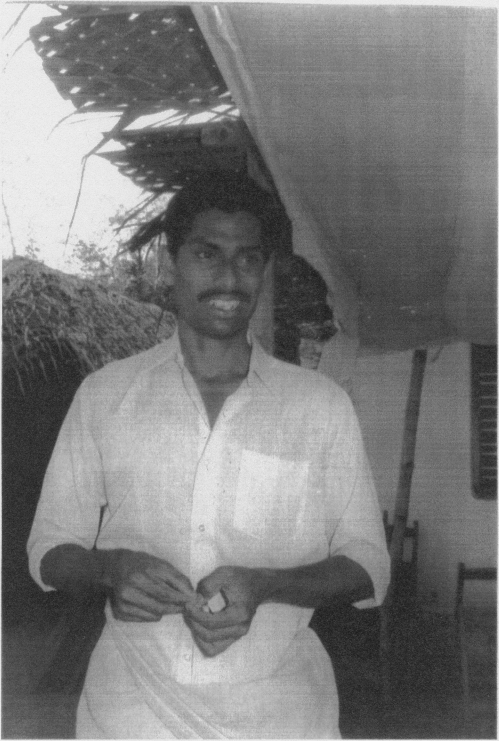


Arul Arai - 17 June, 1993

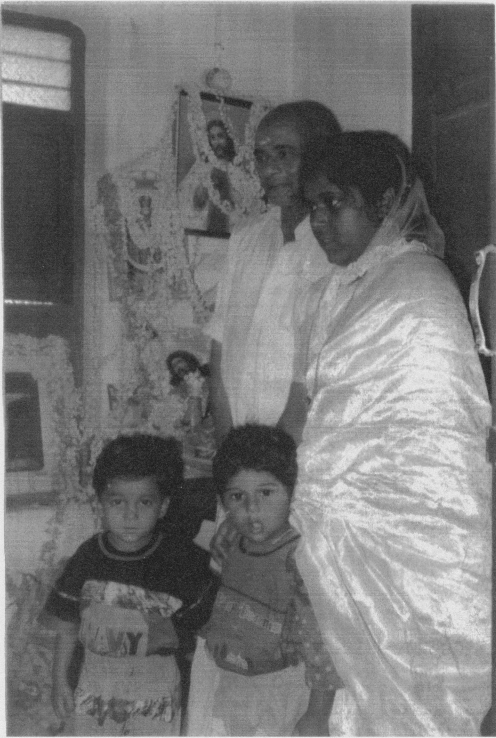


Shrine Table, *Arul Arai*

Yobu

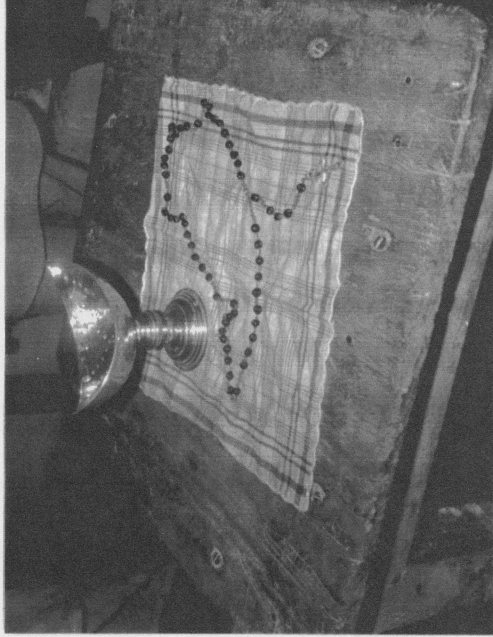


Moses, *Aiya*, Maryamma, a devotee



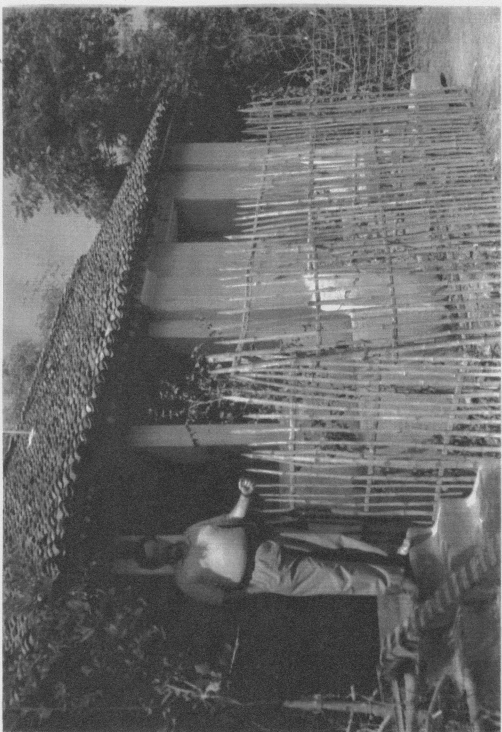


Orattur shrine room where
Maryamma did her seclusion

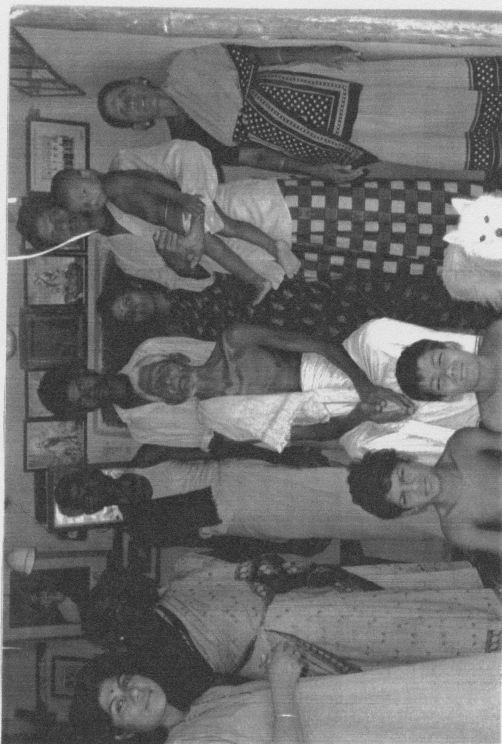


Chalice used for Amma's Mass
and her Shining Rosary

Maryamma's childhood home
at Kattur



Maryamma's family, Orattur



APPARITIONS EN INDE

Nous avons donné dans *Chrétiens Magazine* une première information sur les apparitions qui ont eu lieu en Inde, avec des phénomènes extraordinaires, y compris la résurrection d'un enfant mort et enterré. On souhaiterait évidemment des contrôles. Mais l'évêque du lieu ne fait point d'enquête. Et les fervents de ces apparitions se retranchent derrière des secrets que la Vierge lèvera en son temps. La dernière lettre reçue en reste là tout en apportant des précisions cohérentes. Nous la publions in-texto:

Papanasam, 20 octobre 1992
En réponse à vos questions, Notre-Dame apparaît seulement à la jeune fille Mary. Je pense que je vous ai déjà

écrit la courte histoire de l'apparition. Voici quelques précisions: Mary est une jeune fille indienne. Elle eut la vision de Notre-Dame d'abord, puis Notre-Dame lui donna le nom de Mary. Son nom précédent était Shanthi. Depuis février 1985 jusqu'à 1987, elle eut la vision (sic). Notre-Dame lui apparaît chaque fois qu'elle va dans la chambre et l'appelle. Mais chacun en dehors de la chambre peut parler avec Notre-Dame et converser avec Elle, mais ne peut la voir. Quelquefois la Vierge envoie Mary en dehors de la chambre pour nous parler. Mais, depuis la fin de 1987 jusqu'à maintenant, Mary aussi ne peut plus voir Notre-Dame. Elle aussi ne peut que l'entendre. Si

donc vous venez ici, si vous êtes présent lors de la venue de Notre-Dame, vous pourrez entendre sa voix, et parler avec Elle en l'un des langages que vous connaissez.

J'ai l'habitude de parler avec Notre-Dame. J'ai parlé avec Elle bien des fois: plus ou moins 500 fois. De la même manière, ma mère a parlé avec Notre-Dame plus que moi. Chaque fois que Notre-Dame veut nous dire un message, Elle envoie quelqu'un nous chercher. Si nous venons, Elle nous parle. Nombre de gens ont parlé avec Notre-Dame.

Le 16 octobre 1992, Mary vient chez nous, là où nous sommes à Papanasam; le lendemain, 17 octobre 1992, Notre-Dame vint tôt le matin: 6

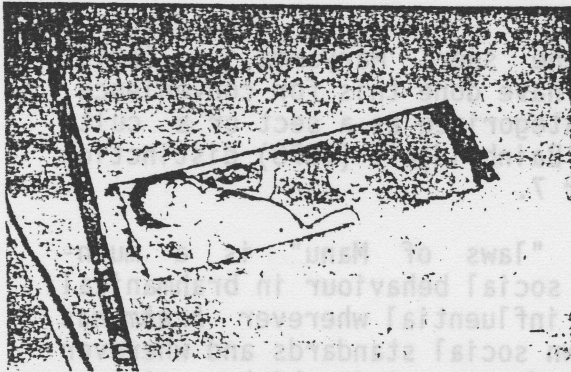
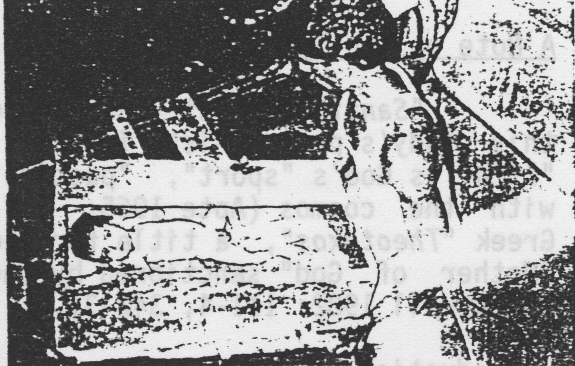
Y A-T-IL PROLIFÉRATION D'APPARITIONS?

Le grand nombre d'apparitions qui se multiplient, au point que je n'arrive plus à les suivre, manifeste sans doute un trop facile et trop rapide accueil de certains chrétiens à ce qui ressemble à ces grâces d'exception. Ceux qui vont trop vite ont une excuse. Il est vrai que Dieu est proche de nous et communique avec nous. Mais le désir de communiquer peut projeter hâtivement les ressources subjectives d'un chacun. Les vrais voyants s'interrogent sur l'authenticité de leurs extases, ils sont discrets et cherchent conseil pour s'éclairer. Est-ce à dire que les apparitions illusoires sont la majorité? Non, selon mon expérience, elles sont l'exception, compte tenu de cas ambigus sur lesquels on s'interroge: lorsqu'une vraie prière et un vrai désir de Dieu interfèrent avec des facultés psychiques médiumniques ou autres. J'ai été assez triste de lire dans plusieurs journaux canadiens (*La Presse* du 8 octobre 1992, *le Journal de Montréal* du 8 octobre), un compte rendu des «apparitions» qui amènent

du monde à la communauté du Cœur Immaculé et de Saint Louis Marie de Montfort, fondée à L'Avenir: petit village de 1500 habitants, situé à 15 kilomètres au sud de Drummondville. Sœur Marie Daniel, que le Seigneur lui-même aurait baptisée «Buisson d'épines», entre «en extase tous les soirs à 18 heures» pour une apparition de la Vierge, et «à 21 heures pour une apparition de Jésus», dit-elle. Elle a des prophéties telles que celle-ci: «Beaucoup de choses vont arriver prochainement... mais vous n'êtes pas prêts, mes enfants, parce que vous ne priez pas assez... La guerre finale est beaucoup moins loin que vous ne pouvez le penser, etc.» Les membres de cette communauté sont jeunes, ils ont de beaux costumes et de belles figures à l'avenant. Buisson d'épines semble «faire elle-même le reportage» du début de ses apparitions, note le journaliste. «Je peux la voir, mais Elle est encore loin avec plusieurs anges... Elle a quelque chose de rouge dans les mains que je ne peux pas distinguer... Elle approche, etc.» A la fin, elle s'effondre. Je ne connais que ces articles de journaux. Ils peu-

vent déformer en ironisant, mais c'est un fait que le Père Blais, homme brillant et doué, qui s'imposait par sa prestance partout où il apparaissait, à Medjugorje ou ailleurs, avec sa facilité de parole et ses dons polyglottes, a été progressivement exclu des Montfortains, et dirige aujourd'hui cette communauté que l'évêque du lieu, Monseigneur Raymond Saint Gelais, 56 ans, refuse de reconnaître. Les propensions prophétiques du Père Blais ne sont pas sans outrance et posaient déjà des problèmes au temps où il était en situation régulière. Nous vivons une période dangereuse. La religiosité grandit. Cela pourrait être un bien, mais cette religiosité sauvage et affamée se jette souvent trop vite sur n'importe quoi: sectes, illusions. Plus que jamais importent le discernement et l'obéissance. C'est pour y aider que je me suis engagé dans l'étude des apparitions, qui portent si souvent (la plupart du temps) de si beaux fruits. J'espère que la communauté du Père Blais, où l'on dit le Rosaire avec ferveur, trouvera par Notre-Dame la grâce qui la ramènera dans l'Eglise catholique.

R.L.



heures 15, dans notre maison. Elle appela Thambi, mon garçon, à haute voix. C'est sa manière de faire quand elle apparaît. Elle a prié là pendant 45 minutes après nous avoir parlé. Je lui ai posé vos questions: «Quand saurons-nous les messages et guérissons?» Elle a répondu: — Quand le temps sera venu, tout sera publié automatiquement. Il nous faut donc attendre ce temps.

Elle m'a demandé de vous le répondre et je lui ai demandé de vous bénir. Elle a dit: — Je le bénis. Elle a dit quantité de secrets à Mary et à certains d'entre nous. Nous avons à attendre le temps de Dieu pour la publication. Dès qu'elle aura donné la permission, je vous enverrai tout ce que vous avez demandé immédiatement. Thomas Kennedy

Voici les pièces à conviction envoyées de Papanasam. On y déterre l'enfant ainsi que la Vierge l'avait demandé.

Photos colonne de droite: le petit cercueil est remonté de la fosse, l'enfant vit. Il est remis à ses parents par Sœur Lourdes-Philomène. La série complète des photos de l'événement m'a été envoyée sans les expertises et constats.

Notes

A Note on the Title

"*Santi*", signifying "peace" in Sanskrit, is the name of this study's protagonist. In Hindu devotional (*bhakti*) traditions, "*lila*" is God's "sport", "pastime", or ludic mode of interacting with the cosmos (Apte 1965: 817). "God-bearing" translates the Greek "*Theotokos*", a title for the Blessed Virgin Mary as the "Mother of God" sanctioned by the Council of Ephesus in 431 C.E. (O'Carroll 1982: 111-4, 342-3).

Introduction

1. I call the adherents of the seer, Maryamma, a "cult" without problematizing the term. I have done this for convenience, as the "*Amma* cult" is not easily categorized as a sect or a cult. See the discussion of Stark and Bainbridge's (1978) distinction between these categories in Chapter 7.

2. The *Manavadharmasastra* or "laws of Manu" is a much-commented authority on normative social behaviour in brahmanical society which has been pervasively influential wherever *brahmanas* have been able to impose their own social standards and wherever other *jatis* have emulated them in order to attain higher status. This standard places severe limitations on female initiative outside the domestic sphere of activity. It is the point of departure for any gender studies in India which take seriously the traditional status of women in the majority Hindu culture. Some works which examine the social condition of Indian women are: A. S. Altekar (*The position of women in Hindu civilization*, 1956), M. Cormack (*The Hindu woman*, 1953), Vanaja, D. (*Hindu women and the power of ideology*, 1989), H. Fane (1975), Gatwood (1985), S. Jayal (*The status of women in the epics*, 1966), J. Leslie (*The perfect wife*, 1988), S. Mitter (*Dharma's daughters: contemporary Indian women and Hindu culture*, 1991), P. Mukherjee (*Hindu women: normative models*, 1978), and A. Pearson (1992). Works which explore symbolic gendered-based power relationships are: L. Bennett (*Dangerous wives and sacred sisters*, 1983), S. Wadley (*Shakti: power in the conceptual structure of Karimpur religion*, 1975; *The powers of Tamil women*, 1980). A general reference work is C. Sakala (*Women of south Asia: a guide to resources*, 1980).

3. Mart Bax introduces the concept of religious regime, "a formalized and institutionalized constellation of human interdependencies of variable strength, which is legitimized by religious ideas and propagated by religious specialists". Bax is concerned that social scientific studies of religion have

emphasized meaning to the neglect of power relations. Religious regimes may function at any scale, level of social integration, and in any relation with other regimes, but they are primarily dynamic "power-constellations" through which ideologies are formulated and strategies and tactics worked out (Bax 1991a: 9-10). Bax understands the tendency of particular religious regimes to dynamic expansionism in terms of the sociogenetic conditions which generated such an ideology (Bax 1991a: 14).

In the Roman Catholic Church, Bax sees expansionism as resulting from "internal competitive processes". "Religious regimes," he writes, generate counter-regimes, which they try to control, without success.... Only if the Church is not viewed as a huge monolith, but rather as a complex constellation of rival religious regimes, each striving for expansion and consolidation", can its variable responses to such phenomena as apparitions be understood (Bax 1991a: 19). "Official belief and popular belief, rather than being fixed social forms, are better seen as oppositional, their content changing through time in connection with the changing power relations between religious regimes" (Bax 1991a: 20). Bax sees apparitions and pilgrimage phenomena, "often loosely organized counter-regimes", as instruments for criticizing, and competing with, the established Church, a situation in which both sides exercise caution (Bax 1991a: 22-3). (Cf. 6.7.3; 6.7.10)

4. Examples of such living saints are Padre Pío at San Giovanni Rotondo (McKevitt 1991) and Ramana Maharshi at Arunachalam (Osborne 1970).

5. Eveline Meyer (1986: 193-4) cites an unpublished paper by Gunther D. Sontheimer, "The *vana* and the *kṣetra*", which suggests how Maryamma might have understood her approach to Velanganni.

6. James Clifford notes this imperative: "Experiential, interpretive, dialogical, and polyphonic processes are at work, discordantly, in any ethnography, but coherent presentation presupposes a controlling mode of authority.... [T]his imposition of coherence on an unruly textual process is now inescapably a matter of strategic choice" (James Clifford 1988: 54).

Chapter 1

1. Kathleen Gough describes the relations among *brahmanas*, *dalits*, and the non-*brahmana* landholding *jatis* in a locality in Tanjavur District from a Marxist perspective (Gough 1973).

2. Meyer cites an unpublished paper by Gunther D. Sontheimer, "The *vana* and the *kṣetra*."

3. *Amman* is a curious term. It denotes a feminine referent, yet it is grammatically masculine. I have called this anomaly to the attention of native Tamil speakers at all educational levels. Most could not grasp my point, and all but one of those who did noted it for the first time and were as confounded as myself. Dr. S.S. Janaki, Director of the Kuppaswami Sastri Research Institute, Madras, had also pondered this oddity, but could offer no solution.

4. I have seen no documentation on this point but its symbolic reaffirmation of *Minakshi's* precedence seems unimpeachable. Jeyechandran (1985) makes no mention of this architectural oddity in his detailed study of the physical development of the temple.

5. D'Souza cites M. Ezekiel, *History and culture of the Bene-Israel in India*. Nadiad: 1948.)

6. The elephants which Hannibal of Carthage marched across north Africa, Spain, southern France, and over the Alps to attack Rome could not have been African elephants, which have never been domesticated. The Romans, having little to exchange but services, paid their import accounts in gold, and hoards of Roman coins from the turn of the Common Era have been found in excavations of coastal *emporium* and along the overland trade routes of the Tamil country (Thani Nayagam 145-62). The epics mention *yavanas*, "strangers" taken by Tamil scholars to be Graeco-Romans, who served Tamil kings as mercenary guards (Karttunen 1986: 192-3). Murton (1975) cites W.H. Schoff (trans.), *The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*, New York: Longmans, 1912, and J.W. McCrindle, *Ancient India as described by Ptolemy*, Calcutta: Chatterjee, 1927.

7. D'Souza cites L.M. Zaleski, *The Apostle Thomas in India: History, tradition and legend*. (Mangalore: Kodialbail Press, 1912).

8. "Inculturation is the dynamic relation between the Christian message and a particular culture.... [It] will see the Christian experience express itself through the native culture in its own elements and become a source of inspiration, action and new creations" (Gnanaprasadam 1988:172). Kennerley (n.d.) describes early Indian Protestant movements toward a contextual theology and the recent work of the "National Biblical, Catechetical, and Liturgical Centre", Bangalore, which has produced an Indian liturgy for the Roman Catholic mass, as has the United Theological College, Bangalore, for Church of South India services. Saldhana (1987: 101) problematizes inculturation: "A thorough rethinking on the meaning of a Christian community will be required, especially among the members of older Christianity in

India, who may be deeply formed in the foreign mould of Christianity." The Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians has met periodically since 1976 to explore emerging Asian and African theological and inculturation issues. The works of Robin Boyd (*India and the Latin captivity of the church*, 1974; *Indian Christian theology*, 1979) and Raimundo Panikkar (*The unknown Christ of Hinduism*, 1981) address themselves to questions of Christian inculturation in India.

9. See the discussion in Chapter 6 (6.8-6.8.2) of the criteria for evaluating such visions.

10. One such was John de Britto, a Jesuit martyr, who was executed in 1693 by a *marava palaiyakarar* or local ruler for refusing to abandon his Tamil converts. Catholic children today are occasionally named after him (Nevett 1980, *passim*).

11. Tamil has four commonly used terms denoting "mother". Three of these - *ammāl*, *annai*, *tāy* - are of Dravidian, or indigenous origin. The fourth, *mādā*, derives from an Aryan, or north Indian, source. In Hindi, for instance, mother is *mātā*. Catholics all over India recognize in "*Mātā*", "The Mother", a reference to the Blessed Virgin Mary and she is most commonly known by this name. In its transition to Tamil, the dental "t" becomes voiced. I have represented it here, and throughout the study, as "d". At Velanganni shrine, Mary is known as *Ārogya Mātā* in Hindi and *Ārōkkiya Mādā* in Tamil. Recall that the protective Hindu village goddess is called an *ammaṇ*. The vocative form, *Ammā* or *Ammāi*, of the innocuous *ammaḷ* is identical to the vocative for *ammaṇ*. For this reason, the Catholic Church has refrained from calling the Virgin Mary "*Ammā*" in order to avoid possible confusion in worshipers' minds. Despite this, popular devotional songs call on Our Lady as *Mariyammā*.

This potential confusion is further compounded by the similarity between the name of the popular goddess, *Māri*, called upon in song and Hindu liturgy as *Māriyammā*, and the name of the Blessed Virgin. The only difference in Tamil is the length of the first vowel - "ā" in the case of the goddess, and "a" in the case of Mary. The European languages, Latin and Portuguese, from which this Christian name entered Tamil, do not make such a distinction, but for Tamil Christians it is an essential one. Today, when a girl is christened "Mary", the name is often spelled as a transliteration of the English pronunciation - *Mēri*. This is so for the name of the charismatic figure at the center of this study, Maryamma. I have signalled this by changing the "ē" to "a" and eliding the "i" rather than using the more awkward, though correct, transliteration, *Mēriyammā*. The suffix "-*ammā*", as in the case of addressing any respected lady in Tamil, is the vocative form of the simple honorific, *Mary-ammaḷ* and would not normally contain any suggestion of identity with any *ammaṇ*. The potent

ambivalence inherent in this common vocative form might be useful as time goes by, however, for there may be symbolic utility in it for both devotees and cult leaders.

Maryamma's followers consistently refer to the Virgin Mary as "*Ammā*", a common form of address to any respected female in Tamil, human or divine. Village-level discourse would not normally use "*Mādā*", and the *Ammā* cult uses it only for clarity when speaking with a newcomer to ensure that the identification is understood. An intriguing variant of this pattern - both terms combined as *Mādā-ammā* - will be noted in the appropriate discussions (3.2.3; 5.2.7).

12. Our Lady of the Mount, Bandra, Bombay; Our Lady of Graces, Sardhana, Meerut, U.P.; St. Mary, Ernakulam, Kerala; Our Lady of Health, Sivajinagar, Bangalore; Our Lady of Snows, Tuticorin, Tamil Nadu; Our Lady of Good Health, Velanganni, Nagappattinam District, Tamil Nadu. The non-Marian basilicas are Bom Jesus in Old Goa; St. Thomas, Mylapore, Madras; Santa Cruz, Cochin, Kerala. Other important pilgrimage churches dedicated to St. Mary are Our Lady of Bandel, Calcutta; Our Lady of Grace, Mokameh, Bihar; Our Lady of Sorrows, Trissur, Kerala.

Gabriel (*et al.* 1989: 37) counts only five Basilicas - Goa, Madras, Bandra, Velanganni and Bangalore. Menachery (1982: 200-1), in text accompanying photos, plates between pp. 200-201, mentions five Basilicas - Goa, Madras, Bandra, Velanganni and Ernakulam. The *Catholic Directory* is the definitive source. The most recent, the Bangalore Basilica, is a "daughter" shrine of Velanganni as Our Lady of Health. According to an inscription I found there, it was formally inaugurated as a Basilica on 1974.01.26 in accordance with an apostolic brief issued on 1973.10.31.

13. Our Lady of Good Health is known also as *Ārōkkiya Mādā* (Good-health Mother, or Lady), *Ārōkkiya Tāy* and *Ārōkkiya Annai* (Good-health Mother), *Annai Vēlāṅgaṇṇi* (Mother of Velanganni), *Vēlāṅgaṇṇi Mādā*, and *Mariyannai* (Mother Mary). I heard her called *Mariyammā* (with a short or "little a", not the long or "big ā" of the Hindu goddess' name) in one devotional pilgrims' song, but this is an unusual usage, and officially disapproved.

14. The only published account of Velanganni Shrine from a social-scientific perspective of which I am aware is Younger (1991).

15. Our Lady of Lourdes, of Good Health, of the Assumption, of Perpetual Help, of Fatima, and of the Immaculate Conception are, respectively, most frequent.

16. At the Ramesvaram Saiva temple, which I visited in February, 1992, there are no less than fourteen *tirthams*, in this

case wells, within the temple at each of which pilgrims must bathe if their pilgrimage is to be complete, ablutions being very important for the removal of *papam* (defilement). While it is open, the floors of the temple are constantly wet from the dripping hair and clothing of these visitors. Bhardwaj understands India-wide Hindu ritual bathing practices as originating in the Dravidian country (1973: 226), of which the districts of Tanjavur and Madurai are the heartland.

17. "Community" is the English term universally used in India to distinguish and refer to religious affiliation.

18. Motha Vaz' *Monograph of Our Lady of Health of Vailankanni* (1920) is cited in Santos (1933: 9, 16-17 [1st ed.]) and Santos (1951: 8, 15 [4th ed.]), but by the 11th edition (Santos 1980), the source is no longer acknowledged. I was unable to locate a copy of this work either in the various archives I searched, or privately. However, Motha Vaz' own *Nihil Obstat* as *Censor deputatus* as Vicar General of Madras-Mylapore Diocese appears in Santos' 1st and 4th editions, a good indication that Santos' account may be true to his source in respect of the authority of the foundation stories.

19. Cited from "*Mytras Lusitanas do Oriente*" Vol. 3: 183.

20. Cited from Lucas Wadding, ofm, *Annales Minorum*, 3rd ed. (Quaracchi [Karachi], 1931), 25: 10. A chapter-list is a census of all the Order's members throughout the world, as part of a comprehensive periodic report for the Superior General on the Order's work. If there were yet no Franciscans in Velanganni as late as 1612, this marks the earliest limit of the Franciscan church's "prehistory". In itself, however, it is no proof that no chapel at all existed prior to this time.

21. Cited from Paulo da Trindade, ofm, *Conquista Spiritual do Oriente*, MS. Vatican Library, Vol. 3, Ch. 68, Fol. 973.

22. Fr. Meersman (1901-82) is the acknowledged authority on the history of Franciscan missions in India. Of American-Dutch parentage, he knew Latin, Dutch and Portuguese. He served in Brazil from 1927 to 1935, in Sind (now in Pakistan) to 1950, and thereafter as lector in Church History at St. Antony's Friary, the Franciscan Seminary in Bangalore, India. He was ideally positioned to study its pre-British colonial history. See his obituary by E. R. Hambye, sj (Hambye 1983).

23. Cited from Meersman 1972: 230.

24. William Christian (1972: 77, 121) refers to a local Spanish shrine to Our Lady of Good Health, *La Salud*, which corresponds to the Portuguese *Saude*. It seems to be an old and common advocacy for the Virgin in Iberia.

25. At least four Portuguese-Indian churches bearing this name appear to antedate the Velanganni parish which the *Directory of the Diocese of Thanjavur* (1993) dates at 1771. They are located at Mundamvely, Kerala, in Alleppey Diocese (1501); at Cuncoim, Goa (1604); at Sancoale, Cortalim, Goa (1606); and at Versova, Bombay, Maharashtra (1634) (*Catholic Directory*, 1993).

26. The icon is not "more than life size" as Younger (1992: 90) describes it.

27. Christian notes how, in 1919, the incipient Spanish shrine of "Limpas was incorporated into the preexisting network of shrines and was becoming understood as part of the spatial mysteries of divine intention" (Christian 1992: 63-4). Spaniards began to think of Limpas as the Spanish Lourdes, a future center of world pilgrimage. The same motives appear to be at work at Velanganni.

28. Citing the *Bilan Touristique* for 1988. Ryan (1993) claims, without citing his source, that fifteen million people visit Our Lady of Guadalupe, Mexico City annually (a surprisingly large figure), while about two million visit the Marian shrines at Fatima, Lourdes, and Medjugorje annually.

29. Citing *Report of the Pilgrim Committee* 1915: 164.

30. "The [Melmaruvatur Adiparasakti] temple prescribes red dress for its devotees and volunteers.... Those who desire to offer personal worship to the... Principal Deity at the main temple... have to wear red dress.... It acts as a pass-port to reach the MOTHER's feet.... The connotation of the red colour is highly symbolic. The colour of the blood that flows in the veins of the human beings is red and it is common to all irrespective of their caste, colour, status,... religion, nationality.... The equality in their claim manifests itself in the uniformity of wearing of the red garb" (Moorthy 1986: 36).

Chapter 2

1. At this time Maryamma was twelve and a half years old and may have entered puberty. First menstruation is a particularly dangerous condition of transition and vulnerability, an inviting window of opportunity for demonic possession to occur (Stirrat 1977: 148). I was unable to determine whether or not Santi had any rites of first menstruation.

2. At first, I took this "Raja" to be Rajendiran of Kalliyur, who later took responsibility for funding the family's hospitality for guests and pilgrims. However, he would not naturally have been called Raja, but "Raju" which is the diminutive form of his name. Sedupati Raja ("Yobu") of Vadiyakkadu, however, would normatively be called "Raja".
3. This part of Maryamma's story had been significantly altered by the time of her interview of 1993.06.14.
4. The "policeman" was probably a uniformed Shrine Security Guard on night duty.
5. A *verbatim* facsimile of the transcript of this "mass" is available in my field research collection.
6. *Aiya* was not born naturally to Maryamma, according to *Anma* cult sources. *Aiya* was not a newborn in November, 1990 and his actual age is uncertain (cf. 5.3). His identity, discussed in detail in Chapter 4, is an important matter of faith in the *Anma* cult (4.6).

Chapter 3

1. In textualizing my field materials, I have attempted to avoid totalization by balancing my sources' intentions with my own. In the end, however, the whole must be taken in hand and appraised methodically. The reader will have to measure to what extent I have succeeded in both "making sense" and "letting speak" (Rabinow 1986: 241-7).
2. "How, precisely," asks James Clifford, "is a garrulous, overdetermined cross-cultural encounter shot through with power relations and personal corss-purposes circumscribed as an adequate version of a more or less discrete 'other world' composed by an individual author?" (Clifford 191986: 25).
3. A *verbatim* facsimile of this typescript is preserved in my field research collection.
4. It is not entirely clear whether Kanakambujam was appealing to the *Anma* at Velanganni, or to some other of several versions of the Virgin, or to some Hindu goddess. As Hindu as well as Christian Tamils in distress will often cry out "*Anma!*", as does a child for its natural mother, to ask such a question is really to beg it. In any case, it was the *Mada-anma* who came in answer to Santi's prayers. Village-level discourse appends *-anma* as a termination of respect to the name of any female, even to an infant's. The selfconscious variant of this pattern - *Mada-anma* (cf. 5.2.7) - may be taken as a clue to the eruption of the goddess' identity through the names and forms of Christian

symbolism, or, likewise, of the Virgin Mary's identity through Hindu symbolism.

5. Pakkirisami, Maryamma's *maman*, or mother's brother, has two kinds of claim on Maryamma and her family that should require them, and her, to consult him when making her life-plans. First, as her mother's only brother, Pakkirisami has the first priority in making marital claims on her for his son. Whenever her parents plan to have Santi marry, courtesy requires that they first consult him, at least to receive a formal waiver of his claim. Secondly, though this is a less formal claim, Pakkirisami was also her foster father for ten years, and this support and personal concern should at least have been acknowledged, by seeking his advice and approval on such a major life decision, with implications for the honour of her parents and the marriage prospects of her siblings (2.6.3; 3.7.1; Note 17, below).

6. "A great portent appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. She was pregnant and was crying out in birth pangs, in the agony of giving birth. Then another portent appeared in heaven: a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads. His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. Then the dragon stood before the woman who was about to bear a child, so that he might devour her child as soon as it was born. And she gave birth to a son, a male child, who is to rule [or shepherd] all the nations with a rod of iron. But her child was snatched away and taken to God and to his throne; and the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, so that there she can be nourished for one thousand two hundred and sixty days.

"And war broke out in heaven; Michael and his angels fought against the dragon. The dragon and his angels fought back, but they were defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. The great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world - he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him... (cf. 5.1.3.4).

"So when the dragon saw that he had been thrown down to the earth, he pursued [or persecuted] the woman who had given birth to the male child. But the woman was given the two wings of the great eagle, so that she could fly from the serpent into the wilderness, to her place where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time. Then from his mouth the serpent poured water like a river after the woman, to sweep her away with the flood. But the earth came to the help of the woman; it opened its mouth and swallowed the river that the dragon had poured from his mouth. Then the dragon was angry with the woman, and went off to make war on the rest of her children, those who keep the

commandments of god and hold the testimony of Jesus." (*Revelation* 12: 1-9, 13-17. *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version: Catholic Edition*, 1993)

This obscure cthonic portrait of a heavenly mother giving birth to a male child, snatched away for protection to the throne of God, conflated in its interpretation with *Genesis* 3: 14-16 quoted below, is the sole scriptural authority for the entire tradition of the cosmic cult of Mary which tends to her virtual deification as the so-called "Co-Redemptrix" in some streams of Catholicism. There is no internal evidence here that Mary, the human mother of Jesus, should be identified as the Woman, nor is there anything in the story which identifies the male child with Jesus. If, however, God, the child's protector, should also be, as Mariological interpretation suggests, understood as his father, these verses pose a very large problem for Trinitarian theology if they are to take seriously the matter of properly accounting for the identity of what appears to be the *primal cosmic Woman*. Mariolatry, by making this identification explicit in attempting to patch over the obscurity of St. John's mystical vision, is a greater heterodoxy than would be interpreting deity itself in the feminine. *Genesis* 3: 20, "The man named his wife Eve, because she was the mother of all living," connects the Woman of *Revelation* with the Woman of *Genesis* through the reference identifying her progeny, all humanity. Joining these two distinct mythic images identifies the heavenly dragon, by extension, with the earthly serpent.

"The Lord God said to the serpent, 'Because you have done this, cursed are you among all animals and among all wild creatures; upon your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. I will put enmity between you and the woman [Eve], and between your offspring and hers; he will strike your head, and you will strike his heel.' To the woman he said, 'I will greatly increase your pangs in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children, yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you'" (*Genesis* 3: 14-16).

7. Well might any woman disappear who, perhaps walking a restless child in the night, unexpectedly encountered a hundred or so people shouting and running toward her in an otherwise quiet and lonely place.

8. The European, I believe, would have been Brother Peter of Walsingham. The "book" already published may be the two-page article entitled "Apparitions en Inde", a French translation of T. Kennedy's description of Moses' resurrection, accompanied by photographs of the process, with an introduction and extremely cautious side-bar by Fr. René Laurentin, in *Chrétiens Magazine* No. 57, 15 January, 1993. In the article, which takes the form of a letter to Fr. Laurentin, Kennedy writes that he is willing to give

all necessary information to him when permission has been received from *Amma*. See Appendix for a facsimile.

9. For discussion of *kallar* marriage patterns and customs in Madurai District of Tamil Nadu, see Dumont (1957, 1983, 1986). No comparable study of Tanjavur *kallar* is yet available.

10. George Spencer plots a "sacred geography" for Tanjavur District and Tamil Nadu from references to places in the *Devāram*, the songs praising Siva as lord of particular places by the early medieval *Nāyanmār* poets. Spencer maps 260 identifiable sites in which Siva is celebrated as lord of each place. These range from north India to Sri Lanka. Among these 220 (88%) are in the four districts which make up the Kaveri basin and the Coromandel coast, localizing this area as the Tamil Saiva heartland. Fully 160 (62%) are located in the area of our study, Tanjavur district (Spencer 1970: 236). The *Devaram* hymns pointedly specify the locality as intimately belonging to Siva, while figuring him also as the universal Lord. This tension between universality and particularity in the relations of a locality with the divine is deeply rooted in the Tamil religious mentality. It is into this appreciation for localization, and local protectors, that *Arokkiya Mada* has been assimilated.

11. When a woman marries, becoming a *sumangali*, she is entrusted with the well-being of her husband's lineage and of his personal wellfare (Reynolds 1980: 45-6). In Tamil culture, the *sumangali* is cognate with the spouse goddess and is responsible for her own *karpū*. The immature girl, youthful, believed to be impetuous, and unpredictable, whose cognate is the *amman* (Reynolds 1980: 37), is not and must be controlled by her seniors, female and male. The capricious *ammans* themselves are often unmarried, or tragically married, women who have failed to properly manage the contingencies of their lives, as in the *Silappadigaram*, when Kannagi's immature husband is murdered because she does not accompany him into the dangerous city of Madurai (MacPhail 1988). Brahmanical influence in the law of Manu, alien as it is to the classical Tamil ethos, has been influential in shaping gender roles. In the brahmanical view, woman is never fit for independence, requiring that in childhood, a father protect her, in youth, her husband, and in old age, her sons (Devapoopathy 1969: 11).

12. Note that the Tanjavur Catholics usually refer to the Virgin Mary as "*Mada*", while Maryamma and her adherents follow the more commonly used "*Amma*" almost exclusively.

13. Rani assumed, perhaps, that Maryamma's seclusion was done apart from her parents' house, rather than inside it. The reference to Tiruvarur may indicate that Rani knew Maryamma as

coming from Kattur, a few kilometers from Tiruvarur, where she grew up from infancy, rather than from Orattur. In 1989, Maryamma may not yet have been denying her early life. Ramamani was still involved with the *Amma* cult, at least until the leg affliction in September (Ramamani 1993.07.07). Sivasubramanian reported that the definitive breach between Maryamma and her closest relatives took place in about 1990 (See 3.7.7.2).

14. This was an interesting item of information. None of those present repudiated Sebastian Raj's testimony that Maryamma herself had said that she had come to Tanjavur to give birth to a child. Kulandaisami, Balraj's friend also suggested this (5.2.11; 5.3). The possible date of *Aiya's* birth is discussed below (5.3).

15. Punamalli is the location of the Madras-Mylapore Diocesan major seminary for training Catholic priests. Fr. Prakash [pseudonym], a philosophy instructor at this seminary is an *Amma* cult devotee, inducted by Fr. Kulandairaj [pseudonym]. He is an important resource for the cult in influencing the process of priestly formation in its favour.

16. Rosemary is conflating *Aiya*, the child "given" in November, 1990, with Moses who was resurrected in June, 1991 and whom Fr. Kulandairaj baptised (or simply named) on 2 July, 1991.

17. In the *kallar* marriage system, this relationship makes the maternal uncle, the *maman*, a young woman's most eligible marriage partner. A young man's father's sister's daughter is likewise his *morapponnu*, suitable marriage partner (Dumont 1957: 22-37); 1983: 68-79). This priority was noted above in the case of Pakkirisami, Maryamma's mother's brother, which is a closer relationship than Viraiyan's. His sons would have a weaker claim, but the system of expectations determines that such relatives be consulted when a marriage is planned. The issue is not whether young people so related wish to marry, or are even of appropriate age. Consultation with the party who has an inherited right is obligatory. Perhaps it is significant that Yobu, with whom Maryamma lives, is not so close a relative as is Chandrasegaran, Viraiyan's unmarried younger son. When Piragalata was married to a man she did not like, a "match" proposed by a relative with such a claim, and it would have been extremely difficult for the family to refuse the proposal (3.4.8).

18. This comment, especially in light of his next sentence, I took to mean that Maryamma should neither be called to account for anything, nor criticized.

19. Maryamma, despite her apparent helplessness in Orattur just hours before, needing the help of Chosen Families' members to get her out of her parents' constraints, showed alacrity in taking

immediate charge of the more sympathetic setting of Viraiyan's home.

20. What is striking in this seemingly innocuous comment is that a village girl, from either Orattur or Vadiyakkadu, would not normally have access to any garment with a zipper. It shows not only that Maryamma had access to western-style garments but that she would not hesitate to wear them, even though they might tarnish her reputation. It was evident from the photographs I had seen in the old family albums at Orattur that Santi had always like to dress stylishly, or at least dramatically. There she appeared doing a movie disco dance step in a *salwar kameez* (a Panjabi dress popular with stylish young city women), an elegant and elaborate silk *sari*, and the blue and white *sari* which she wore in the early period, before her seclusion, when blessing devotees.

21. This question of *Aiya's* age and the timing of his birth is discussed in detail below.

22. The inference here may be that some commercial activity was going on. Fuller documents the system of how, at the Minakshi Temple in Madurai, tickets are sold at the entrance for the performance of various kinds of private worship at the several shrines inside the complex (Fuller 1984: 171-6). Alternatively, R. L. Stirrat found in his study of Catholics in Sri Lanka that numbered tokens would be distributed indicating the order of private audiences with a holy man (Stirrat 1981: 191), and such practices may have been familiar to these young men.

23. As a Jesuit priest, Kulandairaj has had experience of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius Loyola. These involve the "discerning of spirits", that is, whether good or evil influences are at work in one's feelings. Feelings are deceptive as signs of truth and falsehood for evil influences sometimes produce felicitous feelings - "consolations" - while good influences may produce depression, or "disconsolation" (Green 1986: 105-141). A Jesuit must discern the sources of his feelings. We may suppose that Kulandairaj's certainty resulted from some such process discernment. He based his equal certainty about the holiness of the *Aruḷ Arai* at Vadiyakkadu on a sense of peace he experienced the first time he entered it.

24. There seem to be layers of concern here. Perhaps, considering their relationship through Aiyiraja, Viraiyan's sister and Maryamma's maternal grandmother, Chandrasegaran had some desire to wed Maryamma himself. Perhaps, now that she is becoming influential and prosperous, he is motivated as he may not have been before. Perhaps the incongruity of Maryamma, as a holy woman in the Hindu frame of reference, living in Yobu's household, even

though she claims to maintain celibacy, is impossible for Viraiyan's family to accept. Perhaps it is this impropriety, more than anything else, which bothers them.

25. We were later to see this diesel Ambassador at Vadiyakkadu. When Ancy Thomas, daughter of Camillus Perambaloth of Ernakulam, Kerala, arranged for its purchase with foreign funds, she and Maryamma went in it to Orattur to demonstrate Maryamma's newfound prosperity to Maryamma's parents (3.4.7). To possess such a vehicle is beyond the wildest of materialist fantasies for Indians much richer than Panjabakesan and Kanakambujam, and here was their own daughter, respected by Indians working and residing abroad, and receiving such gifts from them. Perhaps it was in keeping with this that she did not get out of the car to greet her parents, to enter their house, or to allow them to extend a too-humble hospitality to her new, high-status friends.

26. On our second visit to this home on 27 June, 1993 to meet Sivasubramanian, his wife, Vasantha Kumari told us that at the time of her own marriage, Santi had been nine. This event had taken place fifteen years earlier (probably in 1978). This Vasantha is the daughter of Padmamavati, Kanakambujam's elder sister. It was she who first looked after Santi as an infant in Pakkirisami's home (3.3) and who came with her mother and Amarajoti to Orattur at the time of our visit there to console Kanakambujam when Piragalata threatened to commit suicide (3.4.8).

27. A facsimile of this typescript is available in my field research materials.

28. This development mirrors processes at work at Velanganni, what Victor and Edith Turner would call the transition from spontaneous to normative *communitas* (Turner and Turner 1978: 252).

Chapter 4

1. A facsimile of this document is preserved in my field research collection.

2. Heather's comment on hearing this tape: "What I heard was such childish rubbish. She's able to fool so many people, learned people, priests. It's really absurd. I can't imagine how anyone listening to that tape [would not notice] it's so clearly her voice. [Kulandairaj] told me that the voice was so melodious, like a foreigner's voice. It's just a nasal tone."

3. Fr. Kulandairaj was also to suggest to me on departing from India that it would have been excellent had I met Angelamma, "such a wonderful lady", at Moses' 1993 resurrection anniversary

at Vadiyakkadu. He concluded that, as I had not, Maryamma must not have wanted us to meet (3.1.1).

4. *Amma's* strategy seems always to be to delay when the arrangement of something requires special preparation, or permission. The special requirements of some audiences require a special interpretation or performance. Thus, we have a second *Katchi* for Irene's parents which could not have effectively been performed for a thousand people. Likewise, when Maryamma is challenged by Balraj (5.2.16) to account for the child she has with her, Maryamma urges delay. She will explain to his satisfaction at another time, not when so many people, for whom a different story is in order, are about.

5. In a study of apparently simultaneous and spontaneous physical responses by a group of men at a charismatic rally, Csordas observes that mutual reinforcement lies in "the impression of collective spontaneity [which] indicates the immediate, intuitive grasp of the gesture's implicit meaning by all of them" (Csordas 1990: 18).

6. Exactly this happened with our own wedding videos. I had insisted on obtaining the originals, to edit myself. We received instead a second-generation copy with a mass of unwanted and hideous scrolling credits at the beginning. Much of the conversation between guests at the reception, which we might have wished to preserve, was obliterated by ghastly pre-recorded music dubbed over it, just as in the resurrection video. In all probability, the original tape was reused immediately after the studio produced a distribution copy for the customer.

7. Literally: "One thing". This colloquial usage connotes awesome dismay, usually pejorative, at the person concerned.

8. Jacinta is suggesting, I believe, from my knowledge of her personality, that as a Servite nun she is subject to an authority which it might be useful to have a good, transcendent reason not to obey.

9. Citing Adriano Prosperi, "Madonne di citta e Madonne di campagna." In *Culto dei santi, istituzioni e classi sociali in eta preindustriale*, edited by S.B. Gajano and L. Sebastiani, 1984: 615-47. Roma: L.U. Japadre. Carroll's reporting of these Inquisition records is discussed further in Chapter 6.

10. See Arunachalam (1972) for a hagiography of the child-saint. This story may be echoed in *Amma's* feeding of Moses in the grave so he could mature to the equivalent of ten months of age (4.5.2).

11. Kulandairaj's story carries echoes of the origin of the Medjugorje phenomenon itself. Mart Bax describes how a Franciscan, Fr. Branko, attended a charismatic renewal meeting in Italy in 1979. He was told by a prophet, "Do not worry; I shall send you My Mother and everyone shall listen to Her." Fr. Branko organized prayers and rosaries, and taught his parishioners in Medjugorje that God would reveal a "special grace" through their children. Shortly, on 24 June, 1981, six children saw their first vision of "Gospa" as the Virgin is called (Bax 1990: 65-6; 1991: 35-6). Medjugorje seems to have been a catalyst for Fr. Kulandairaj's involvement with the *Amma* cult, and may well have catalysed other apparitional phenomena elsewhere.

12. In an interview with Yobu's widowed mother who lives on the family farm at Vadiyakkadu, Kamatchiyamma stoutly denied that they had ever sold any land at all, for this or for any other purpose, and assured us that it was her son-in-law, Moses' own father, Rajendiran, who had paid for the festivities to celebrate the child's naming. (Kamatchiyamma 1993.06.19) It is not credible, unless Kulandairaj is being kept out of some rather important *Amma* cult affairs considering his deep involvement as an authority on it to others, that he would not come to know of Rajendiran's patronage of the festival for his son's naming/baptism. If Kulandairaj was not fabricating this explanation, there is more amiss than even I had guessed. Why should Kulandairaj be impelled to lie to dismiss Rajendiran's contribution and enhance Yobu's selfless generosity merely for my consumption?

13. A "cutout" is a two dimensional painted billboard or hoarding, erected on a scaffold, depicting a person - usually a film star or politician - which is constructed in the shape of the outline of the body. This practice comes from the popular Tamil cinema and has migrated into state politics, along with the movie stars. The late Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, M.G. Ramachandran was famous for heroic roles which created his political image as a defender of the poor and helpless. Ms. Jayalalitha, the current Chief Minister and confidante of Ramachandran was one of his movie heroines who also played a role in the film *Annai Velanganni*. Adulation of film and political heroes knows no bounds in Tamil Nadu. Each star has her or his own club of avid and uncritical admirers which serves as a base of support for the hero's move from film into politics.

14. The copy of Maryamma's history dated 18 December, 1991, later given to me by Josephine Thomas bore Brother Peter's address on its letterhead, and had, perhaps, been prepared for his benefit from the original Tamil manuscript chronology kept by Josephine in Pabanasam.

Chapter 5

1. Actually, Josephine had been absent during the whole period of Santi's affliction, arriving late in the second year of *Amma's* presence at Orattur.
2. Josephine remembers the early days when *Amma* would come whenever Santi called her (2.4.7). Note here that Josepine frankly asserts that it is Maryamma who calls "*Tambi*". This is understood by others as *Amma's* voice summoning Maryamma.
3. There are many resources for the study and practice of Ignatian spirituality. Puhl's *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius* (1960) is a translation of Ignatius' Latin work for the essential formation of Jesuit priests. Guillet's *Discernment of Spirits* (1970) is a classic interpretation. A popular introduction to discernment is Green's *Weeds Among the Wheat. Discernment: Where Prayer & Action Meet* (1986). A practical application from the perspective of the wilful practice of evil is Lewis' delightful *Screwtape Letters* (1981).
4. Many times in Mark's Gospel, Jesus asks his disciples to take note of a miracle, but each time he asks them to tell no one about it (*N.R.S.V. Bible*, 1993, Mark 1:43-4; 5:43; 7:36).
5. Fr. Arockiasamy's interference in the interview process had the opposite intention, but the identical effect, as it had in an interview with Bishop S.L Gabriel in October, 1991, into which he also insituated himself. In that case, he attempted to manage my questions, prevent me from probing too deeply, and keep me from asking questions which might be awkward for the Bishop. In this case, Arockiasamy showed remarkably little concern for the sensibilities of Mr. and Mrs. Balraj, determined as he was to get to the heart of the *Amma* cult's alleged program of deceit against the Diocese.
6. Combining two such equivalent terms as "*Mada*" and "*amma*", as Mrs. Balraj did, makes no sense. Construed, however, as "the *amman* who is called *Mada*", as with "*Angala-amman*", such usage would verbally incorporate the Blessed Virgin Mary into the pantheon of Hindu protective village goddesses. What she meant, though, was simply "the lady (*amma*) 'connected' with *Mada*". Note that Kanakambujam used the same term, perhaps in the same sense.
7. This Irene must not be confused with Irene, daughter of Josephine Thomas.
8. It seems that visitors would offer containers of water to be blessed when *Amma* came, the sanctified water to be taken home afterward.

9. *Tay maman* is a woman's mother's brother, or one of his sons, and an eligible marriage partner. Arockiasamy is asking whether they know of rumours that Maryamma had had sexual relations with such a man.

10. Maryamma's mother, Kanakambujam, has a brother, Pakkirisami, in Kattur (Ramamani 1993.07.07), who, with his wife, Ramamani, raised Maryamma for most of her early childhood. Their son would be the most eligible husband for Maryamma in the *ka'llar* marriage preference system, but he is still in school. See Dumont (1957, 1983, 1986) for references to this system. Ramamani calls Kamatciyamma, Yobu's mother, Pakkirisami's *cinnamma*, or mother's younger sister. Ayiraja, Kanakambujam and Pakkirisami's mother, would thus seem to be Yobu's maternal aunt. Viraiyan is thus their brother, so his son, Chandrasegaran, is the next closest eligible candidate for marriage, as Sivasubramanian is already married (Viraiyan 1993.06.21). Kamatciyamma is also related to Santi on her father, Panjabakesan's side as his paternal aunt (Baskaran 1993.06.25). Santi's elder sister, Amarajoti, resides with her husband, a cousin of Yobu, at Vadiyakkadu. See genealogical chart in the Appendix.

11. In fact, Fr. Kulandairaj is a *vellalar* from Tirucchirappalli District.

12. Here was a fascinating insight into the workings of Tanjavur Diocese and some of the political pressures which have come to bear upon it. Archbishop-Bishop P. Arockiasamy is under pressure from his colleagues to clarify the alleged apparitions in his jurisdiction connected with Maryamma. Two foreigners had taken an interest in the phenomena, one British Marian devotee from Walsingham, Brother Peter, and "a Canadian". The interest shown by these foreigners had generated anxiety in the hierarchy that tales of the unconfirmed and unapproved apparitions might gain a wider, even international public, causing incalculable problems. On 30 March, 1992, I had met with P. Arockiasamy on the occasion of his annual pastoral visit to Velanganni and informed him of my interest in Vadiyakkadu. Clearly, no other Canadian has been involved with the *Amma* cult so far.

13. Examples of conflict among the Hindu gods for precedence can be multiplied. In the *Padma Purana*, Rudra chops off Brahma's head (Deshpande 1988: 141-56) and Vishnu in the form of a dwarf takes possession of the "three worlds", including Indra's, by pacing off all existence in just three steps (Deshpande 1988: 367-83). In the *Varaha Purana*, Vishnu and Rudra battle each other (Venkitasubramonia Iyer 1985: 74-9), Vinayaka is brought into being (1985: 83-7), as is Skanda (1985: 88-92). In the *Linga Purana*, Vishnu is obliged to praise, or worship, Siva (*Linga P.*, Part 1 1973: 64-7), Vishnu and Brahma are enlightened with regard

to Siva's ultimate godhead (1973: 68-76). In the *Siva Purana*, Siva creates Sakti, the goddess (*Siva P.*, Part 4 1970: 1825-7), and in perhaps the ultimate expression of divine superiority Siva comes upon Vishnu and Brahma arguing over precedence, emits a column of fire which extends beneath the earth up through the heavens. The two gods cease their squabbling to seek its top and bottom, but both fail, returning exhausted, unable to plumb the limits of Siva (*Siva P.*, Part 1: 52-7).

Chapter 6

1. This perceived continuity of human and divine realms has been identified in the northern Spanish communities studied by Christian as well (Christian 1972: 132).

2. Carroll offers data from early modern Italy on the matter of another Madonna's petulance, providing a late sixteenth century Italian Inquisition account of a peasant woman, "Margherita" [pseud.], who experienced an apparition of a Madonna, in her bean field. The Virgin sent "Margherita" to tell the people of the town to repent. A few days later, when the Virgin appeared again and asked the woman to account for herself, Margherita confessed that she had not been believed. As a sign to the townspeople "that would engender belief", the Madonna caused the woman's legs to become paralyzed. In short order, others were impelled by this sign to do the saint's will and a rough shrine was constructed in the field where she had fallen which attracted a local clientele (Carroll 1992: 58-59). What this story tells us, rather surprisingly in the Italian context, is that the very prophet and seer of Mary, through no fault of her or his own, may suffer at the Madonna's hands as a sign to others as the result of her community's reluctance to obey her messages. This type of affliction is not at all surprising in the Hindu traditions of goddess possession (Carroll 1992: 58).

3. The only exception to this which I found concerned Francis Regis, and its conditions appear to be rather contrived. (4.1.3)

4. Freed and Freed (1964), Obeyesekere (1981), and Kakar (1982).

5. Berreman (1964), Lewis (1971), and Pocock (1973).

6. Citing Peter J. Claus, 1979, "Spirit possession and spirit mediumship from the perspective of Tulu Oral traditions," *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry* 3: 49.

7. Carroll's study provides a parallel example, in the Italian Catholic tradition, of another woman, called "Aurelia" [pseud.], whose circumstances were also investigated by the

Inquisition during the late sixteenth century. "Aurelia" had abused her husband in anger at the time he was prayerfully offering the Virgin an *ex voto*, a wax candle in thanks for the healing of an eye disease. The wife, "exploded with a string of blasphemies against the Virgin" (Carroll 1992:72), grabbed his candle, and trampled it underfoot. On the very night of the same *festa*, precisely one year later, her feet were suddenly detached from her legs, which was interpreted as a punishment.

8. In a sixteenth-century Italian story similar to that of Santi offering a fresh rose to Fr. Gabriel, parish priest at Velanganni, which withered when he received it, Carroll recounts how a girl, "Domenica" [pseud.], took a withered rose to an unbelieving priest, along with Mary's command to construct a chapel. The rose "became fresh and flooded the air with a heavenly fragrance" before him. A church soon came to be built at the place which Mary had designated, but the unfortunate priest died the next year, and his death was understood as an appropriate reward for his reluctance (Carroll 1992: 71). To date Fr. Gabriel, now a bishop, is alive and well a decade after the parallel alleged incident involving Maryamma.

9. McKevitt (1991) discusses the tensions which developed at an Italian shrine between the personal authority of one living saint, Padre Pio, and the institutional authority of the Church, until his death permitted the Church to absorb his "charisma".

10. This may be to slightly overstate the case. The sacraments offer believers a moral advantage in terms of social responsibilities and the grace to execute them. The particular advantages sought by devotees at saints' shrines, on the contrary, tend to be competitive rather than solidary.

11. The notion of a new "age" in millenialist Christian history is not new. The Roman Catholic Church has been in a semi-official "Age of Mary" since the promulgation of the dogma of the "Immaculate Conception" of Mary in 1854 (O'Carroll 1982: 182-4 ["*Ineffabilis Deus*"]) initiated a "Marian century" which culminated in the dogma of the Mary's "Assumption" bodily into heaven in 1950 (O'Carroll 1982: 55-7 ["*Munificentissimus Deus*"]). These two doctrines are the only ones decreed under the authority of the doctrine of "Papal Infallibility", and the only official doctrines concerning Mary which Catholics are obliged to accept - perhaps a measure of their intrinsic dubiousness. In the 1950's, before the Vatican Council, a stridently triumphalist Marian journal, *The Marian Era: World Annual of the Queen of the Universe* began publication in Chicago. The premise of this journal was that a new era had begun in Christian history in which Mary, her apparitions, and her teaching were the central voice. Since Vatican II, triumphalist Marianism has been downplayed in official Church

publicity and Marian devotions are regarded at the center of the Church as essentially private devotions. With the Council's refusal to publish a separate document on Mary, interest in a distinctively Marian era has declined. See René Laurentin (1967) for a discussion of Marianists' responses to Vatican II.

12. Most of the people with whom I spoke at Velanganni, and interviewed elsewhere through a written schedule of questions, were indifferent to official certification by the Church of Velanganni's Marian apparitional charter. Sixty-four Catholics and two Hindus were asked: "Would it make any difference to you if the traditions of apparitions and miracles at Velanganni were not officially recognised by the Catholic Church, or by Vatican authority?" Forty-five respondents (68.2%) said it would make no difference to them. Seven (10.6%) said it would. Three (4.5%) said they were not interested in the issue, and eleven (16.7%) gave no answer. If Mary's graces and favours are present in personal experience, or in others' testimonies, the question of official recognition appears not to matter. Three of the seven who said it would make a difference if Velanganni were not recognized were devotees of *Arokkiya Mada*, and interpreted the question to be suggesting a withdrawal of a Vatican approval which is presumed to exist. In fact, there never has been any such approval.

13. When a group of Christian boys in Tanjavur had demanded, at Sivasubramanian's house, to know if tokens were being given out to gain access to Maryamma, it was probably this sort of arrangement they had in mind (3.7.4).

14. Stirrat accounts for the intensified personalism of Catholic popular devotions in Sri Lanka partly in terms of a conservative reaction against the Church hierarchy which is held responsible by some Catholics for the decline of Catholic political influence since independence in the face of resurgent Sinhala Buddhism (Stirrat 1991: 130). Failing to remain true to the traditional patterns of popular devotion (such as pilgrimages, scapulars, rosaries, and novenas) in pursuit of the social mandate of Vatican II, the hierarchy is seen by these conservative Catholics as forfeiting the sacred power which once flowed through the pilgrimage shrines it controls.

15. Clifford, following Dilthey ("The construction of the historical world in the human sciences", 1914), writes "Understanding others arises initially from the sheer fact of coexistence in a shared world... an experiential world, an intersubjective ground for objective forms of knowledge" (Clifford 1988: 35). "Ethnographic 'experience'", he writes, "can be seen as the building up of a common meaningful world, drawing on intuitive styles of feeling, perception, and guesswork... living one's way into an alien expressive universe" (Clifford 1988: 36). Likewise

are facts, texts, events and their interpretations constructed by ethnographic subjects out of just such a shared experiential world.

16. Stirrat finds the Virgin appearing to adult men in Sri Lanka, where stress is placed on the "ideal of the perfect priest" (Stirrat 1992: 138). By contrast, in Europe, she tends to appear to children and women, stress is placed on innocence or ignorance (Stirrat 1992: 212, note 9), and these are the sorts of people are those who tend to become possessed by demons in Sri Lanka (Stirrat 1992: 212, note 10).

17. Mandelbaum (1966) distinguishes between the religious functions of a "transcendental complex" concerned with ultimate purpose and a "pragmatic complex" generated to meet local and temporal exigencies. These two modes of religiosity are inherently conflictual, as illustrated in this chapter. Mandelbaum, however, emphasizes their complementarity, overlap, and convergence, and the transition of symbols from one complex to the other, which certainly does occur (Mandelbaum 1996: 1177). Following Marriott (1955: 211-218), Mandelbaum writes: "A local godling may gradually be endowed by worshipers with transcendental attributes, and, conversely, a deity from the scriptural pantheon may be locally transposed into a pragmatic spirit." Likewise, in an example from north India, "when all [the disease] goddesses are worshiped together, in the general prophylactic rite [to secure the welfare of children], they are taken as one goddess who is given more of a transcendental than a pragmatic complexion."

18. "In many cases esoteric religious knowledge generates an exoterics, a simpler and sometimes less exigent form of doctrine and practice, more adapted to the simplicity and even heterodoxy of the non-experts, allowing greater speculation and broader practice than may be proper for learned or otherwise distinguished persons. A universalizing religion seems always to contain such room for local communities to colour-in the broad outlines of their religion" (N. Davis 1982: 2).

19. This is explicitly the case with the seer, Mrs. Alphonsa, and members of the *Tandai Tūviya Mariyannai Jabakulam* ("Prayer-family of the Father and Holy Mother Mary") in Tanjavur, whom I interviewed in June, 1993.

20. Whether these devotees are aware of it or not, this view presents the same theological problem as the "two natures" within the person of Christ.

21. In the Sri Lankan case, on the other hand, the saints, alive or dead, constitute a bridge between Sinhala Buddhism and Catholicism in a graded continuum of gods and saints which permits

Catholics to attend Buddhist shrines while continuing to identify themselves as Catholics (Stirrat 1981: 188).

22. Catholic and Protestant seminaries in India are currently addressing themselves to pragmatic debates concerning *praxis*-based theology in place of the older model of theory and practice, in which ideas precede implementation. *Praxis* requires that one's fundamental understanding of the Christian *evangelion* must be grounded first in struggles with suffering, and the gospel message must be read as a commentary on experience in the world.

23. See Michael O'Carroll's articles "Devotions forbidden" (1982: 121-2) and "Objections to Marian doctrine and devotion" in *Theotokos* (1982: 270-1). "In the [Second Vatican] Council entourage, the words 'maximalist' and 'minimalist' expressed two trends - one which tended to increase the power, privileges, and function of Our Lady to the extreme possible; the other seeking to accord to her only what could be literally and rigorously justified.... The main criticisms...: Mariology is being enlarged at the expense of the unity of Theology, with a methodology of its own, claiming almost independent status; dogmas are being multiplied beyond objective validity -... the doctrinal development has been in excess of the data of Revelation; Marian theologians have been at times influenced unduly by the sentiment of the faithful or by private revelations; and Christ is at times displaced from the center of the Christian mystery and economy" (O'Carroll 1982: 270).

24. For a fascinating account of symbolic transformation as essential to local identity in colonial meso-America, see Watanabe (1990).

Chapter 7

1. Nonetheless, these similarities between European Catholicism and the Tamil tradition may be rooted more generally in Indo-European folklore, which contains motifs representing the ambivalent, conditional, dangerous benefactor (Thompson 1955). Carroll's data personify these characteristics through the symbol of the Virgin Mary, while the Hindu ethos represents them through the local goddess. The goddess' character and identity is itself the locus of contests between Indo-European (brahmanical) and indigenous Dravidian symbols of divine, gender-based precedence (Younger 1980: 495). Discourse concerning the relative status of gods and goddesses is discussed in Chapter 1 (1.2.4). *Amma*'s contest for precedence with *Andavar* (6.6) may reflect this motif.

2. A local tradition has it that *Amma* differs from *Andavar* in that she has never yet set foot upon the earth (3.4.1; Baskaran 1993.06.25).

3. Similarly, Christian (1992: 114) notes a Spanish prophet connected with the cult of the Christ of Limpias as claiming the Marian Age as a preliminary to the coming of Christ.

4. Hayden White, *Metapsychology: The historical imagination in nineteenth century Europe*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973.

Resources

Unpublished Sources

Brubaker, Richard Lee

- 1978 The ambivalent mistress: a study of south Indian village goddesses and their religious meaning.
Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, Chicago Ill.

Erndl, Kathleen M.

- 1990 The lion-riding goddess of northwest India: myth, ritual, and symbol. Ph.D. dissertation, Lewis and Clark College, Portland, Oregon.

MacPhail, Richard D.

- 1988 Justice, foreknowledge, and fate in the *Cilappatikaram*.
M.A. thesis. McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario.

Memoranda Missionis Negapatam et Velangany [1839 - 1877].

Catalogue No. 217/159.

Madura Mission Jesuit Archives, Shembaganur, Kodaikanal.

Mosse, C. D. F.

- 1986 Caste, Christianity and Hinduism: a study of social organization and religion in rural Ramnad.
D.Phil thesis, Oxford University, Oxford, England.

Noronha, S. X., Fr.

- 1916 Private journal. (Unpublished). Velanganni Basilica Archive.

Pearson, Anne M.

- 1992 "Because it gives me peace of mind": functions and meanings of vrats in the religious lives of Hindu women in Banaras.
Ph.D. thesis, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario.

Weissman, Lee A.

- 1988 Who is Pankaru? Unpublished paper read at the Conference on Religion in South India, 1988.

Published Sources

Adhiparasakthi in the form of Adigalar.

- n.d. Pamphlet, lacking publication information, obtained at the bookshop of the Adiparasakti Temple, Melmaruvatur, Chengalpet District, Tamil Nadu.

Apte, Vaman Shivram

- 1965 *The practical Sanskrit-English dictionary*. (Revised and enlarged edition.) Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.

Arokiaswami, M.

- 1972 *The classical age of the Tamils*. (1st ed. 1967)
Madras: University of Madras.

Arunachalam, M.

- 1972 *Guru Jnana Sambandha of Dharmapuram*.
Tarumapuram: Tarumapuram Atinam.

Babb, Lawrence

- 1970 Marriage and malevolence: the uses of sexual opposition in a Hindu pantheon. *Ethnology* 9/2: 137-148.

Badone, Ellen

- 1991 Breton folklore of anticlericalism. In *Religious orthodoxy and popular faith in European society*, Edited by Ellen Badone, pp. 140-162.
Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press.

Badone, Ellen, ed.

- 1990 *Religious orthodoxy and popular faith in European society*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.

Bayly, Susan

- 1989 *Saints, goddesses and kings: Muslims and Christians in south Indian society, 1700-1900*.
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bax, Mart

- 1990 The Madonna of Medjugorje: religious rivalry and the formation of a devotional movement in Yugoslavia. *Anthropological quarterly* 63: 63-75.
1991a Religious regimes and state-formation: toward a research perspective. In *Religious regimes and state-formation: perspectives from European ethnology*. Edited by Eric R. Wolf, pp. 7-27.
Albany: State University of New York Press
1991b Marian apparitions in Medjugorje; rivalling religious regimes and state-formation in Yugoslavia. In *Religious regimes and state-formation: perspectives from European ethnology*, Edited by Eric R. Wolf, pp. 29-53.
Albany: State University of New York Press

Bharathi, S. Bhakthivatsala

- 1993 Spirit possession and healing practices in a south Indian fishing community. *Man in India* 73/4: 343-352.

Beck, Brenda E. F.

- 1969 Color and heat in south Indian ritual.
Man (n.s.) 4: 553-572.
- 1981 The goddess and the demon. A local south Indian festival
and its wider context. *Purusartha* 5: 83-136.

Behar, Ruth

- 1991 The struggle for the Church: popular anticlericalism and
religiosity in post-Franco Spain. In *Religious orthodoxy
and popular faith in European society*.
Edited by Ellen Badone, pp. 76-112.
Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press.

Berreman, Gerald D.

- 1964 Brahmins and shamans in Pahari religion. In *Religion in
south Asia*. Edited by Edward B. Harper, pp. 53-69.
Seattle: University of Washington Press.

Bharati, Agehananda

- 1963 Pilgrimage in the Indian tradition.
History of Religions 3/1: 135-167.

Bhardwaj, Surinder Mohan

- 1973 *Hindu places of pilgrimage in India (a study in cultural
geography)*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Blackburn, Stuart H.

- 1985 Death and deification: folk cults in Hinduism.
History of Religions 24/3: 255-274.

Boissevain, Jeremy

- 1977 When the saints go marching out: reflections on the
decline of patronage in Malta. In *Patrons and clients in
Mediterranean societies*. Edited by E. Gellner and J.
Waterbury, pp. 81-96. London: Duckworth.

Boucher, John J.

- 1994 Mary's appearances: sorting good fruit from bad.
Catholic update, C0594, May 1994.
Cincinnati: St. Anthony Messenger Press.

Brown, R. E., K. P. Donfried, J. A. Fitzmyer, J. Reumann, eds.

- 1981 *Mary in the New Testament* (A collaborative assessment by
Protestant and Roman Catholic scholars).
London: Fortress Press.

Brubaker, Richard Lee

- 1977 Lustful woman, chaste wife, ambivalent goddess:
a south Indian myth. *Anima* 3/2: 59-62.

Caminatha Aiyar, U. V.

1955 *Cilappatikaram*. (6th ed.) Madras.

1956 *Manimekalai*. (5th ed.) Madras.

Carroll, Michael P.

1992 *Madonnas that maim: popular Catholicism in Italy since the fifteenth century*.

Baltimore; London: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

Catechism of the Catholic Church.

1994 Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press.

Catholic directory of India.

1993 New Delhi: Catholic Bishops Conference of India.

Christian, William A., Jr.

1972 *Person and God in a Spanish valley*.

Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.

1981a *Apparitions in late medieval and renaissance Spain*.

Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.

1981b *Local religion in sixteenth-century Spain*.

Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.

1982 Provoked religious weeping in early modern Spain. In

Religious organization and religious experience.

Edited by John Davis, pp. 97-114. London: Academic Press.

1984 Religious apparitions and the cold war in southern

Europe. In *Religion, power and protest in local communities: The northern shore of the Mediterranean*.

Edited by Eric R. Wolf, pp. 238-275.

Berlin; New York: Mouton.

1987 Tapping and defining new power: the first month of visions at Ezquioga, July, 1931.

American ethnologist 14/1: 140-166.

1992 *Moving crucifixes in modern Spain*.

Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.

Claus, Peter J.

1973 Possession, protection and punishment as attributes of dieties in a south Indian village.

Man in India 53/3: 231-242.

1979 Spirit possession and spirit mediumship from the perspective of Tulu oral traditions.

Culture, medicine and psychiatry 3: 29-52.

Clifford, James

1986 On ethnographic allegory. In *Writing culture: the poetics and politics of ethnography*. Edited by James Clifford and George E. Marcus, pp. 98-121. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press.

- 1988 *The predicament of culture: twentieth-century ethnography, literature, and art.*
Cambridge, Mass.; London: Harvard University Press.
- Clifford, James and George E. Marcus, eds.
1986 *Writing culture: the poetics and politics of ethnography.*
Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press.
- Cohen, A. P.
1985 *The symbolic construction of community.*
Chichester: Ellis Horwood Limited, Publishers, and London; New York: Tavistock Publications.
- Coleman, John and Gregory Baum
1983 *New religious movements.*
Concilium: Religion in the Eighties.
Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark Ltd. & New York: Seabury Press.
- Comacuntaran, Po. Ve.
1977 *Cilappatikaram.* (Three vols., 1977, 1975, 1976)
Cennai [Madras]: The South India Saiva Siddhanta Works Publishing Society, Tinnevely, Ltd.
- Crapanzano, Vincent and Garrison Vivian, eds.
1977 *Case studies in spirit possession.*
New York: John Wiley and Sons.
- Csordas, Thomas J.
1990 Embodiment as a paradigm for anthropology.
Ethos 18/1: 5-47.
- Cucchiari, Salvatore
1988 'Adapted for heaven': conversion and culture in western Sicily. *American ethnologist* 17.3: 417-441.
- Daniel, Sheryl B.
1980 Marriage in Tamil culture: the problem of conflicting "models". in *The powers of Tamil women.*
Edited by Susan S. Wadley, pp. 61-92.
Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University,
- Danielou, Alain
1961 *Prince Ilango Adigal: le roman de l'anneau (Shilappadikaram)* Paris: Gallimard.
1965 *The Shilappadikaram (The ankle bracelet)*
London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd.

- David, C. R. W.
1983 *Cinema as medium of communication in Tamil Nadu*.
Madras: The Christian Literature Society.
- Davies, J. G.
1988 *Pilgrimage yesterday and today: why? where? how?*
London: SCM Press.
- Davis, John, ed.
1982 *Religious organization and religious experience*.
London: Academic Press.
- Davis, Natalie Z.
1982 From 'popular religion' to religious cultures. In
Reformation Europe: a guide to research.
Edited by Steven Ozment, pp. 321-341).
St. Louis: Center for Reformation Research.
- Deshpande, N. A., trans.
1988 *The Padma Purana*, Part 1.
Ancient Indian Tradition and Mythology [series], Vol. 39.
Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas.
- Devapoopathy Nadarajah
1969 The womanly ideal. In *Women in Tamil society: the
classical period*, pp. 9-25.
Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya,
- Diehl, Carl Gustav
1986 Human reaction to divine identity in Tamilnadu. In
South Asian religion and society. Edited by
Asko Parpola and Bent Smidt Hansen, pp. 108-120.
New Delhi: K. K. Agencies (P) Ltd.
- Directory of the diocese of Thanjavur*
1993 Thanjavur: Diocesan Office, Bishop's House.
- Di Tota, Mia
1981 Saint cults and political alignments in southern Italy.
Dialectical anthropology 5: 317-329.
- Downs, Frederick S.
1992 *History of Christianity in India*. Vol. V, Part 5: *North
east India in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries*.
Bangalore: The Church History Association of India.
- D'Souza, Herman
1972 *In the steps of St. Thomas*. [3rd ed.]
Madras: Diocesan Press (Madras-Mylapore).

Dumont, Louis

- 1957 *Hierarchy and marriage alliance in south Indian kinship*. London: Occasional papers of the Royal Anthropological Institute, no. 12.
- 1983 *Affinity as a value: marriage alliance in south India, with comparative essays on Australia*. Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press.
- 1986 *A south Indian subcaste: social organization and religion of the Pramalai Kallar*. (Une sous-caste de l'Inde du Sud. Translated by M. Moffatt, L. Morton, A. Morton; edited by M. Moffat.) Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Eade, John

- 1991 Order and power at Lourdes: lay helpers and the organization of a pilgrimage shrine. In *Contesting the sacred: the anthropology of Christian pilgrimage*. Edited by John Eade and Michael Sallnow, pp. 51-76. London, New York: Routledge.

Eade, John and Michael J. Sallnow

- 1991 Introduction. In *Contesting the sacred: the anthropology of Christian pilgrimage*. Edited by John Eade and Michael Sallnow, pp. 1-29. London, New York: Routledge.

Egnor, Margaret

- 1980 On the meaning of sakti to women in Tamil Nadu. In *The powers of Tamil women*. Edited by Susan S. Wadley, pp. 1-34. Syracuse, N.Y.: Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, Syracuse University.

Elmore, Wilber Theodore

- 1925 *Dravidian gods in modern Hinduism: a study of the local and village deities of southern India*. Madras: The Christian Literature Society for India.

Erndl, Kathleen M.

- 1989 Rapist or bodyguard, demon or devotee? Images of Bhairava in the mythology and cult of Vaisno Devi. In *Criminal gods and demon devotees: essays on the guardians of popular Hinduism*. Edited by Alf Hiltebeitel, pp. 239-249. Albany: State university of New York Press.
- 1993 *Victory to the mother: The Hindu goddess of northwest India in myth, ritual, and symbol*. New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Fane, Hannah

- 1975 The female element in Indian culture. *Asian folklore studies* 34/1: 51-112.

Fernandez, James

- 1974 The mission of metaphor in expressive culture.
Current anthropology 15/2: 119-145.

Flannery, Austin, ed.

- 1989 *Vatican Council II: the conciliar and post conciliar documents* [1975]. Bombay: Saint Paul Publications.

Freed, Ruth S. and Stanley A. Freed

- 1964 Spirit possession as illness in a north Indian village.
Ethnology 3/2: 152-171.

Fuller, Christopher J.

- 1984 *Servants of the goddess: the priests of a south Indian temple*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Gabriel, S. L., I. Arokiasamy, P. Xavier, D. Amudhan, A. Philomin Raj, S. Kulandainathan, compilers

- 1987 *The history of the shrine basilica of Our Lady of Health Vailankanni (The Lourdes of the east)*. 15th revised edition. Imprimatur: Thanjavur 6-6-1987, P. Arokiaswamy, Archbishop-Bishop of Thanjavur. [No further publication data are given.]
1989 *The history of the shrine basilica of Our Lady of Health Vailankanni (The Lourdes of the east)*. 16th revised edition. Printed by Jeyakar Offset Printers, Sivakasi. [No further publication data are given.]

Gatwood, Lynn E.

- 1985 *Devi and the spouse goddess: women, sexuality, and marriage in India*. New Delhi: Manohar.

Geertz, Clifford

- 1973 *The interpretation of cultures*. New York: Basic Books.

Gennep, Arnold van

- 1960 *Rites of passage*. [1909]
London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Gnanapragasam, V. M.

- 1988 Beschi and inculturation. In *Jesuit presence in Indian history*. Edited by Anand Amaladass, pp. 171-181.
Anand, Gujarat: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash.

Gold, Ann Grodzins

- 1988a Spirit possession perceived and performed in rural Rajasthan. *Contributions to Indian sociology* (n.s.) 22/1: 35-63.
1988b *Fruitful journeys: the ways of Rajasthani pilgrims*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Gough, Kathleen

- 1973 *Harijans in Thanjavur*. In *Imperialism and revolution in south Asia*. Edited by Kathleen Gough and Hari P. Sharma, pp. 222-245. New York, London: Monthly Review Press.

Gough, Kathleen and Hari P. Sharma, eds.

- 1973 *Imperialism and revolution in south Asia*. New York, London: Monthly Review Press.

Grafe, Hugald

- 1990 *History of Christianity in India*, Vol. 4, Part 2.: *Tamilnadu in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries*. Bangalore: Church History Association of India.

Green, Thomas H., sj

- 1984 *Weeds among the wheat. Discernment: where prayer and action meet*. Manila: Ave Maria Press.

Guerin, Michelle, osu

- 1989 *Cosmic mother of the Aztecs: Our Lady of Guadalupe*. *Anima* 15/2: 115-122.

Hambye, E. R., sj

- 1983 *Father Achilles Meersman, O.F.M., 1901-1982 [Obituary]*, *Indian church history review* 17/1: 73-75.

Harman, William P.

- 1989 *The sacred marriage of a Hindu goddess*. Bloomington, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

Harper, Edward B., ed.

- 1964 *Religion in south Asia*. Seattle: University of Washington Press.

Hart, George L.

- 1979 *Poets of the Tamil anthologies: ancient poems of love and war*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.

Hemingway, F. R.

- 1906 *Tanjore*. (Madras District Gazetteers) Madras: Government Press.

Hiltebeitel, Alf

- 1988 *The cult of Draupadi. Mythologies: from Gingee to Kuruksetra*. Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press.

Houtart Francois

- 1974 *Religion and ideology in Sri Lanka*. Bangalore: T.P.I., St. Peter's Seminary.

- Israel, Milton and N. K. Wagle, eds.
1993 *Ethnicity, identity, migration: the south asian context*. South Asian Studies Papers, no.6. Toronto: University of Toronto Centre for South Asian Studies.
- Janaki, S. S.
1988 *Dhvaja-stambha (Critical account of its structural and ritualistic details)*. Madras: The Kuppuswami Sastri Research Institute.
- Jeyechandrun, A. V.
1985 *The Madurai temple complex (with special reference to literature and legends)*. Madurai: KMadurai Kamaraj University.
- Jha, Makhan
1985 *Dimensions of pilgrimage: an anthropological appraisal*. New Delhi: Inter-India Publications.
- John Paul II
1988 Vailankanni in south India: 'the Lourdes of the orient'. *The living word*. 94/6 (Nov.-Dec.): 399-400. Alwaye, Kerala: Pontifical Institute of Theology and Philosophy.
- Kailasapathy, K.
1968 *Tamil heroic poetry*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Kakar, Sudhir
1982 *Shamans, mystics and doctors: a psychological inquiry into India and its healing traditions*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Kapferer, Bruce
1983 *A celebration of demons: exorcism and the aesthetics of healing in Sri Lanka*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Karttunen, Klaus
1986 On the contacts of south India with the Western world in ancient times, and the mission of the Apostle Thomas. In *South Asian religion and society*. Edited by Asko Parpola and Bent Smidt Hansen, pp. 189-204. New Delhi: K. K. Agencies (P) Ltd.
- Kennedy, T.
1993 "Apparitions en Inde." Translated by Rene Laurentin. *Chrétiens magazine* No. 57, (15 January, 1993): 16-17.

Kennerley, K. Virginia

- 1981 The use of indigenous sacred literature and theological concept in Christian eucharistic liturgy in India.
Studia liturgica 19/2: 143-161.

Kinsley, David

- 1986 *Hindu Goddesses: visions of the divine feminine in the Hindu religious tradition*.
Berkeley: University of California Press.

Kjaerholm, Lars

- 1986 Myth, pilgrimage and fascination in the Aiyappa cult: a view from fieldwork in Tamilnadu.
In *South Asian religion and society*. Edited by Asko Parpola and Bent Smidt Hansen, pp. 121-161.
New Delhi: K. K. Agencies (P) Ltd.

Krishnaswami Aiyangar, S.

- 1928 *Manimekhalai in its historical setting*.
London: Luzac & Co.

Laurentin, Rene

- 1967 Mary in the new age. *The Marian Era: world annual of the queen of the universe* 8: 27-29, 78-84.
Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press.

Lewis, I. M.

- 1971 *Ecstatic religion: an anthropological study of spirit possession and shamanism*.
New York: John Wiley and Sons.

Linga Purana, Part 1.

- 1973 Ancient Indian tradition and mythology [series], Vol. 5.
(Translated by a board of scholars.)
Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass

Mandelbaum, David G.

- 1966 Transcendental and pragmatic aspects of religion.
American anthropologist 68: 1174-1185.

Marcus, George and Michael Fischer

- 1986 *Anthropology as cultural critique*.
Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Mathew, G.

- 1982 Politicisation of religion in Tamil Nadu (Parts 1 and 2).
Economic and political weekly 17: 1027-34, 1068-72.

McKevitt, Christopher

- 1991 San Giovanni Rotondo and the shrine of Padre Pio. In *Contesting the sacred: the anthropology of Christian pilgrimage*. Edited by John Eade and Michael Sallnow, pp. 77-97. London, New York: Routledge.

Meersman, Achilles, ofm

- 1962a *The Franciscans in Tamilnad*. Schoneck-Beckenried, Switzerland: Nouvelle revue de science missionnaire (Neue zeitschrift fur missionswissenschaft) Supplementa XII.
- 1962b The origin of the shrine and cult of Our Lady at Vailanganni, *Indian ecclesiastical studies*, 1: 65-76. Source: Sacred Heart Seminary, Poonamallee.
- 1971 *The ancient Franciscan provinces in India, 1500-1835*. Bangalore: Christian Literature Society Press. Source: Madurai Province Jesuit Archives, Sacred Heart College, Shembaganur, Kodaikanal - 624 104.
- 1972 *Annual reports of the Portuguese Franciscans in India 1713-1833*, Lisbon. First published in *Studia* (Lisbon), No. 25 (1968), 159 ff. Cited in Meersman 1974: 467-468.
- 1974 *Documents pertaining to the Franciscans in the Madurai mission and on the Coromandel coast, India, 1790-1830*. Roma: Collegio S. Bonaventura. Extractum ex Periodico Archivum Franciscanum Historicum An. 67 (1974)-68 (1975).

Menachery, George, ed.

- 1982 *The St. Thomas Christian encyclopaedia of India*, Vol. 1. Trichur: The St. Thomas Christian Encyclopaedia of India.

Meyer, Eveline

- 1986 *Ankalaparamecuvvari: a goddess of Tamilnadu, her myths and cult*. Stuttgart: Steiner Verlag Wiesbaden GMBH.

Moffat, Michael

- 1979 *An untouchable community in south India. Structure and consensus*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Moorthy, K. K.

- 1986 *The mother of Melmaruvathur and her miracles*. Tirupati: Tirupati Tirumalai Devasthanam.

Moreno, Manuel

- 1985 God's forceful call: possession as a divine strategy. In *Gods of flesh/gods of stone: the embodiment of divinity in India*. Edited by Joanne Punzo Waghorne and Norman Cutler, pp. 103-120. Chambersburg: Anima Press.

Morinis, Alan

- 1984 *Pilgrimage in the Hindu tradition: a case study of West Bengal*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Morinis, Alan, ed.

- 1991 *Sacred journeys: the anthropology of pilgrimage*.
(Contributions to the study of anthropology, no. 7.)
Westport, Conn./London: Greenwood Press.

Mosse, C. D. F.

- 1994 Idioms of subordination and styles of protest among
Christian and Hindu Harijan castes in Tamil Nadu.
Contributions to Indian sociology (n.s.) 28/1: 67-106

Motha Vaz, M.

- 1920 *Monograph of Our Lady of Health of Vailankanni*.
(Place of publication and publisher unknown.)
Cited in *The shrine of Our Lady of Vailankanni*.
[1st edition, 1933: 9; 4th edition, 1951: 8]
by S.R. Santos, Tanjore: Don Bosco Press.

Mundadan, A. Mathias

- 1984 *Indian Christians: search for identity and struggle for autonomy*. Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications.
1989 *History of Christianity in India*. Vol. 1. *From the beginning up to the middle of the sixteenth century*.
Bangalore: Church History Association of India.

Murton, Brian J.

- 1975 Geography and the study of south India. In *Essays on south India*. Edited by Burton Stein, pp.92-120.
New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd.

Nevett, Albert M., sj

- 1980 *John de Britto and his times*.
Anand, Gujarat: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash.

Nilakanta Sastri, K.A.

- 1975 *The Cholas*. [1955] Madras: Madras University.
1976 *A History of south India from prehistoric times to the fall of Vijayanagar*. [1955]
Madras: Oxford University Press.

Nolan, Mary Lee and Sidney Nolan

- 1989 *Christian pilgrimage in modern western Europe*.
Chapel Hill, London: University of North Carolina Press.

New revised standard version Bible: Catholic edition.

- 1993 Nashville: Catholic Bible Press.

Obeyesekere, Gananath

- 1981 *Medusa's hair: an essay on personal symbols and religious experience*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

O'Carroll, Michael, C.S.Sp.

- 1982 *Theotokos: a theological encyclopedia of the Blessed Virgin Mary*. Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier, Inc.

Oddie, G. A.

- 1981 Christianity in the Hindu crucible: continuity and change in the Kaveri delta, 1850-1900.
Indian church history review 15/1: 48-72.

Ojha, Catherine

- 1981 Feminine asceticism in Hinduism: its tradition and present condition. *Man in India* 61/3: 254-285.

Osborne, Arthur

- 1970 *Ramana Maharshi and the path of self-knowledge*. New York: S. Weisner.

Ozment, Steven, ed.

- 1982 *Reformation Europe: a guide to research*. St. Louis: Center for Reformation Research.

Pandian, Jacob

- 1991 *Culture, religion, and the sacred self: a critical introduction to the anthropological study of religion*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall.

Parpola, Asko and Bent Smidt Hansen, eds.

- 1986 *South Asian religion and society*. (Studies on Asian topics No.11.) New Delhi: D. K. Agencies (P) Ltd.

Parthasarthy, R.

- 1992 *The Cilappatikaram of Ilanko Atikal: an epic of south India*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Perry, Nicholas and Loreto Echeverria

- 1988 *Under the heel of Mary*. London; New York: Routledge.

Pfaffenberger, Bryan

- 1979 The Kataragama pilgrimage: Hindu-Buddhist interaction and its significance in Sri Lanka's polyethnic social system. *Journal of Asian studies* 38/2: 253-270.
1982 *Caste in Tamil culture: the religious foundations of sudra domination in Tamil Sri Lanka*. Syracuse NY: Syracuse University.

Pocock, D. F.

- 1973 *Mind, body and wealth: a study of belief and practice in an Indian village*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Pope, B. C.

- 1985 *Immaculate and powerful: the Marian revival in the nineteenth century*. In *Immaculate and powerful: the female in sacred image and social reality*. Edited by C. N. Atkinson, C. H. Buchanan and M. R. Miles, pp. 173-200. Boston: Beacon Press.

Puthanangady, Paul, sdb, ed.

- 1986 *Popular devotions in India: research seminar*. Bangalore: National Biblical, Catechetical & Liturgical Centre (N.B.C.L.C.).

Rabinow, Paul

- 1986 *Representations are social facts: modernity and post-modernity in anthropology*. In *Writing culture: the poetics and politics of ethnography*. Edited by James Clifford and George E. Marcus, pp. 234-261. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Rajam, V. S.

- 1986 *Ananku: a notion semantically reduced to signify female sacred power*. *Journal of the American oriental society* 106/2: 257-272.

Ramachandra Dikshitar, V. R., trans.

- 1978 *The Cilappatikaram*, 2nd ed. (1st ed. 1939) Madras: The South India Saiva Siddhanta Works Publishing Society, Tinnevely, Limited.

Ramachandra Rao, S. D.

- 1980 *The folk origins of Indian temples*. Bangalore: IBH Prakashana.

Ramanujan, A. K., trans.

- 1967 *The interior landscape: love poems from a classical Tamil anthology*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
1985 *Poems of love and war: from the Eight Anthologies and the Ten Long Poems of classical Tamil*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Reynolds, Holly Baker

- 1980 *The auspicious married woman*. In *The powers of Tamil women*. Edited by Susan S. Wadley, pp. 35-60. Foreign and Comparative Studies/South Asian Series, No. 6. Syracuse N.Y.: Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs.

Roche, Patrick A.

- 1984 *Fishermen of the Coromandel: a social study of the Paravas of the Coromandel*. New Delhi: Manohar.

Ryan, Maurice

- 1993 Fatima, Lourdes and Medjugorje: a challenge for religious educators. *Religious education* 88/4: 564-575.

Sahi, Jyoti

- 1977 Thoughts on village religion and culture. *Vidyajyoti* 61/2 (Feb 77): 68-73.

Saldanha, Julian

- 1987 *Inculturation*. Bangalore: St. Paul Publications.
1988 *Patterns of evangelisation in mission history*. Bombay: St. Paul Publications.

Sallnow, Michael

- 1981 *Communitas reconsidered: the sociology of Andean pilgrimage*. *Man* (n.s.) 16/2: 163-182.

Santos, S. R., Fr.

- 1933 *The shrine of Our Lady of Vailankanni*. [1st edition] Tanjore: Don Bosco Press. Source: Madurai Province Jesuit Archives, Sacred Heart College, Shembaganur, Kodaikanal.
1951 *The shrine of Our Lady of Vailankanni*, 4th edition. Tanjore: Don Bosco Press. Source: Bishop S. L. Gabriel, Tirucchirappalli.
1980 *The shrine basilica of Our Lady of Health Vailankanni*, [Cover title: *Our Lady of Health, Vailankanni - shrine history*.] Revised and enlarged 11th edition. Imprimatur: Tanjore, 20-9-1965, R.A. Sundaram, Bishop of Thanjavur. Thanjavur: Don Bosco Press.

Saraswati, Baidyanath

- 1985 *Traditions of tirthas in India: the anthropology of Hindu pilgrimage*. Varanasi: N.K. Bose Memorial Foundation.

Sax, William S.

- 1990 Village daughter, village goddess: residence, gender, and politics in a Himalayan pilgrimage. *American ethnologist* 17/3: 491-512

Schulman, David Dean

- 1976 The murderous bride: Tamil versions of the myth of Devi and the buffalo-demon. *History of Religions* 16/2: 257-263.
1980 *Tamil temple myths: sacrifice and divine marriage in the south Indian Saiva tradition*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Sekar, Radhika

- 1992 *The Sabarimalai pilgrimage and Ayyappan cultus.*
Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.

Shiels, W. J., ed.

- 1982 *The church and healing.* Oxford: Blackwell.

Siva Purana, Parts 1 and 4

- 1970 Ancient Indian tradition and mythology [series],
Vols. 1 and 4. (Translated by a board of scholars.)
Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.

Spencer, George W.

- 1970 The sacred geography of the Tamil Shaivite hymns.
Numen 17: 232-244.

Srikant

- 1987 *Power in temples: a new look through modern science.*
Payyanur, Kerala: Integral Books.

Srinivasa Aiyangar, P. T.

- 1929 *History of the Tamils from the earliest times to 600 A.D.*
Madras.

Stanley, John M.

- 1988 Gods, ghosts, and possession. In *The experience of Hinduism.* Edited by Eleanor Zelliot and Maxine Berntsen, pp. 26-59. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Stark, Rodney and William Simms Bainbridge,

- 1978 Of churches, sects and cults: preliminary concepts for a theory of religious movements.
Journal for the scientific study of religion 18/2: 117-131.

Steen, Ann-Belinda

- 1986 The Hindu jajmani system - economy or religion? An outline of different theories and models. In *South asian religion and society.* Edited by Asko Parpola and Bent Smidt Hansen, pp. 30-41. New Delhi: D. K. Agencies (P) Ltd.

Stein, Burton

- 1975 The state and the agrarian order in medieval south India: a historiographical critique. In *Essays on south India.* Edited by Burton Stein, pp. 64-91. New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House Pvt Ltd.
1980 *Peasant state and society in medieval south India.* Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Stirrat, Richard L.

- 1977 Demonic possession in Roman Catholic Sri Lanka. *Journal of Anthropological research* 33: 133-157.
- 1981 The shrine of St. Sebastian at Mirisgama: an aspect of the cult of the saints in Catholic Sri Lanka. *Man* 16: 183-200.
- 1982 Shrines, pilgrimages and miraculous powers in Roman Catholic Sri Lanka. In *The church and healing*. Edited by W. J. Shiels, pp. 385-413. Oxford: Blackwell.
- 1991 Place and person in Sinhala Catholic pilgrimage. In *Contesting the sacred: the anthropology of Christian pilgrimage*. Edited by John Eade and Michael Sallnow, pp. 122-136. London, New York: Routledge.
- 1992 *Power and religiosity in a post-colonial setting: Sinhala Catholics in contemporary Sri Lanka*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Subramanyam, Ka. Naa.

- 1970 *The Catholic community in India*. Madras; Bombay; Calcutta: Macmillan and Company, Ltd.

Swaminathan, A.

- 1981 Temple lands and society (with special reference to Chola period). *Journal of Tamil studies* No. 20: 18-26.

Tambasco, Anthony J.

- 1984 *What are they saying about Mary?* Ramsey N.J.: Paulist Press.

Tamil lexicon.

- 1982 Madras: University of Madras [7 vols].

Taylor, William B.

- 1987 The Virgin of Gualdalupe in New Spain: an inquiry into the social history of Marian devotion. *American ethnologist* 14/1: 9-33.

Thani Nayagam, X. S.

- 1970 *Tamil culture and civilization. Readings: the classical period*. New York: Asia Publishing House.

Thekkadath, Joseph

- 1988 *History of Christianity in India. Vol. 2: From the middle of the sixteenth century to the end of the seventeenth century (1542-1700)*. Bangalore: Church History Association of India.

Thani Nayagam, X. S.

- 1970 *Tamil culture and civilization. Readings: The classical period*. New York: Asia Publishing House.

- Thomas, P.
1981 *Churches in India*.
New Delhi: Publications Division, Ministry of Information
and Broadcasting, Government of India.
- Thompson, Stith
1955 *Motif-index of folk literature*.
-58 Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Thompson, Stith and Jonas Balys
1958 *The oral tales of India*.
Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press.
- Thurston, Edgar
1909 Kallan. In *Castes and tribes of southern India*,
Vol. III - K, pp. 53-91. Madras: Government Press.
- Trinidade, Paulo da, ofm
1635 *Conquista spiritual do oriente*.
MS. Vatican Library, Vol. 3, Ch. 68. Fol. 973. In
The origin of the shrine and cult of Our Lady at
Vailanganni, by Achilles Meersman.
Indian ecclesiastical studies, 1 (1962b): 65-76.
- Turner, Victor
1974 *Dramas, fields, and metaphors: symbolic action in human
society*. Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press.
1979 *Process, performance and pilgrimage: a study in compara-
tive symbology*. New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company.
- Turner, Victor and Edith Turner
1978 *Image and pilgrimage in Christian culture:
anthropological perspectives*.
New York: Columbia University Press.
- Vaidyanathan, K. R.
1983 *Pilgrimage to Sabari*. (2nd ed.)
Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan.
- Veer, Peter van der
1988 *Gods on earth: the management of religious experience
and identity in a north Indian pilgrimage centre*.
London: The Athlone Press.
- Venkitasubramonia Iyer, trans.
1985 *Varaha Purana*, Part 1. Ancient Indian tradition and
mythology [series], Vol. 31. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.

- Vinson, Julien
1969 *Legendes bouddhistes et d'jainas*. [1900]
Paris: G.-P. Maisonneuve & Larose.
- Wadley, Susan Snow
1976 The spirit "rides" or the spirit "comes": possession in a north Indian village. In *The realm of the extra-human: agents and audiences*. Edited by Agehananda Bharati, pp. 233-252. The Hague: Mouton.
- Wadley, Susan Snow
1980 *The powers of Tamil women*. Syracuse, N.Y.: Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, Syracuse University.
- Waghorne, Joanne Punzo and Norman Cutler, eds.
1985 *Gods of flesh/gods of stone: the embodiment of divinity in India*. Chambersburg, PA: Anima Press.
- Warner, Marina
1983 *Alone of all her sex: the myth and the cult of the Virgin Mary*. New York: Vintage Books [1976].
- Watanabe, John M.
1990 From saints to shibboleths: image, structure, and identity in Maya religious syncretism.
American ethnologist 17/1: 131-150.
- Watson, Simone, osb
1964 *The cult of Our Lady of Guadalupe: a historical study*. Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press.
- Wester, Nils
1986 Bene Israel - a Jewish community in India. In *South Asian religion and society*. Edited by Asko Parpola and Bent Smidt Hansen, pp. 205-222.
New Delhi: D. K. Agencies (P) Ltd.
- Whitehead, Henry
1921 *The village gods of south India*. (2nd ed.)
Calcutta: Association Press [Y.M.C.A.]
- Williams, Michael A., ed.
1982 Charisma and sacred biography.
Journal of the American academy of religion thematic studies 48/3-4. American Academy of Religion.
- Wilson, Bryan R.
1973 *Magic and the millennium: a sociological study of religious movements of protest among tribal and third-world peoples*. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers.

Wolf, Eric R.

- 1958 *The Virgin of Guadalupe: a Mexican national symbol.*
Journal of American folklore 71: 34-39.

Wolf, Eric R., ed.

- 1984 *Religion, power and protest in local communities: the northern shore of the Mediterranean.*
Berlin; New York: Mouton.
1991 *Religious regimes and state-formation: perspectives from European ethnology.*
Albany N.Y.: State University of New York.

Wood, Peter W.

- 1991 *Pilgrimage and heresy: the transformation of faith at a shrine in Wisconsin.* In *Sacred journeys: the anthropology of pilgrimage.* Edited by Alan Morinis, pp. 115-134.
Westport, Conn; London: Greenwood Press.

Yocum Glen E.

- 1982 *An-keliya: a literary-historical approach.*
In *Religious festivals in south India and Sri Lanka.*
Edited by Guy R. Welbon and Glenn E. Yocum, pp. 312-329.
New Delhi: Manohar.

Younger, Paul

- 1980 *A temple festival of Mariyamman.*
The journal of the American academy of religion, 48/4
(Dec. 1980): 493-517).
1983 *Popular religion and politics in south India: the annual visit of the goddess Mariyamman to Srirankam.*
Religion and society, 30/1 (March 1983): 18-27).
1991 *Velankanni calling: Hindu patterns of pilgrimage at a Christian shrine.* In *Sacred Journeys: the anthropology of pilgrimage.* Edited by Alan Morinis, pp. 89-99.
(Contributions to the Study of Anthropology, Number 7.)
Westport, Conn./London: Greenwood Press.

Ziegenbalg, Bartholomaeus

- 1869 *Genealogy of the south Indian gods* [1713]. Translated by
G.J. Metzger. Madras: Higginbotham and Co.

Zimdars-Swartz, Sandra L.

- 1991 *Encountering Mary: visions of Mary from La Salette to Medjugorje.* New York: Avon Books.

Zvelebil, Kamil

- 1973 *The smile of Murugan; on Tamil literature in south India.*
Leiden: E. J. Brill.

Interviews and Personal Communications

Albudha Prakasam

1993.06.21 - Interview at Tanjavur.

Amarajoti

1993.06.25 - Interview at Vadiyakkadu.

Antoniyamma

1991.12.30 - Interview at Vadiyakkadu.

Arockiasamy, A., Fr.

1994.08.17 - Correspondence from Tanjavur.

Arokkiyadas

1993.06.21 - Interview at Tanjavur.

Arokkiyasami, M. A.

Numerous personal communications.

Arokkiyasamy, V. S.

1992.08.29-30-31

1992.09.01-02 - Interviews at Velanganni.

Arulappa, P. T., Msgr.

1992.01.19 - Interview at Madras.

Balraj, A.

1993.06.21 - Interview at Tanjavur.

Baskaran, B.

1993.06.25 - Interview at Orattur.

David, Robert

1993.07.13 - Interview at Madras.

Deva Doss, N. Arul, Fr.

1992.07.17 - Interview at Madras.

Elsamma

1993.06.17 - Interview at Vadiyakkadu.

"Francis", sj, Fr. [pseudonym]

1993.07.11 - Interview at Madras.

Francis Regis

1993.06.17 - Interview at Vadiyakkadu.

George Sebastian, Fr.

1993.06.17 - Interview at Vadiyakkadu.

"Jacinta", Sr. [pseudonym]

1992.08.16 - Interview at Pabanasam.

1993.06.17 - Interview at Vadiyakkadu.

John Peter, A. S., Fr.

1993.07.03 - Interview at Velanganni.

Joseph, A.

1993.07.13 - Interview at Velanganni.

Joseph Selvaraj, A., Fr.

1993.07.01 - Interview at Velanganni.

Josephine Thomas

1991.12.18 - Typescript received 1993.06.27 at Pabanasam.

1992.08.16 - Interview at Pabanasam.

1993.06.17 - Interview at Vadiyakkadu.

1993.06.27 - Interview at Pabanasam.

1993.06.27 - Typescript of *Amma's* Mass received at Pabanasam.

Kanakambujam P.

1993.06.25 - Interview at Orattur.

Kannaiyan, C. S.

1991.12.30 - Interview at Velanganni.

Kennedy, Thomas

1993.06.17 - Interview at Vadiyakkadu.

"Kulandairaj", sj, Fr. [pseudonym]

1992.04.08-09 - Interviews at Madras.

1993.06.17 - Interview at Vadiyakkadu.

1994.09.15 - Correspondence from Madras.

Lobo, Margaret

1993.06.17 - Interview at Vadiyakkadu.

Maliekal, George, Fr.

1992.08.27 - Interview at Velanganni

Maria Arokiam, A. S., Fr.

1993.06.18 - Interview at Mandalakkottai.

Maryamma

1992.03.26 - Interview at Vadiyakkadu

1993.06.14 - Interview at Vadiyakkadu.

Manoharan, M.

1993.07.02 - Interview at Velanganni.

Narayan

1991.08.13 - Interview at Velanganni.

Parameswary, A.

1993.06.16 - Interview at Vadiyakkadu.

1993.09.02 - Correspondence from Pattukkottai.

"Peter", Fr. [pseudonym]

1993.06.17 - Interview at Vadiyakkadu.

Peter of Walsingham, Brother

1993.04.06 - Correspondence from Walsingham, England.

"Prakash", Fr. [pseudonym]

1993.06.13 - Interview at Vadiyakkadu.

1993.07.10 - Interview at Punamalli.

Raja, S., Dr.

1993.06.25 - Interview at Tanjavur.

Ramamani Pakkirisami

1993.07.07 - Interview at Tanjavur.

Rayyan, S. A.

1993.06.30 - Interview at Velanganni.

Rosemary Packiam

1993.06.21 - Interview at Tanjavur.

Rowe, Anthony Thomas

1991.08.21 - Interview at Velanganni.

Sammanasu, M. M., Fr.

1993.07.02 - Interview at Velanganni.

Santhanasamy, R., Fr.

1993.06.23-24 - Interviews at Tanjavur.

Savarimuthu, V., Fr.

1991.11.07 - Interview at Velanganni.

1994.01.21 - Correspondence from Tanjavur.

Sebastian Raj

1993.06.21 - Interview at Tanjavur.

Vaz, Thomas, Msgr.

1993.06.22 - Interview at Tanjavur.

Victor Lawrence Parthy

1993.07.13 - Interview at Madras.

Vincent, A. J.
1993.07.01 - Interview at Velanganni.

William Patrick
1993.06.30 - Interview at Velanganni.

Wilson Paul, Fr.
1993.07.06 - Interview at Velanganni.

Xavier, A., Fr.
1992.08.29 - Interview at Velanganni.

	Gr P	Total Gr P	# units
CHEM 1E03	4	12	3
PH	5	15	3
CALC 1N03	2	6	3
M L G 1B3	1	4	4
ENG 1C4	6	24	8
PHY 1D3	7	21	3
Electives 6	8	48	6
		<u>130</u>	<u>33</u>