

**KALKI'S AVATARS:
WRITING NATION, HISTORY, REGION, AND CULTURE IN THE TAMIL
PUBLIC SPHERE**

DISSERTATION

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By

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ABSTRACT

Challenging the English-only bias in postcolonial theory and literary criticism, this dissertation investigates the role of the twentieth-century Tamil historical romance in the formation of Indian and Tamil identity in the colonial period. I argue that Tamil Indian writer-nationalist Kalki Ra. Krsnamurti's (1899-1954) 1944 *Civakamiyin Capatam* (Civakami's Vow)—chronicling the ill-fated wartime romance of Pallava king Narasimhavarman (630-668 CE) and fictional court dancer Civakami against the backdrop of the seventh-century Pallava-Chalukya wars—exemplifies a distinct genre of interventionist literature in the Indian subcontinent.

In Kalki's hands, the vernacular novel became a means by which to infiltrate the colonial imaginary and, at the same time, to envision a Tamil India untainted by colonial presence. Charting the generic transformation of the historical romance in the Tamil instance, my study provides 1) a refutation of the inflationary and overweening claims made in postcolonial studies about South Asian nationalism, 2) a questioning of naïve binaries such as local and global, cosmopolitan and vernacular, universal and particular, traditional and modern, in examining the colonial/postcolonial transaction, and 3) a case for a less grandiose and more carefully historicized account of bourgeois nationalism than has previously been provided by postcolonial critics, accounting for its complicities with

and resistances to discourses of nation, region, caste, and gender in the late colonial context. Looking out from a specific historical, political, linguistic, and cultural location, I hope to generate ethical, context-sensitive analyses of South Asian nationalisms (in this study's case, Tamil) as persisting and protean global formations sensitive to local and global networks of influence.

Dedicated to my great-grandmother

Rukmini Krishnamurti

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VITA

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: THE CASE FOR KALKI

It seems apt to begin a dissertation in English advocating a comparatist and multilingual model for South Asian/postcolonial studies by invoking a bilingual moment in a critically acclaimed Indian English novel. In *A Strange and Sublime Address* (1991), a novel written in English by Bengali writer Amit Chaudhri, Sandeep—a young boy visiting his extended family in Calcutta one summer—overhears his uncle Chhotomama singing a Bengali verse with customary gusto in the bathroom: “*Godhulir chhaya pathe/Je gelo chini go tare*. Roughly translated,” the English-speaking narrator tells us, the verse said, “In the hour of cow dust, on the shadowy path,/ Who passed by me? I felt I knew her” (53). Chhotomama then resumes singing, rendering the verse of the immensely popular Bengali nationalist poet Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941). Again, we get the transliterated original and the English translation, accompanied by the following narration:

It was a song of praise, a prayer-song. Sandeep did not understand a single word of it, but he thought that the tune and especially the sound of the difficult words communicated to him in an obscure way, and he was aware that the repetitive sound of the language had mingled with the sound of the water falling in the bath, till they became *one glimmering sound without meaning*. Whether the bath ended first, or the song, Sandeep could not tell. *A cool spell of remote waterfall-like music was woven and broken at the same time, as if the words of the song could not*

endure existing a hundredth of a second after they had been uttered. (54, my emphasis)

Sandeep's fanciful interweaving of such sensory stimuli as Chhotomama's voice and the cascading bath-water, the coalescence of these two separate sound streams into a harmonious whole, stand testament to the power of his, and Chaudhri's, imagination. This type of finely nuanced description commingling poetry and prose, the epiphanic and the mundane, is scattered through the novel, with the third-person narrator interpolating the ethnographic and cultural context (in this case, the background and translation of the song) that renders Sandeep's imaginings intelligible to the non-Bengali reader. The effect is delightful; mood-wise, this is modernist languor—a la Joyce and Woolf—at its curious and carefully etched best.

Chaudhri's entire novel is focalized through Sandeep, a technique that allows readers to see the gritty streets and crowded homes of Calcutta (if you recall, a city famously memorialized in Dominic La Pierre's *City of Joy* for its pervasive poverty) with a degree of detachment presumably not afforded by the non-English speaking native's vision. Sandeep *is* Indian, but not a Calcutta resident. He lives in Bombay with his parents, and his ambition is to be a writer in English, something of which his Calcutta cousins are slightly in awe. Sandeep's perfectly enunciated English, his lack of familiarity with his native Bengali, his visitor status, and his otherworldly dreaminess set him apart from the other characters in the novel, so that he becomes the logical choice for the principal focalizer, the character through whom the reader glimpses the action. Chaudhri has Sandeep assume the ironic gaze of the cosmopolitan commentator taking in his somewhat provincial, lower middle-class environment with alternating fascination,

nostalgia, and amusement. It is fitting, it seems, that the language through which such a gaze would operate is English.

What, if anything, is problematic in Chaudhri's assimilation of Bengali verse in English prose, the lingua franca of the postcolonial subject in the present day, in describing a multilingual present that most definitely includes the presence of that language of India's former colonizer? In the scene just described above, Chhotomama's own obvious passion for Tagore's verse, something many Bengalis share, is neatly sidestepped in the narration, providing the fodder for a translation that moves sinuously and seamlessly into the idiom of English poetry. What follows is a lingering meditation on the boy's hastily formed (and largely uninformed) impressions of the Bengali original. Sandeep learns the meaning from Chhotomama of the compound word *godhuli* (*go*=cow, *dhuli*=dust, *godhulir*=the hour of cow-dust) from this explanation, only to form a secular documentary-type image of "slow, indolent cows" and an "expectant village" bathed in sepia twilight (53-54). Nowhere here is the intense religiosity of this image—obvious to any Hindu reader as the allusion to the Hindu god, Krsna, who typically takes the form of a playful cowherd—explored. The more specific spiritual connotations of Chhotomama's fervent singing are subsumed by Sandeep's modernist musings, and his obvious enchantment at the obscurity and repetition of the lyric.

Second, Sandeep's untutored reaction to Tagore parallels that of a non-native speaker of Bengali, the stranger among the natives confronting in his language a cultural and linguistic opacity—a language enticing in its strangeness. The novel's narration reincarnates the politely baffled though inquisitive gaze of the European colonizer faced with the incomprehensibility and mystery of the so-called Orient. It is under this gaze

that the mapping, and congruent mastery, of an outlandish, aesthetically foreign art-form can take place. Its sounds are reduced to unintelligibility, leading to a romanticized image of the union of vernacular outpouring with the primeval forces of nature.

Sandeep's flight of fancy deftly removes the possibility of emphasis on the literary particularities and resonances of Chhotomama's prayer song to instead afford yet another instance in Indian English writing of the English-speaking Indian male's alienation from his native language, society, and culture.

For many Indians educated first in "English-medium" schools in India, then moving on to higher education in elite colleges and universities at home and in the "west," Chaudhri's description of Sandeep's "not-quite-not-white"ness, his alienation from his more "provincial" extended family in India, would serve as a powerful reminder of the English-educated Indian intellectual's own struggles with identity and belonging in the postcolonial state. Many of us—who grew up in the rarified realm of privilege and access in which India's economic, social, and cultural elite operate, as the anglicized and alienated products of colonialism's culture—have experienced the same "difficulty" as Sandeep does with his native language, always-already negotiating its vagaries through the better-known and more easily navigable pathways of English. Chaudhri writes for us and our interested western counterparts, *about us*, perfecting the idiom with which to describe postcolonial estrangement from indigenous and western cultures alike. In turn, we gratefully produce the critical discourses that help legitimize his work, making the Indian English author the key representative of an authentically syncretic yet readily recognizable postcolonial literary ethos. The Indian English novel is thus firmly established as the product of both indigenous and European linguistic/cultural

inheritances, containing equal parts of the refreshingly exotic and the reassuringly familiar: a recipe guaranteed for success! And Chaudhri is not the first Indian English writer to fall into such patterns of representation.

A pivotal moment marking the cosmopolitan bias in postcolonial and South Asian literary criticism is a 1997 essay that originally appeared as the introduction to the *New Yorker's* special issue on Indian fiction (June 23 & 30, 1997). In this essay titled “Damme, This is the Oriental Scene for You”, reprinted later that year as the introduction to a fêted fiction anthology, *The Vintage Book of Indian Writing*, acclaimed novelist Salman Rushdie asserts that Indian writing in English is “a stronger and more important body of work than most of what has been produced in the 16 ‘official languages’ of India, the so-called vernacular languages” (x). Rushdie’s statement dismisses two thousand years of Indian literary history, relegates the indigenous languages of India to the status of “vernacular,” and ignores the vital relationships between postcolonial India’s now nineteen official languages. Such views on postcolonial literature persist, despite having been consistently refuted by scholars such as Gayatri Spivak, Aijaz Ahmad, and Leela Gandhi in the South Asian instance alone.¹

Following in Rushdie’s illustrious footsteps, the field of postcolonial literary criticism predominantly showcases South Asian writers who write in English, almost all of whom belong to the South Asian diaspora. These writers include such authors as V. S. Naipaul, Hanif Kureishi, Bharati Mukherjee, Vikram Seth, Arundhati Roy, Bharati Mukherjee, Amitav Ghosh, Chaudhri, and, of course, Rushdie himself. The award-winning *Midnight’s Children*, Rushdie’s own “Booker of Bookers,” is self-reflexive, postmodern, and parodic, providing the perfect alibi for the English-only emphasis in

postcolonial literary scholarship of the eighties and nineties, a bias, I would argue, that continues into the present.

Challenging this bias in English and postcolonial studies, my dissertation focuses on regional Tamil writer Kalki Ra Krsnamurti's *Civakamiyin Capatam*, a thousand-page historical romance in the Tamil language that chronicles the ill-fated love affair between a fictional courtesan-dancer named Civakami and the Pallava king Narasimhavarman I, and is told against the backdrop of the seventh-century Pallava-Chalukya wars. A Tamil brahmin intellectual negotiating the reformist and revivalist agendas of the Hindu nationalists—not to mention the ongoing race, caste, and language wars in the Tamil region that undercut the unifying discourses of Indian bourgeois nationalism—Kalki was deeply invested in formulating a regional identity untainted by colonial oppression and compatible with a pan-regional/pan-religious vision of India as a nation. In all, he wrote three enormously popular historical romances extolling the achievement of the Pallava and Chola dynasties—*Parthiban Kanavu* in 1941, *Civakamiyin Capatam* in 1944, and *Ponniyin Celvan* in 1950.

Studying the Tamil novel's production and reception through a **cellular** focus on Kalki's *Civakamiyin Capatam* enables the larger critical enterprise of my dissertation which is: 1) a refutation of the inflationary claims made in postcolonial studies about all South Asian nationalisms, cultures, and literatures, 2) a questioning of naïve binaries such as local and global, cosmopolitan and vernacular, universal and particular, traditional and modern, in examining the colonial/postcolonial transaction, and 3) a case for a less grandiose and more carefully historicized account of the so-called nonwestern or "Third World" novel in terms of its formal genesis and accounting for its complicities

with and resistances to discourses of nation, region, caste, and gender in the late colonial context.

The dissertation argues that the lack of non-English texts in the postcolonial literary oeuvre of both western and Indian academics indicates an embarrassing gap in the field, the result of elitist claims about Indian English fiction both at home and abroad. I also suggest that such claims ignore the vital and dynamic reciprocity between postcolonial India's vernacular languages, including English. Despite the fact that critics have now been arguing for the inclusion of vernacular texts in postcolonial analysis for the past decade, a point that I return to later on in this chapter, the fact remains that relatively little work is being done with non-English texts. My study attempts to address this gap in the field.

Closely linked to his cultural and political aspirations for the nation, Kalki's celebration of the medieval Tamil kingdoms in novelistic fiction in the Tamil language is a conscious choice, born of a desire to envision the pre-colonial past as an ideal for an independent India in which the Tamil language, land, and people would enjoy a status denied to them in the colonial present. The development of a "taste for history" was thus a crucial part of Kalki's, and other nationalist writers', arsenal of resistance to the British presence. At the time Kalki wrote most of his novels during the 1930s and 1940s, the Indian nationalist movement successfully paired social reform and cultural revival within native communities with active political resistance to British rule. His anticolonial agenda focused inward as well as outwards, involving a kind of repeated political cultural and social stock-taking on national and regional fronts all over the subcontinent, a stock-

taking that could be glimpsed in his writings on prose, poetry, the performing arts, and film.

It was through such discourse in a variety of genres—affording a combination of reform, revival, and resistance—that Indian nationalism crafted its oppositional stance. A multi-faceted writer who took on each aspect of the nationalist challenge to British rule, Kalki employed different pen-names (ten in all) under which he successfully experimented with different genres for popular magazines: he wrote fiction as Kalki, non-fiction as Raki, and reviewed the arts under the pseudonym Karnatakam. The pseudonyms afforded Krsnamurti the opportunity to perform a variety of identities for his audiences, and to repeatedly rehearse resistance—on a spectrum of direct to indirect opposition—to colonial rule.

Integral to such multi-pronged anticolonial resistance, Kalki's major historical romances were initially serialized even as they were written in the nationalist weekly *Kalki*, a periodical launched in 1941 by the author and named after Krsnamurti's own easily recognizable writerly pseudonym. Combining the possibilities of historical fact and nationalist fantasy, the historical romance provided an ideal formula for Kalki's overall political and cultural agenda in his journalism. His evocations of the past appeared in the magazine alongside his sometimes witty, sometimes serious political writings featuring news and current events of global, national, and regional interest. While Kalki's non-fiction and social realist fiction often directly challenged the presence of the colonizer in the subcontinent, the historical romances provided subtler forms of resistance, allowing the reader to imagine a British-free India. Kalki was able to transport readers to a glorious yesteryear in which the Tamil lands attained sovereignty,

allowing Tamil men and women to feel pride in their cultural and political legacy, a ploy that garnered him a wide readership during his lifetime and beyond.

Launching his historical triptych with *Partiban Kanavu*, a novel serialized in 1941 and set in the seventh-century, Kalki details the earliest beginnings of the Cola empire, including the overthrow of the Cola king Partiban by the Pallava king Narasimha (later the hero of *Civakamiyin Capatam*), and the eventual restitution of Partiban's son Vikraman to the Cola throne after he weds the Pallava princess Kundavi (a benevolent Narasimha's daughter). We encounter the mature Narasimha frequently in the novel as we do Civakami, Kalki's fictional dancer-heroine of his second historical romance. It emerges in the course of the novel that, while Partiban's dream is to ensure the glory of the Colas, Narasimha's ambitions are even grander. In Part 3, Chapter 23, he tells Ponnann, a faithful henchman:

He [Partiban, the dethroned Cola king] dreamt only of the Cola land's victory. I kept dreaming of the everlasting glory of Tamilakam [the Tamil land]... This sacred earth that is Bharatakandam [the land of Bharata, India] is now divided into north and south. In story, song, and history, and since ancient times, it has been the northern territory that achieved fame. What of Patalipuram's Chandragupta, Ashoka Chakravarti, and Vikramadityan?² Which southern king has rivaled their achievements? Even now, in our time, can it be said that our [Pallava] King Mahendra's glory has spread to the same degree as the northern King Harsha? What is the reason our southern land has lagged behind. It is undoubtedly the division of the south into Cola, Cera, and Pandya kingdoms! (357)

Narasimha's ambitions clearly parallel Kalki's own as a writer and anticolonial nationalist seeking to unite a divisive and fractious subcontinent. Alongside the desire for pan-regional unity, however, is a troubled negotiation of the differences between

north and south, and resentment at the hegemony of the former. Clearly for Kalki, it is in these early beginnings of the Pallavas and Colas that a history lesson may be learned by the south. Later on, in the mammoth *Civakamiyin Capatam* and *Ponniyin Celvan*, Kalki's vision of native supremacy and pan-Indian consolidation—a vision not without its contradictions, as my analysis will show—come to fruition. The Colas are constructed as benevolent and powerful monarchs, the rightful inheritors of Hindu empire from the Pallavas. And it is in the reigns of the Pallavas—Mahendra and Narasimha—which Kalki so vividly details in *Civakamiyin Capatam* that the dream of southern solidarity and glory, and the setting aside of communal and linguistic difference, is initially realized. Kalki's investment in the establishment of Tamilakam, the land of the Tamils, is also significant in terms of his explicit association of national identity with language.

The enthusiastic response of the Tamil public to Kalki's reconstructions of the past had not only to do with Kalki's intricate plot devices (the sudden twists and turns producing both excitement and suspense week after week) and his ability to bring the medieval setting to life. Readers reacted to his characters in much the same way as viewers of popular television do to soap operas. Male readers revelled in the portrayal of indigenous heroes, renaissance men who combined intellectual, artistic, and physical prowess. Women formed crushes on these kingly heroes from the past and keenly felt affinities with suffering/afflicted heroines. As reformist and revivalist camps clashed over the role and status of indigenous women in the forties and fifties, female readers—whatever their material circumstances--could vicariously experience the travails and successes of Kalki's fiery and outspoken women characters.

In *Civakamiyin Capatam*, the powerful Pallava kings Mahendra and Narasimha, the courageous and quick-witted young Pallava army commander Paranjoti, the art-obsessed and absent-minded royal sculptor Ayanar, his feisty and beautiful dancer-daughter Civakami, and the complex machinations of the villainous Chalukya monk Nakanandi, were the subject of lively discussion among men and women alike. The historical novels also afforded both men and women an avenue of escape from the drudgery of their existence, in a language that was comfortingly familiar. Readers could also take pride in the existence of a flourishing precolonial Tamil culture; the tutelary rewards of reading Kalki's historical romances formed a crucial part of the pleasure of the serialized text.

Like nationalist poet Cuppiramaniam Bharati (1882-1921) and Tamil scholar U. Ve Caminata Aiyar (1855-1942) before him, Kalki belonged to a select coterie of brahmin intellectuals who were instrumental in the propagation of Tamil language, literature, and performing arts. His achievements in this regard are valorized by Tamil scholars and literary historians. While Kalki's social realist novels detailed events relating to anticolonial resistance in the early twentieth century were celebrated for their "incendiary political ideas," his historical novels allowed him to relate the achievements of a hoary and resplendent Tamil past to the needs of the colonial present. P. Sri writes: "No other writer of historical novels in Tamil handled famous characters and poignant themes from the rich Tamil cultural heritage so brilliantly and movingly as Kalki. His epic delineations of the great Mahendra Pallava and his son Narasimha Varma Pallava in *Sivakamiyin Sabadam*...have come to dominate the Tamil imagination. It is no exaggeration, therefore, to say that Kalki ...created among the Tamils a taste for history"

(297). In addition, it is through *Civakamiyin Capatam* that Kalki navigates the searing ethnic, linguistic, religious, and caste-based tensions surrounding the creation of Tamil identity in the 1940s.

As a graduate student brainstorming possible options for a dissertation topic in postcolonial studies, I knew for certain that I did not want to write yet another paper on Salman Rushdie! However, having never had formal training in my native Tamil or any other Indian language at the collegiate level, I was hesitant to consider a writer who did not express herself or himself predominantly in English. It was in the course of several conversations, professional and personal, with South Asia scholars in different disciplines that I confronted my own neglect of a major literary inheritance, Tamil. I grew up listening to my mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother tell stories by and of my maternal great-grandfather, Kalki Thatha,³ as he was affectionately dubbed by his family. The earliest narratives I heard of anticolonial nationalism and colonial rule, my discovery of India's precolonial and colonial pasts, was intricately enmeshed with my own family history, something I have alternately been proud of and run away from as long as I remember. It was Kalki's wife, Rukmini, my beloved Babuji, who narrated the stories and songs of the medieval Tamil poet Kampan's version of the Hindu epic, the *Ramayana*, to me, stories and songs to which I improvised gesture and rhythm at the age of five. I listened to the story of *Civakamiyin Capatam* growing up, begging for "one more chapter" from my mother every night when bedtime approached. I studied south Indian Carnatic vocal music, learning songs in at least ten different classical and vernacular languages, and Bharata Natyam, the traditional dance form practiced by Civakami, the heroine of Kalki's novel. Yet, because this multivalent learning took place

in “extra-curricular” realms characterized by largely oral—not written—and nonverbal literacies, I did not identify it as such. What I learned in these spaces seemed provincial and out-of-step with modernity, a cumbersome legacy that I was anxious to dismiss from my life upon reaching adulthood. Little did I realize that it was this brahminical legacy—its tensions, contradictions, challenges, and rewards—that I would turn to as part of my scholarly excavation. This early indoctrination into the world of Indian languages, arts, and cultures—something for which I am now exceedingly grateful—made my later formal acquisition of Tamil and Sanskrit possible, allowing this midnight’s grandchild to grapple head-on with the ideological and linguistic complexities, including the problem of English, that make up life in the post-colony in the present.

Telling this personal story is to disclose an important aspect of my implication and investment in my topic, to waive any claims to anthropological “disinterestedness,” and instead acknowledge my subject position as vitally determining the ways in which I construct the study at hand. A whole generation of postcolonial scholars—legatees and protégés of the bourgeois nationalist project—have this kind of personal stake in their work. I merely choose to make mine explicit.

The Problem of Language

Discussing India’s linguistic inheritances necessarily means tracing the impact of colonial education and language policy on the role and status of South Asian classical and vernacular languages. In this regard, scholars cannot ignore Thomas Babington Macaulay’s infamous 1835 *Minute on Indian Education*, a crucial episode in the history of British colonial education. The Orientalist-Anglicist controversy surrounding the use of English in Indian educational forums and institutions in the 1830s raised fundamental

questions about language use and the spread of European knowledge frameworks and branches of study in the subcontinent.⁴ In his *Minute*, Macaulay advocated the creation of an elite coterie of Indians who would serve as cultural intermediaries between the British and their Indian subjects:

...a class of Indians who may be interpreters between us and the millions who we govern – a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions in morals, and in intellect. To that class we may leave it to refine the vernacular dialects of the country, to enrich those dialects with terms of science borrowed from western nomenclature, and to render to them by degrees fit vehicles for conveying knowledge to the great mass of population. (qtd. in Evans 271)

Macaulay's pronouncement represents a key turning point in colonial attitudes to nonwestern languages, a pendulum swing away from the high status accorded to Sanskrit and Arabic, the classical languages of the subcontinent. This earlier privileging of the so-called classical languages by the Orientalists was designed both to further western understanding of the colonized psyche and society and to placate indigenous elites by showing respect for precolonial legacies. Now, colonial education policy went more towards an Anglicist promotion of English linguistic/cultural norms and standards and, concurrently, an outsourcing of vernacular education to the Indian interpreter class (Evans 269-72). It is hardly a scholarly feat to trace a genealogy of linguistic chauvinism from this point of high Anglicism in colonial history, tracking the language hierarchies established during colonial rule into the present day, where writers in English such as Rushdie and Arundhati Roy continue to mediate India and Indianness in the west.

It still astonishes me that, in five years of college education in India, undergraduate and graduate, I did come across and study Macaulay as a Victorian poet,

but nowhere in the socio-cultural histories of English literature I read for my coursework was Macaulay's role in the colonial education debates mentioned, let alone made explicit. It was only later on, when I took up postcolonial theory as a field of study that I made the connections between the literary figures and works I read for my BA and MA in English, and the propagation of colonial culture and literary-linguistic imperialism in the post-colony. Admittedly, the landscape of English studies in colleges and universities has changed considerably since I was student in India, an impetus provided by postcolonial studies and new historicism. Most English departments have undertaken the gargantuan task of forming closer links with language departments and other branches of humanistic and social scientific learning, so that such compartmentalization, a legacy of colonial culture, is avoided.

Given millennia of cultural exchange between South Asia and the world, scholars of South Asian postcolonial literatures, specifically those who have made their home in English studies, would do well to examine postcolonial subjects and texts in contexts beyond those afforded by English alone. South Asia historian Sheldon Pollock notes the "great transformation in the course of the last two millennia—from the old cosmopolitan to the vernacular... This began in southern Asia and western Europe with remarkable similarity in the early second millennium, and it developed with equally striking parallels over the following five centuries. I say "began" emphatically: vernacular literary cultures were initiated by the conscious decisions of writers to reshape the boundaries of their cultural universe by renouncing the larger world for the smaller place, and they did do in full awareness of the significance of their decision" (591). It is only recently postcolonial literary scholarship on South Asia has even begun to unpack the significance

of such vernacularization, and colonial and postcolonial representations of the precolonial experience that seek to revive and spotlight the coming-of-age of vernacular ‘mother-tongues.’ If every global was once a local, what better way to understand global localities and “glocalizations” than historicist and cross-cultural analysis that contextualizes and locates legacies of and beyond Europe?

Critics such as Ahmad, Spivak, Nicholas Thomas, Elizabeth Povinelli, Deniz Kandiyoti, and Ato Quayson argue for just such analysis in their respective areas of interest.⁵ Additionally, in two landmark compendia from the early nineties that examine the relationship between Third and First World universities from a South Asianist perspective—Svati Joshi’s *Rethinking English* (1994) and Rajeswari Sunder Rajan’s *The Lie of the Land* (1992)—both editors and contributors repeatedly note the need for scholars to go beyond the traditionally monolingual focus of English departments to rethink the role of postcolonial and English studies in an increasingly multilingual and multicultural world.

The Problem of Theory

As recent conversations in the field of postcolonial studies suggest, claims about the relationship between the postcolonial novel and nation elide crucial differences in the postcolonial condition as experienced in First, Second, Third, and Fourth Worlds. This section of my introduction briefly reviews the critical legacy that has contributed to the pre-eminence of English-based inquiry in postcolonial studies. I focus chiefly on the pivotal theorists around whose work the field has principally evolved, namely, Fredric Jameson’s theory of Third World literature as national allegory, Edward Said’s *Orientalism*, Benedict Anderson’s theory of nation as imagined community, Homi

Bhabha's notion of hybridity, the Subaltern Studies Collective's critique of bourgeois nationalism, and the construction of the Third World woman in western and postcolonial feminism. While these theories, and the debates they have generated over the last few decades have done much to help us understand colonial and postcolonial cultural production, there is also a tendency to apply these theories a priori to a handful of texts in English, without thinking about ways in which regional and local factors might intersect with global influence to produce difference in multi-lingual contexts. I suggest that to arrive at a historically grounded postcolonial praxis, scholars need to go beyond the tendency to essentialize Third World texts and contexts in explanations of postcolonial identity politics and cultural production.

As Henry Schwarz reminds us in an essay provocatively titled "Mission Impossible: Introducing Postcolonial studies in the Western Academy:"

There exists a strong suspicion among many scholars as well as people implicated in colonial processes, that postcolonialism is simply the bad faith effort of Western scholarship to atone for its sins of knowledge production in the service of imperialism. In another formulation it could be considered the English department's way of understanding world history as it begins to recognize its crucial role in the domination of the globe. (6)

Schwarz's comment reflects extreme views of postcolonial scholarship, nevertheless these views have surfaced repeatedly since the 1980s, in the work of the field's founding theorists. For instance, what is "Can the Subaltern Speak" but a questioning—and denial—of academic discourse's ability to represent the marginal, the unseen and the unheard voices of those disempowered by the discourses of colonialism? As Schwarz rightly points out, such allegations must be faced, and postcolonial scholarship must

show itself capable of holding a mirror up to itself, acknowledging its sometimes-complicity with the dominant. “This demands,” Schwarz writes, “the most persistent bringing to crisis of those European habits that allowed and condoned world domination” (7). This goal of “bringing-to-crisis” in mind, I briefly outline here some key debates in postcolonial studies as well as the Eurocentric assumptions that at times guide postcolonial inquiry, even in the field’s most enabling theories. These include Fredric Jameson’s argument about First and Third World literatures, Said’s Orientalism, Benedict Anderson’s idea of nation as imagined community, Homi Bhabha’s theory of hybridity in colonial and postcolonial discourse, the critique of Indian bourgeois nationalism provided in the work of the Subaltern Studies Collective, and postcolonial perspectives on western feminism and its constructions of the Third World woman. Not only do the various viewpoints represented by the theories and theorists outlined below reflect the trajectory of the field since its inception and acceptance within western and nonwestern academies, they also assist with understanding the frameworks and vocabularies by which postcolonial literary criticism examines cultural production in the so-called Third World in colonial, neo-colonial and ex-colonial contexts.

I. Fredric Jameson’s notion of Third World literature as national allegory:

In the landmark essay “Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism,” Jameson formulates a theory of the novel predicated on Three Worlds theory marked by an essentializing differentiation between western and nonwestern cultural production. In Jameson’s view, the western novel targets the individual reader—staging the confrontation of the self in a capitalist milieu—whereas the “Third World” novel expresses the hopes and aspirations of a national culture. The most notable and

controversial response to Jameson is Aijaz Ahmad's "James's Rhetoric of Self and Otherness" in the polemical *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures*. Questioning Three Worlds theory, which provides the basis for Jameson's argument, Ahmad writes, "[T]here is no such thing as a 'Third World Literature' which can be constructed as an internally coherent object of theoretical knowledge" (96-97). Asserting that such theory derives from and reifies the dehistoricizing imperatives of capitalist and colonialist hierarchies that relegate the entire "Third World" to the west's Other, Ahmad questions "Jameson's absolute insistence upon Difference and the relation of Otherness between the First World and the Third, and his equally insistent idea that the 'experience of the Third World could be contained and communicated within a single narrative form" (105). While he acknowledges there might be commonalities between ex-colonial cultures that derive from the colonial experience, Ahmad requires a more exacting scholarly position for examination of such similarities and differences, a position that is not solely predicated on any essentialist notion of a 'Third World' and goes beyond colonial language hierarchies.

II. Said's theory of Orientalism and its attendant, post-structuralist nemesis, the restless, roving, native intellectual in the west:

Writing with a particular emphasis on scholarly and literary constructions of the Orient, Said's *Orientalism* (1978) and *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) examine European linguistics, anthropology/ethnography, cultural studies, and translation studies undertaken during the colonial period and focused on Europe's colonies. Said alleges that the place-name "Orient" is, in fact, a fiction, a product of the European imagination evidenced in colonial discourse, including literature. Such fictive representations, Said claims, dot the

work of such colonial writers as Joseph Conrad, Rudyard Kipling, E. M. Forster, and Jane Austen. He claims that most scholarship and cultural production constructing the Orient leads to a distorted picture of the colonized, contributing to the notion that the colonized territories were desperately in need of Europe's civilizing mission. These representations of the Orient are by no means disinterested or innocent, Said notes, and in fact collude in the larger project of western colonialism and imperialism.

Said's primary analysis is geared towards English, French, and American scholars' approaches to the Arab societies of north Africa and southwest Asia (calling this region the Middle East would, qua Said, indicate scholarly complicity in and perpetuation of Orientalism). He does not treat the cultures of other areas that were the object of scholarly inquiry in the field of Oriental studies, nor does he investigate the work of German, Russian, Italian, Spanish, or Portuguese Orientalists. While European Orientalism dates back several centuries, Said restricts his focus to the height of colonialism's epoch—the late eighteenth century to the present. However, Said does go beyond scholarly or critical discourse to examine literature, journalism, and travel writing, in order to pinpoint the spread of Orientalist constructions into other realms of understanding and perception.

One of the most influential and controversial attacks on Said's postulations occurs again in Ahmad's *In Theory*. In the third chapter of the book, titled "*Orientalism and After: Ambivalence and Metropolitan Location in the World of Edward Said*," Ahmad points out that Said writes out of his own location and subject position as a nomadic Palestinian, eloquently targeting western intelligentsias in *Orientalism*. However, Said's scholarly background in comparative European literatures, Ahmad alleges, is pivotal in

producing a classical humanist bias in his counter-narrative to western cultural and literary hegemony. This paradoxical appropriation of the language of humanism in Said's work, ostensibly a move to recognize the complicity of European literary discourse in European imperialism, leads to an inflation of the role of literature and a rejection of explanations beyond the discursive in east-west relations in Said's work, Ahmad alleges. This rejection has more to do with *Orientalism*'s, and Said's, affinity with western intellectual history, Ahmad suggests, the kinds of antifoundational claims available after Nietzsche and Foucault, than with the materialities of life in the colonies:

The perspectives inaugurated in *Orientalism* served, in the social self-consciousness and professional assertion of the middle-class immigrant and the 'ethnic' intellectual, roughly the same function as the theoretical category of 'Third World' literature, arising at roughly the same time, was also to serve...If *Orientalism* was devoted to demonstrating the bad faith and imperial oppression of all European knowledges, beyond time and history, 'Third World literature' was to be the narrative of authenticity, the counter-canon of truth, good faith, liberation itself. Like the bad faith of European knowledge, the counter-canon of 'Third World Literature' had no boundaries. (197)

Ahmad's emphasis above highlights both the continuing complicity of postcolonial theoretical discourse in reifying the very humanist categories it opposes, and the casting of Third World literature as perennially oppositional, static, though unwavering, in its unswerving resistance to Europe.

III. Benedict Anderson's Enlightenment- and Americas-predicated imagined communities thesis:

In 1983's *Imagined Communities*, Anderson examines the constructs of nationality, nation-ness, and nationalism, whose arrival signals the coming-of-age of

industrialized and capitalistic networks in Europe at the end of the eighteenth century. Anderson sees these constructions as powerfully “modular,” imitable in different contexts and fluid, capable of combination with a variety of ideologies and power structures. In theorizing nationalism, Anderson discusses the emergence of three paradoxes: the objective modernity of nations in the eye of the historian vs. their subjective antiquity in the eye of nationalists; the formal universality of nationality as a socio-cultural concept vs. the particularity of its concrete manifestations; and the political power of nationalism vs. its philosophical poverty. This view of nationalism as a European export is one that is both useful and limited, useful as means by which to explore the relationship between the novel, print culture, and nationalism, and limited in its Eurocentric positioning.

As a result of these paradoxes, Anderson argues, a nation emerges, a community that is imagined as both limited and sovereign. A nation’s members will never know most of their fellow-members, yet in the minds of each subject lives the image of their affiliation and autonomous coexistence. Imagined as a community of individuals predisposed towards a harmonious relationship towards one another on the basis of a national allegiance that has the capacity to overwhelm all other differences, the nation’s citizenry is visualized as a deep horizontal comradeship. The nation also has finite, though elastic, boundaries beyond which there may be other nations of similar, though distinct, socio-cultural values. The construct, Anderson argues, came to fruition at a stage of human history when the freedom of the average citizen was striven for as a precious ideal. By Anderson’s account, nationalism in colonial and postcolonial societies would always be predicated on an appropriation of such ideologies from Europe.

In *A Nation and its Fragments*, Partha Chatterjee argues that nationalist imaginations in Asia and Africa are not necessarily posited on such identifications but on anticolonial perceptions of *difference* from Europe. Refusing the hegemonic implications of Anderson's thesis, Chatterjee acerbically notes:

If nationalisms in the rest of the world have to choose their imagined communities from certain "modular" forms readily available to them by Europe and the Americas, what do they have left to imagine? History, it would seem, has decreed that we in the postcolonial world shall only be perpetual consumers of modernity. Europe and the Americas, the only true subjects of history, have thought out on our behalf not only the script of colonial enlightenment and exploitation, but also that of our anticolonial resistance and postcolonial misery. Even our imaginations must remain forever colonized. (5)

Chatterjee shows how anticolonial nationalism in the Indian subcontinent ekes out its own domain of sovereignty within colonial society. In the case of India, anticolonial nationalists, part of an emergent middle-class, consciously fostered a discourse of intertwining private and public sovereignties, in spiritual (home) and material (world) domains. These elites, using examples drawn from colonial history in India, first imagined the nation into being in the spiritual realm, presaging political struggle in the public or outer realm, and the coming-into-being of a modern national culture, Chatterjee suggests.

How did such a politics of national difference get articulated in the emerging Indian public sphere, distinguished by its linguistic and regional variations? G. Aloysius identifies three modes of colonial discourse through which ideals of modernity and democracy percolated into the nationalist imaginary: evangelical, official, and free trade. He writes:

Under this three-pronged attack...the socio-cultural and religious world of the dominant Hindu castes went through serious changes: old values, some of them at least, had to be discarded, while others were rejuvenated; traditional legitimacies had to be revamped; new sanctions had to be dovetailed into a pattern; a new ideology had to be articulated to serve old ends; new interests had to be served with the old rationale; new challenges had to be neutralized or co-opted. In short, the Hindu conceptual world, especially at the top levels of Brahminic ideology, went through a trauma of instability, change, and, finally, reincarnation. (37)

What Aloysius's description of the formation of a national imaginary foregrounds is the repeated reconciliation of old and new in nationalist discourse, so that European thought frameworks *contribute to* rather than initiate the founding moments of anticolonial nationalism. The complexity and circular flows of this interaction—its investment in precolonial, colonial, and postcolonial aspirations—is something Anderson's paradigm would not acknowledge. Aloysius's emphasis on the traumatic processes by which nationalist ideologies are manifested is also significant; he tellingly uses the metaphor of reincarnation, emphasizing the derivation of the new not solely from the belated colonial/European archive of democracy, modernity, and capital but from a particular combination of precolonial and colonial discursive and philosophical means. The emergence of the vernacular novel (invoking precolonial pasts) and its participation in a flourishing vernacular print culture can be better understood through this less reductive lens. As Nalini Natarajan notes: "The beginnings of the national movement gave literature a new purpose, the forging of regional/national print communities ... In India, regional print communities nested into larger anti-colonial pan-Indian movements leading, for instance, to Tamil poet Bharati's translation into far-off Gujarati. A certain

multilingual exchange was thus built into this process” (5). The specificities of this linguistic, cultural, and political exchange would be left out in Eurocentric, English-only analysis.

IV. Homi Bhabha’s a priori conceptualizations of postcolonial hybridity, mimicry, and repetition:

Since editing the foundational *Nation and Narration* and publishing the series of pioneering essays that comprise *The Location of Culture*, Homi Bhabha has established himself as part of postcolonial theory’s holy trinity along with Said and Gayatri Spivak. Most notable among Bhabha’s contributions to postcolonial scholarship are his forays into the colonized psyche using theories of psychoanalysis and deconstruction. Bhabha notes a psychic wounding stemming from a feeling of secondariness to the colonizer that produces derivative discursive modes—repetition, ambivalence, mimicry, and hybridity—in the verbal and written output of the colonized. Such discourse, a product of colonial contact, provides the liminal spaces in which resistance and subversion of authority are enacted. However, while Bhabha’s theory is eminently enabling in its ability to explain the power and lasting effects of the colonial discursive transaction, it is undeniably elitist in its repeated emphasis on the English book (a more detailed explanation of this claim is available in Chapter Three). Bhabha’s entire exposition contains no reference to books not in English, a trend that is symptomatic of our field. In Bhabha’s analysis, colonial discourse theory explicates texts of European writers such as Conrad, Kipling, and Forster, and the contours of postcolonial discourse are mapped solely with reference to such writing in English, a pool that assuredly does not contain the entire postcolonial literary oeuvre.

After Bhabha, and tracing the genealogy of postcolonial hybridity as a theory that was grafted from biology to cultural/ political analysis to present-day theorizations of cultural difference and diaspora, Robert J.C. Young performs a Deleuzian reading of what he terms colonial desire, hybridity's antecedent.⁶ Manufactured by market forces, colonial desire presages forms of sexual, social, and cultural hybridity. Fruit from the same post-structuralist tree as Bhabha's oeuvre, Young's theory reiterates the emphasis on colonial contact—the primacy of the discursive transaction between the colonizer and the colonized—and explains hybridity as a monstrous or perverse inversion of colonial desire. Any treatment of literary diversity (multi-genre and multilingual considerations in a postcolonial world) that follows this paradigm must place a similar emphasis on colonialism's, and capitalism's, shadow on cultural production. While it is safe to assume that the imposition of colonial cultural norms and modes of education had a profound effect on the colonized subject and postcolonial culture, to give this type of systemic interpretation primacy in every single linguistic, social, and cultural context is to deny the complex maneuverings by which postcolonial culture confronts and negotiates pre-colonial and colonial pasts.

V. The Subaltern Studies Collective's oversimplified dichotomies of elite and working-class nationalisms in South Asia:

Originally, the Subaltern Studies Collective consisted of a group of UK-based historians influenced by the Marxist perspectives of E.P. Thompson and Gramsci in their work on the nationalist movement in South Asia. The subalternists—Ranajit Guha, Rosalind Miles, David Arnold, Partha Chatterjee, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Sumit Sarkar, Gyanendra Pandey, and Gayatri Spivak, to name a few—offered correctives and

alternatives to hegemonic accounts of the Indian independence struggle by tracing peasant revolts and working-class nationalisms in colonial South Asia.⁷ These accounts were typically ignored or simply omitted in the interest of establishing the work of the Indian National Congress as the chief instrument of nationalist struggle. As Sarkar suggests in a denouncement of subaltern studies' later efforts, "[A]nti colonial movements had been explained far too often in terms of a combination of economic pressures and mobilization from the top by leaders portrayed as manipulative on colonial, and as idealistic, or charismatic, in nationalist historiography" (302). There was also a privileging of written accounts and legal documentation over other types of (typically undocumented) revolutionary forms of action. But, as Sarkar notes, the postulation of elite and subaltern classes, indigenous and colonial discourse, western and third world nationalism—led to the formation of new binaries that oversimplified the complex dynamics at work in anticolonial resistance. Additionally, according to Sarkar, the work of subaltern historians on South Asia has gradually shied away from its Marxist-Thompsonian underpinnings to a Saidian and discourse-based theoretical paradigm, implying "a folding back of all history into the single problematic of Western colonial cultural domination. This imposes a series of closures and silences, and threatens simultaneously to feed into shallow forms of retrogressive indigenism" (Sarkar 316).

VI. Western, transnational, and postcolonial feminisms' essentialized Third World woman:

In *Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourse*, Chandra Mohanty suggests that western feminist scholarship on the so-called Third World woman is complicit with the discourses of colonialism and western imperialism, producing the

third world Woman as a singular and monolithic subject. Throughout her essay, Mohanty systematically locates the biases in western feminist texts that construe the victimhood of the colonized female subject. She denies western feminism's basic premise, the implication that "women" form a coherent group with similar, if not identical, materialities and interests. Western feminist discourse, Mohanty argues, ignores how women in the Third World are constituted through complex and varying socio-economic, cultural, and political structures. Western standards of individuality and community are applied by feminists in assessing the operations of nonwestern patriarchy, and the Third World woman is always-already constructed as religious/spiritual, bound by strong family and kinship ties, without legal recourse, illiterate, and the victim of domestic abuse.

By postulating a Third World Other who fails the standards for active participation in egalitarian and democratic frameworks, the Western feminist authorship emerges as independent, secular, and as rejecting patriarchal forms of control. Mohanty highlights western feminism's vexed insistence on the individual subject as coherent, rational, secular; such a gaze, she avers, is a legacy of humanist and Enlightenment visions. Mohanty goes on to challenge the binary oppositions of male oppressors and female victims, First and Third World, white and black, implicit in heteronormative and universalist western feminism. Western feminism's inability to do away with such binaries perpetuates a monolithic and seamless notion of patriarchy, so that its (western feminism's) practitioners emphasize global sisterhood while neglecting the politics of location and ignoring their own collusion in the patriarchal status quo. As a result of such positioning, Third World women are denied modes of historical, cultural, and

political agency antecedent to or outside of western feminist intervention.⁸ Such posturing on the part of western feminism, Mohanty argues, leaves little room for the sexual, political, and economic autonomy of nonwestern women, and denies the possibility of diversity or heterogeneity in female subjectivities in the Third World. The result is a dogmatic and static conception in which the resistances and complicities of Third World subjects wrought by intertwining patriarchal discourses and practices in colonial and postcolonial contexts tend to go unexamined.

Finally, having challenged the overarching theoretical postulates on hegemonic western feminism is built, Mohanty criticizes the oversimplifying dichotomies in its methodological practices that reinforce the status of Third World woman-as-victim. She argues that most white feminist studies of Third World women fail to implement fine-grained and painstaking field research that demonstrates both the dynamism of patriarchal forms and the mechanisms of resistance that allow women subjects to grapple with their fluid and changing realities in postcolonial societies. By implication, Mohanty suggests for feminist intervention a combination of a posteriori methodologies including more qualitative research and participant observation that examines the situatedness—social, economic, intellectual, and cultural positioning and location of the female subject—in society. In 2003's *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*, Mohanty revisits the basic premises of “Under Western Eyes,” to turn her scholarly gaze on those like herself, diasporic feminist scholars engaged in transnational/postcolonial dialogue and committed to feminist solidarity, yet complicit in the imperialist discourses of global capital.

Such critical formulations in postcolonial studies are more often than not based on elite-cosmopolitan texts, Foucauldian-Saidian theoretical paradigms, and over-generalizations based on decolonization processes observed in one ad-hoc postcolonial context. These theories are simply inadequate in their ability to account for the complexities of the colonial transaction as it impinges on particular socio-economic, political, linguistic, and gender histories.

It is in response to such calls for a change of textual and theoretical focus in the analysis of postcolonial literature that I ground my own study in a particular historical, linguistic, and socio-cultural framework. As Ahmad writes: “Developments during the colonial period are everywhere embedded as much in pre-colonial legacies as in colonial processes as such; and (b) cultural productions everywhere greatly exceed the boundaries set by the colonial state and its policies” (*Rethinking English* 244). To extend Ahmad’s argument, the *postcolonial* moment—transactional, fluid, and reciprocal with the colonial *and* precolonial—is by no means exempt from such dialogue. A focus on a particular author, epoch, vernacular, and regional context in the history of British colonial rule in India helps me tease out how one literary work of the late colonial period in Tamil mediates colonialist and hegemonic nationalist constructions of indigenous culture. Questioning prematurely celebratory approaches to the postcolonial (Anne McClintock’s phrase),⁹ I argue that the Tamil historical romance “exceeds” the very reformist and revivalist rubrics that afforded its existence.

Outline:

Overall, I investigate in this study the rhetorical context in which Kalki’s novels were produced and received, how an emergent Tamil middle-class participated in the

novel's circulation and readership, and the types of regional/national community that were imagined in print culture as part of anticolonial nationalist discourse. Analyzing the pedagogic function of anticolonial rhetoric in the vernacular public sphere helps me arrive at a closer understanding of the Tamil novel's impact on a burgeoning Tamil political, socio-cultural and literary ethos. Examining the novel's pivotal role in nascent formulations of the Tamil public sphere sets the stage for the chapters to come in which I analyze Kalki's uses of Pallava history, his deployment of secular and religious forms of narration, and his treatment of women characters through close readings of the novelistic text and its multiple contexts.

In Chapter Two, titled *The Nationalist Subject and the Tamil Public Sphere*, I reveal how Kalki's vision of a sovereign India was necessarily riddled with contradictions owing to prevailing tensions between nation and region. I first define the Tamil public sphere's relationship to its Indian and European counterparts. In this regard, I examine Kalki's own role as a Gandhian nationalist, specifically tracing his political writings on World War II, the British presence, and the nationalist movement in 1944-46. I then investigate two important movements in the Tamil region during the period, Tamil *marumalarcci* (cultural renaissance) and the Tamil anti-brahman (Dravidian) movement, in order to throw light on Kalki's own negotiations of region and caste questions in the novel. Finally, I examine how Kalki's preface to *Civakamiyin Capatam* navigates reformist and revivalist discourses in the Tamil public sphere, invoking the spiritual past in its vision of a secular postcolonial future.

In Chapter Three titled "Narration, Imagination, New Hybridities," I examine *Civakamiyin Capatam*'s non-western and western formal trajectories. I show in this

section how Kalki invokes indigenous performance traditions and multilingual, multi-genre storytelling practices within the framework of the historical romance to widen its generic scope. In his hands, the novel becomes a multilayered palimpsest that includes the oral, the performative, and the mythic, as well as the written. My analysis of the formal frameworks that undergird Kalki's text helps pinpoint ongoing processes of translation, interpretive engagement, and narrative reciprocity that constitute the Tamil writerly and readerly experience.

Chapter Four, "Artists, Ascetics, and Anticolonial Nationalism," investigates *Civakamiyin Capatam*'s emphasis on ancient and medieval kingly patronage of the religious arts, and the figure of woman artist that such an insistence produces. In this chapter, I articulate the need for greater contextualization of local, regional, and national histories in examining postcolonial texts. It establishes the case for investigating *Civakamiyin Capatam*, defining the novel as a narrative that marks the consolidation of and resistance to dominant discourse—both nationalist and colonialist. I focus specifically on the novel's troubled commentary on Buddhist, Jain, and Hindu rivalries in medieval India, and its quandaries about the role of religion, war, and the arts in emergent nation-state formation.

Charting the generic transformation of the historical romance in the Tamil instance, my study seeks to 1) locate the political, religious, and cultural imperatives that shaped Kalki's novel, 2) identify competing colonialist, nationalist, and regionalist discourses in the novel as complex intersections of the global and the local, and 3) highlight the pedagogic function of narratives of/as assimilation, intervention, and social change in conceptualizing the novel's reception among Tamil audiences. In my conclusion, I

reiterate that, by paying attention to the relationship between region and nation in a nuanced account of Tamil cultural production, my dissertation contests monolithic accounts of Indian bourgeois nationalism in postcolonial studies deriving in the main from Bengali and Hindi examples. Out of such examination emerges an alternative genealogy of the anticolonial Tamil novel whose spatio-temporal sweep encompasses the global, national, and regional; precolonial, colonial, and postcolonial. Examining other Tamil writers who wrote during Kalki's time and after, my conclusion traces this alternative genealogy in one particular linguistic context. Consequently, I see the Tamil novel as providing spaces of radical alterity in which its readers could imagine themselves to be autonomous subjects.

The insistence that all postcolonial literature is a form of writing back to the former metropolitan centre leads to a distorted and singular vision of postcolonial aspirations and politics. Equally harmfully, this monolithic viewpoint results in the emphasis of certain elite texts that replicate colonialist cultural hegemonies. While English is presented as the only viable language of translation, critical judgment, and interpretation, indigenous languages continue to be relegated to provincial dialect. I hope in future interrogations of postcolonial texts, translated and otherwise, to provide a critical discourse that continues to question this cosmopolitan-vernacular binary, making possible analysis that is respectful of particularity yet mindful of planetarity. In speaking of planetarity, I invoke Spivak's enabling metaphor in *Death of a Discipline* for a kind of "reformed comparative literary vision" that foregrounds "areas rather than nation-states," demands "altered attitudes to language learning," and allows us to go beyond dialectical formulas in imagining radical alterities. Looking out from a specific historical, political,

linguistic, and cultural location, I hope to generate ethical, context-sensitive analyses of South Asian nationalisms (in this study's case, Tamil) as persisting and protean global formations sensitive to local and global networks of influence.

A vexed construct from the start, Kalki's vision of sovereign nation is based on a strategic combination of revival and reform (revival of classical and folk traditions, practices, and customs that uplifted the colonized subject, reform of indigenous social practices still prevalent among the colonized that, seen through the filters of colonialist and nationalist histories, seemed out-of-step with modernity). However, as I have argued earlier, the resistances in Kalki's novel exceed both reformist and revivalist impulses. In contrast to scholarly claims that elide crucial linguistic, regional, caste, and gender differences that marked the various nationalisms emerging in the subcontinent, I show through my analysis of *Civakamiyin Capatam* that bourgeois nationalism's existing definitions do not contain the extremely complex processes of production surrounding the vernacular novel, nor do they help contextualize Kalki's continuing popularity in the Tamil literary and political scene.

A note on the literary translation and transliteration conventions used in this study: For proper names in Tamil and all Tamil transliteration, and when applicable and possible, I have used Library of Congress standard characters to romanize Tamil script per the established conventions for Tamil proper name and Tamil language transliteration in area/South Asia/Indological studies. However, while I have used standard romanization conventions, I have omitted diacritical markers used in area studies scholarship in order to facilitate easier reading in the context of English studies. In direct quotations from other writers and scholars, I have retained both their character

usage and diacritical conventions for both proper names and transliterated, romanized script. Since there are multiple diacritical conventions that are often bewildering and confusing except for native language speakers and long-time non-native speakers of Tamil, I feel that omitting diacritics and retaining character usage was my best choice for this study.

Knowledge and Reconciliation

Let me end this chapter where I began, in the voice of the Indian English writer. In an article he wrote for *The Hindu*, an English daily newspaper in India, Amit Chaudhri argues for an approach to Indian fiction based on form rather than ideology. He bases his view on the writings of bilingual poet Arun Kolatkar in whose English verse he sees employed the techniques of defamiliarization (in the Russian-formalist or Shklovskyan sense) and a singularly modernist “peripatetic” narration comparable to that of Philip Larkin. Introducing Kolatkar to his pan-Indian audience, Chaudhri writes:

Kolatkar was a poet who wrote in both Marathi and English; in Marathi, his oeuvre is shaped by a combination of epic, devotional and weird science fiction and dystopian impulses. In English, Kolatkar’s impetus and ambition are somewhat different: it’s to create a vernacular with which to express, with a febrile amusement, a sort of urbane wonder at the unfinished, the provisional, the random, the shabby, the not-always-respectable but arresting ruptures in our moments of recreation, work, and as in **Jejuri** [Kolatkar’s collection of poems], even pilgrimage.
(Chaudhri)

Chaudhri’s assertions here are startling for one reason. Even in the discussion of a poet who is equally at ease in English and Marathi, who, after the publication of *Jejuri* in the 1960s forswore the use of English, making Marathi the exclusive language of his creative idiom, the use of ‘native’ language is seen by Chaudhri as symptomatic of the

traditional/mythic, and the use of English related to the expression of a cosmopolitan, sophisticatedly fragmented modernity. Having read most of Kolatkar's Marathi poems in English translation, my understanding of the Marathi originals Chaudhri speaks of is limited.¹⁰ However, the mythic and devotional resonate as much in the *Jejuri* poems as in Kolatkar's later Marathi poems, 2004's *Kala Ghoda* and *Sarpa Satra*, something outside the purview of this dissertation, and a case I would like to prove elsewhere, in the interest of time. Notwithstanding space constraints, that discussion is a crucial one, a much-needed attempt to pinpoint the relationships between the Indian writer in English and his multilingual Indian audiences.

It is this analysis of Kolatkar's English poems as modernist representation that takes Chaudhri to his biggest theoretical caveat about Indian writing, the essay's deeper purpose. He writes:

In India, where, ever since Said's **Orientalism**, the exotic has been at the centre of almost every discussion, serious or frivolous, on Indian writing in English (tirelessly expressing itself in the question, "Are you exoticising your subject for a Western audience?"), the aesthetics of estrangement, of foreignness, in art have been reduced to, and confused with, the politics of cultural representation. And so the notion of the exotic is used by lay reader and critic alike with the sensitivity of a battering ram to demolish, in one blow, both the perceived act of bad faith and the workings of the unfamiliar" (Chaudhri).

In the above segment, Chaudhri takes on the specter that haunts every Indian English writer, the naively nativist critic who accuses the Indian English writer of selling out to the west, according him/her "a politics that is partly nationalistic, partly xenophobic." In the meantime, he appropriates Kolatkar—one of the most radically innovative and publicity-shy proponents of Marathi writing whose constant struggle was to establish his

native language's ability to express cosmopolitan themes—into the Indian English canon. He neglects to mention Kolatkar's own surly contempt for English-speaking and English-thinking intelligentsia,¹¹ not to mention his reclusive withdrawal from the metropolitan literary scene towards the end of his life. The point, it finally seems, is not so much Kolatkar's reclamation into Indian English ranks, but via such reclamation, the defense of the Indian English writer, Chaudhri himself.

My attempt here is not to scapegoat Chaudhri for all that is wrong with Indian writers who produce work in English. However, the accountability of these writers in their self-representation and in petulant critical outbursts like the one above is something that needs to be discussed in more substantive and less polemical terms than the current critical establishment, both at home and abroad, seems to want to allow. For it is someone like Chaudhri who gets to edit the *Picador Book of Modern Indian Literature* (2001),¹² in which, after lamenting the hegemonic status of writing in English in the Indian literary pantheon, he showcases in ample quantity writing in English and his native Bengali, undeniably at the expense of the other Indian languages. As Girish Karnad, one of India's most pre-eminent playwrights (writing both in English and the south Indian language Kannada), remarks:

This book has 632 pages of main text. Of these, 130 are devoted to Bengali, and 300 to English. It is hardly surprising then that there isn't much space left for other languages. And yet Chaudhuri adds, "This slight tipping of the scale towards 'regional' or 'vernacular' writing is not strategic or premeditated, but a numerical fact that has emerged after the completion of the selection". Can cramming six vernacular languages into a third of the book, while the remaining two-thirds is devoted to the two languages with which Chaudhuri is familiar, be described as "tipping of the scale towards" the vernaculars? Is he

being ironic? Naive? Insensitive? Or is he - a suspicion that becomes stronger as one goes along - merely justifying his laziness? (Karnad)

Karnad's plainspeak, what he perceives as Chaudhri's hypocrisy in claiming pan-Indianness for a book focused mainly on literary production in two languages, borders on the offensive, perhaps. However, his diagnosis is spot-on. In the Picador anthology, Chaudhri includes seven Bengali-language writers, three Hindi, three Urdu, four "Pages from Autobiographies" (one Oriya, three English), *sixteen* English, and four from "the south" (two Malayalam, one Tamil, one Kannada). Printed alongside Karnad's excoriating essay, Leela Gandhi's review of the same anthology provides a gentler type of rebuke coupled with praise. Hailing the anthology as a "major literary event," she writes:

[T]his volume draws our attention, anew, to the symbiotic development of vernacular and English literatures in modern India ... Aspects of this anthology may well alienate some readers. The editorial headnotes are chatty to a fault, and the selections themselves are fairly idiosyncratic. Bengal is predictably pre-eminent, Tamil, Kannada, Malayalam and Telugu literatures are clumped together under a featureless "The South", and there is something puzzling about the omission of Maharashtra from a volume devoted to the representation of Indian secular modernity. So too, one is not always persuaded by Chaudhuri's protestations about the very literary fashions of which he is, in some ways, a direct beneficiary as a new-Indian-writer-in-English. (Gandhi)

Such criticism—idiosyncratic selections, significant omissions, clear bias and editorial culpability—arguably affords grounds for changing the title of Chaudhri's anthology from the *Picador Book of Modern Indian Literature* to the *Picador Book of Modern English, Bengali, and Other Literatures in India*. Gandhi's praise for the elegance of the English translations in the volume is a gesture of conciliation at best. At worst, it is a

refusal on the part of the diasporic postcolonial scholar to seriously treat the allegations of migrant self-consolidation and spuriousness that Chaudhri's critical and fictional careerism represents.

It seems that, a decade after the initial publication of Ahmad's *In Theory*, the English bias still persists in South Asian literary studies. While Chaudhri attempts to go beyond the exclusively English tenor of previous efforts, it is clear, if nothing else, that he does not do enough. It is also noteworthy that the "featureless" south receives short shrift in pan-Indian surveys and anthologies, though recent critical efforts—such as *The Handbook of Twentieth-Century Literatures of India* (1996, edited by Nalini Natarajan) and Sheldon Pollock's *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions of South Asia* (2003)—signalling the kinds of linguistic reciprocity and literary exchange in the narratives produced in South Asia are exceptions to this rule.

When critics such as Chaudhri continue to lament the paucity of translations, they hark back to postcolonialism's earliest orthodoxies, evident in publications such as 1989's *The Empire Writes Back*. While conceptualizing the need for and problematic of comparative models for postcolonial literature that account for regional and linguistic disparities across the "non-settler" colonies, Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin are far more comfortable with the idea of linguistic variance as hybridity, syncreticism, metonymy, interlanguage, and syntactic fusion, an arsenal of resistance "signifying both difference and the tension of difference" in the cross-cultural text, and solely available to the writer in English (69). Such strategies provide an unthreatening means of foregrounding inscriptions of "cultural difference," and their identification is surely a far less

cumbersome task than the systematic unearthing of vernacular texts and making available of scholarly translations in English.

In order to highlight a moment of embodied cultural difference in a non-English frame, I conclude my introduction with the description and analysis of a song I learned as a child, a song written by Kalki and sung by the incomparable south Indian vocalist M.S. Subbulakshmi (1916-2004), active in the nationalist campaign and dubbed the “queen of song” by India’s first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru. The song was first written by Kalki for the 1944 Tamil version of the film *Meera*, a motion picture narrating the life of the Rajasthani medieval poet-saint of the same name and directed by the American filmmaker Dungan Ellis. This song was subsequently performed by Subbulakshmi and others towards the end of classical music recitals, when lighter pieces could be performed and enjoyed after the main, high-classical, melodic exposition had taken place. In this song, the female persona (in the film original, Meera herself) yearns for the song of the Hindu god Krsna’s flute, a celestial song that arrives in the tranquil breeze. The concluding lines of the song are: ‘Kalam ellam avan katalei yenni/urukumo en ullam.’ In them, the persona croons that her heart will melt from unrequited love for the lord, to whom she pledges her devotion through the ages. These final lines often have a palpable effect on south Indian audiences listening to the song; audible sighs can be heard in the audience at this romanticized image of absolute devotion and yearning on the part of the poet-persona. Gowri Ramnarayan writes:

Since it was first rendered in 1944 for the earlier Tamil version of the film *Meera*, the song “Kaatrinile varum geetam” invariably sets the audiences applauding even as they hear its first note and syllable. Written by "Kalki" Krishnamurti to bring out the deep, wistful yearning of the

human soul through music and poetry, the lyric uses the iconic visuals of the Krishna who blows magic through his flute ... When M.S. Subbulakshmi sings, the fantasy and hyperbole of Krishna's flute become living experience for listeners of three generations across this country.¹³

What explains the appeal of Kalki's song? It is precisely the crafting of an inviolable inner/sacred realm personified by Subbulakshmi's voice, her rapt and transcendent demeanor while singing, and the conjuring of a stylized devotionism associated with medieval Tamil poetry in which the first stirrings of anticolonial resistance can be located, that audiences identify with during the song. Kalki successfully appropriates this devotional register from the medieval past, ably assisted in his endeavor by the incandescent singing and appearance of Subbulakshmi, making her inspired outpouring the exclusive province of Indian nationalism. It is this fantasy of sovereignty and autonomy in a precolonial past, and the opportunity for the Tamil audience to relive that sovereign period, that contributes to the appeal of the lyric and Subbulakshmi's performance. This sense of wonder at indigenous pasts was something that anticolonial crafters repeatedly strove to propagate. Additionally, Tamil viewers and listeners could revel in the fact that the Tamil *Meera* spawned a Hindi version in 1947. Contributing to the legend of Tamil origin and ascendancy is the fact that Subbulakshmi often sang Meera's songs for Mahatma Gandhi at his request.

During the twentieth-century Tamil renaissance, the contribution of Tamil cultural production in the Tamil language to a pan-Indian Hindu nationalism took concrete form in films such as *Meera*. Kalki's song marks a legitimizing moment for his audiences, a moment when the Tamil experience has a profound influence on the anticolonial imagination at large, and Tamil influence travels far beyond the region. In my next

chapter, I will detail the discursive/sociological mechanisms by which the Tamil nationalist ethos, to which Kalki was a prominent contributor, took shape in context of a wider anticolonial resistance.

NOTES

¹ In an essay titled “Indo-Anglian Fiction: Writing India, Elite Aesthetics, and the Rise of the ‘Stephanian’ Novel,” a publication that marked the beginning of her scholarly career, Gandhi suggests, “In valorising a certain class of writer in the name of enlightened cosmopolitanism, both [Rushdie and established Indian English writer Rukun Advani] turn away from the creative and cultural realities of another, possibly more troubled, India. The voice of this ‘other’ India may not be as immediately accessible or aesthetically appealing to an international readership, but surely this is a matter of taste rather than value” (*Australian Humanities Review*, 8, November 1997-January 1998). Despite her perceptive diagnosis of the bias in Rushdie, and the field in general, Gandhi fails to provide the alternatives by which to understand this other, more troubled, India. The emphasis on Third World literature’s allegorical capabilities persists.

² Kalki here refers to the ancient empires of Maurya and Magadha in the northern plains, and the great kings associated with their achievement.

³ Thatha=grandfather. In Tamil, the term signaling the familial relationship usually succeeds the name of the person being addressed.

⁴ For more on this eighteenth-century controversy, and the role of English departments in propagating colonial supremacist notions of global cultural production, see Gauri Viswanathan’s *Masks of Conquest* (1989).

⁵ Each of these scholars emphasizes historicizing the local and thoroughly examining material situations and practices in her/his respective fields. See Thomas’s *Colonialism’s Culture* (1994), in which he argues for a more nuanced understanding of the ways in which colonial discourse enmeshes with ex-colonial/precolonial/postcolonial history, policy, and practice. In Povinelli’s *The Cunning of Recognition: Indigenous Alterities and the Making of Australian Multiculturalism* (2002), a sensitive and nuanced understanding of the (im)possibility of identification with the aboriginal subject—shuttling between the forces of indigenous and national identity—is coupled with a carefully historicist and materialist approach. Quayson cautions against seeing all African literature as writing back to the European center. See also Chidi Okonkwo’s *Decolonizing Agonistics in Postcolonial Fiction* (1999). In “Identity and Its Discontents: Women and the Nation,” Deniz Kandiyoti argues strenuously for the scholarly examinations of the situatedness of the doubly colonized and variously affiliated female subject, the imbrication of gender in race and class.

⁶ Deleuze and Guattari’s *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* provides the jumping off point for Young’s theory. He argues that desire is a social and material product rather than something that springs from an individual consciousness. The forms of sexual exchange brought about by colonialism—miscegenation the key instance of this

inquiry—were themselves consequences of the modes of economic exchange that constituted the basis of colonial relations.

⁷ For a comprehensive introduction to the originating perspectives of the subaltern studies collective, see Ranajit Guha's anthology, *The Subaltern Studies Reader, 1986-1995* and David Ludden's 2002 collection of more recent views in *Reading Subaltern Studies: Critical History, Contested Meaning and the Globalization of South Asia*.

⁸ It is in much the same manner that colonial authority saw itself as the instrument of social change and democratization and the liberation of indigenous women, providing the moral justification for colonial rule and oppression of colonized male subjects. See Gayatri Spivak's pivotal "Can the Subaltern Speak" (1983).

⁹ McClintock eloquently argues that the "post" in post-colonial privileges European prepositional time and teleology, relying on the Enlightenment notions of linear progress.

¹⁰ However, it seems to me that Kolatkar's *Marathi* verse employs Rushdie-esque modernist and postmodernist techniques, including defamiliarization, the self-same techniques that Chaudhri holds dear. In a review of the *Kala Ghoda* poems, Gowri Ramnarayan writes:

The black farce frames cityscapes under shifting lights,
films men and women below towers, clocks, churches and
heritage mansions, moving for up-close shots of waifs,
wastrels, trollops, thieves, drug pushers, drunks... The city
dawns to breakfast, swarming around "Our Lady of Idlis"
who releases a "landslide of full moons slithering past each
other, humping like turtles, or oil-slick seals blinking in the
sun". The Lepers Band marches past — "Trrap a boom
chaka, shh chaka boom tap" — its noseless singer bawling
to drums beaten by bandaged hands. Above the archway
that bears his head, David Sassoon, merchant prince,
unrolls the pageant of the city's past. The "Barefoot Queen
of the Crossroads", tosses her damp hair back and forth,
scattering spitfire droplets, draping her saree "with utter
contempt for the voyeur world revolving around her — the
dirty old men with clean noses, the bug-eyed painters, poets
with their tongues hanging out". The stroke punctures deep.
Hypocrisies gush out in a putrid burst. No wonder the poet
has been accused of cynicism, even sacrilege.
(Ramnarayan, September 5, 2004)

¹¹ When asked to comment on the difference between his Marathi and English writings, Kolatkar opines: “My Marathi poems were written in different times and periods in my life, and that could have made the difference rather than language. They are probably more dense texture wise, and opaque. At least that's a common complaint. Anyway it's futile to form a judgement of what I'm doing in Marathi in English” (“No Easy Answers,” September 5, 2004).

¹² The title slyly invokes 1997's *Vintage Book of Indian Writing*, edited by Rushdie and Elizabeth West and containing Rushdie's infamous proclamation about Indian Writing in English.

¹³ See Ramnarayan's “Jewel in the Crown” (*Frontline* 15:2, January 24 - February 6, 1998).

CHAPTER 2

THE PRESS, THE HISTORICAL ROMANCE, AND THE TAMIL PUBLIC SPHERE

“When I wrote *Partiban Kanavu* and *Civakamiyin Capatam*, I realized how much Tamil people today desire to know about the prestige of the ancient Tamil regions,” Kalki reveals in the 1948 preface to the 1944 historical romance *Civakamiyin Capatam*.¹ His three novels depicting the medieval south Indian kingly dynasties of the Pallavas (500-800 CE) and Colas (800-1279 CE) – *Partiban Kanavu* (1941), *Civakamiyin Capatam* (1944) and *Ponniyin Celvan* (1950)–have made him (and the historical and fictional characters he assembled) a household name among Tamil audiences. Tamil critics, writers and scholars interviewed in 2003 credit Kalki with single-handedly forging a readership for Tamil journalism, an achievement in which the serialized novel played a significant role. The immense popularity of his historical fiction persists; the three novels featuring the Pallava and Chola dynasties continue to run periodically in *Kalki*, with a corresponding rise in readership that indicates the continuing loyalty of his audiences in the postcolonial present.

Though the genre of historical romance was a secular inheritance from Europe, its twentieth-century Tamil incarnation invoked ancient Tamil history, secular/sacred texts and contexts, and pan-religious mythologies and symbols to influence formulations

of region and nation in the Tamil public sphere. Its practitioners sought deliberately to infiltrate the colonial imaginary with their revivalist narratives of a Tamil nation founded on hoary spiritual traditions, fashioning a distinctive vernacular public sphere in the process. I explore in this chapter how *Civakamiyin Capatam*, the second of the three historical romances, navigates the searing, often-contradictory, ethnic, linguistic, and regional tensions that constructed colonial Tamil identity in the 1940s, invoking a spiritual past for a vision of secular nation.

Examining the edifice of anticolonial history wrought through Kalki's images of the Tamil medieval past in *Civakamiyin Capatam* assists my critique of existing constructs of bourgeois nationalism in the South Asian context. Contested space from the beginning, the formation of nationalistic discourse and of nation in India and other ex-colonies have been studied in contexts of colonial and imperialist discourse; the gender-, caste- and class-specific subject in relation to colonial, bourgeois nationalist, and neo-imperialist discourse; the role of language in shaping nation, and the nation-state's relationship to processes of globalization.

In a by-now classic instance of subaltern studies scholarship, 1987's *Dominance Without Hegemony*, Ranajit Guha outlines the contradictions and layers of irony afforded through an examination of the two sets of bourgeoisie, metropolitan and indigenous, present in colonial India. "Champions of the right of European nations to self-determination, they [the metropolitan bourgeoisie] denied the same right to their Indian subjects until the very last phase of the raj and granted it without grace only when forced to do so under the impact of anti-imperialist struggles of the subject population" (4). The indigenous bourgeoisie, on the other hand, caught between their reluctance for military

struggle against the British and the inherited values of a feudal past, practiced a weak-kneed liberalism, Guha alleges. “This mediocre liberalism, a caricature of the vigorous democratic culture of the epoch of the rise of the bourgeoisie in the West, operated throughout the colonial period in a symbiotic relationship with the still active and vigorous forces of the semi-feudal culture of India” (Guha 5).

As I indicated in my introduction, such sharply critical perspectives on the indigenous middle-class, and by extension, the intellectuals and politicians who sprang from their ranks, inaugurated an antifoundational approach to historiography in South Asia, enabling scholarship focusing on the fragmented and forgotten narratives of the nationalist movement and usually involving marginal and/or oppressed communities—peasants, aboriginal peoples, workers—whose experience had hitherto garnered very little written documentation.

Despite these undeniably crucial interventions in historical accounts, the institutional discourses that make up dominant culture—the province of elites—can hardly be ignored in an account of India’s pre-independence history, literature, and politics. Ashis Nandy states that nationalists all over India constructed an “anti-colonial” discourse that was a response to the manifold colonialisms enacted in India through rhetoric, public policy, and legal reforms.² A product of this anticolonial response, the bourgeois nationalist project might have suffered from a derivative mindset, as Guha and other scholars of his ilk suggest, as well as unacknowledged ideological limitations for which the subalternists offered timely correctives. However, the subaltern perspective is impoverished in its ability to account for the complexities of and variations in nationalist discourse that affected the way in which the nationalist movement gained momentum and

spread between colonized elites and other sections of society. That is, there is very little attempt in subaltern historiography to explain the populist moves made by anticolonial nationalists in order to gain public and proletarian support, to ask how Macaulay's class of white-collar, English-educated Indians subverted the colonial agenda (assisting in the governance of the masses) to organize middle- and working-class resistance to British rule. However, its practitioners were nevertheless architects of the edifice of nation inherited by postcolonial communities in South Asia.

Bourgeois nationalism's existing definitions also do not contain the extremely complex processes of print culture—including the translation, production, and reception of vernacular and cosmopolitan texts. For instance, as Priya Joshi writes: "Print in India has many lives: it forms the material of reading and writing and in this context it is purveyed, purchased, purloined, borrowed, loaned, exchanged, copied, "zeroksed"...printed paper performs the role of exchange value in ways one seldom encounters anywhere else: in many parts of India, households sell old newspapers and print of all types by weight to an army of organized ragmen in exchange for kitchen goods such as stainless steel pots and pans that mothers stash for their daughters' trousseaux" (xv-xvi). Investigating the pathways by which print culture assailed its audiences can help contextualize Kalki's contribution as a public intellectual and determine the effects of his writings on the Tamil social, cultural, and political scene.

The Bengali and Hindi instances alone, though instrumental as role models and points of departure/resistance for other regional public spheres—Marathi, Kannada, Tamil, Oriya, Gujarati, Telugu, Assamese, and Malayalam, to name but a few—do not represent the widely differing discourses of nation, and the literary and social movements

that occurred in the various regions of India during the nationalist period. The time has come for sustained, pan-regional analysis of anticolonial nationalism's contributors.³

The work and the lives of regional writers and intellectuals who shaped vernacular public spheres and strongly influenced the production of cultural, literary and political knowledge deserve scrutiny on account of the local and regional factors that nuanced nation- and culture-making projects across South Asia's regions.

In order to historicize the role of the serialized historical romance in the formation of the Tamil public sphere, this chapter first theorizes and traces the growth of national and regional public spheres in colonial India. Locating *Civakamiyin Capatam* within the frame of its initial serialization in the weekly magazine *Kalki*, the chapter closely examines the range of secular purposes and outcomes produced by nationalist appropriations of history and religion in the Tamil public sphere, and the discursive/ideological tensions that result. In other words, I ask how anti-colonial crafters of the vernacular public sphere—such as *Kalki*—reconciled a retreat into the religious past with regionalist loyalties and their secular democratic ideals for an independent Indian nation.

Nation, History, and the Constitution of the Public Sphere

How might the Tamil instance nuance scholarly understandings of South Asian print culture and the regional public sphere? What were some of the ways in which Tamil print culture and the novel participated in the exchange of ideas that occurred in the Tamil public sphere and in sometimes competing, sometimes complementary discourses of Tamil and Indian nationalism? What were its models? In *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Jurgen Habermas postulates that in seventeenth-

and eighteenth-century Europe, relations between capitalism and the state resulted in the short-lived formulation of a bourgeois public sphere--an arena for rational critical debate in which disinterested citizens could participate, a debate afforded by print culture and the existence of a reading public who cultivated opinion in the private sphere of family/home. “The public sphere of civil society stood or fell with the principle of universal access...Accordingly, the public that might be considered the principle of the bourgeois constitutional state viewed its sphere as a public one in this strict sense; in its deliberations it anticipated in principle that all human beings belong to it...This public remained rooted in the world of letters even as it assumed political functions; education was one criterion for admission—property ownership the other” (Habermas 85). The European public sphere of this description is historically, philosophically, and socially context-bound and a product of Enlightenment values, of which Habermas makes no secret.

As later theorists have pointed out, the promise of “universal access” for “all human beings” in the public sphere was a myth; often women and racial minorities were excluded from political and social participation.⁴ However, the way in which Habermas historicizes the European public sphere—its press an emerging forum for rational critical debate—and the growth of this sphere in a public institutional space separate from both the private realm and from the state—is still a useful framework, at least affording the lens with which to imagine the kinds of constructions of democratic Europe and models for postcolonial public communication that circulated in the anticolonial nationalist imaginary. This possibility of a rational public sphere in a civil society where the democratization of ideas and interests occurred through education, property rights, and

public discourse, inflamed the bourgeois nationalist projects of India's various regions. (It must be kept in mind, however, that in the polyglot public spheres of India where the colonial presence was a precondition, however, socio-political circumstances were markedly different than those experienced by their western European counterparts.)

Though I have already outlined the debates surrounding the constructions of nation and national culture in anticolonial contexts in my introduction, I briefly recap these arguments here to map how Eurocentric formulations of nation were challenged or appropriated for the construction of India's vernacular public spheres. The relationship between fictional representation, print culture, and the nation-state was investigated by Benedict Anderson who argues in his 1983 *Imagined Communities* that ideas of nation are created and maintained in the social imaginary through what he termed print capitalism, especially the novel and the newspaper. In connecting the emergence of national consciousness to literary forms, Anderson's text provided fodder for a range of debates on the institutional processes and discourses constructing nationness in the Indian subcontinent. In Anderson, the nation-state is a western inheritance (post the industrial revolution in Europe) that spread to other parts of the globe. It is a projection, imagined and imaginary, a construct that carries ideological and emotional weight in the global context despite its philosophical poverty, according to Anderson.

Faulting Anderson for representing the genealogy of nation solely in western Enlightenment terms, Partha Chatterjee investigates the processes by which Indian bourgeois nationalism consciously imagined itself as distinct from nationalism in the British/western colonial sphere. The notion of nation as an exportable European conception and creation that traveled to the Americas and then Asia, successfully

reproducing itself around the globe, emphasizes the *derivative* and *repetitive* instantiations of national discourse without allowing for location-specific variations, Chatterjee states (15). He argues further that the idea of a modular nationness/nationalism does not allow for transnational difference, and does not explain local modifications and resistances to overarching formulations of nation.

Similarly, the Saidian-Foucauldian paradigm in postcolonial and subaltern studies has led to the universalizing postulation that “both the [colonial] encounter and orientalism [are seen] as nearly total hegemonic projects in which all classes of the colonized lost not only their self-determination but also, more importantly, their power to construct their own “true” identities or imagine their own “real” histories or nations” (Ravindiran 51). Such theoretical generalizations about the colonial condition predicated upon post-structuralist methodologies yield, Ravindiran argues, “a view of colonized regions as culturally and socially homogeneous, with little internal or class struggles, and contradictions, at least until the advent of European hegemony” (52).

Broadly speaking, the articulation of gaps in critical discourse on nationness is attempted by postcolonial scholars who seek today to identify the discourses of those disempowered by state, race, and religion sponsored nationalisms. These constructions and processes are only partially contained in Anderson’s Enlightenment-and-Americas predicated account of nation and Bhabha’s version of nationness based on textuality and cultural process. Anti-colonial nationalist elites in South Asia, in fact, rejected the idea of secondariness (to the colonizer’s England), consciously scripting an original and sovereign Indian nation. The elite/subaltern subjectivities created by the discourses of nationalism in India were not solely based on such European universalist assumptions.

The concern for originality and sovereignty among anticolonial crafters (such as Kalki) creates a tension between their secular, democratic ideals for an independent India on the one hand, and their emphasis on reviving an Indian past untainted by colonial rule on the other. The Indian novelists concerned themselves with the subordinate situation of the colonized, while embracing for indigenous society Enlightenment ideals of social and national progress. In their hands, the novel became a vehicle through which to fashion Indian identity. At the pan-Indian level, Kalki's novel reveals the stance of anti-colonial nationalist elites who rejected the idea of secondariness (to the coloniser's England), consciously scripting an original and sovereign Indian nation.

Claims to hoary status predating Muslim and British invasions occurred often in the realm of Hindu nationalist historiography and were disseminated by the vernacular and English press. As historian Manu Goswami suggests in *Producing India: From Colonial Economy to National Space* (2004), intellectuals negotiating the discursive spaces produced by and in the colonial state were forced to grapple with an inherent contradiction that was the product of non-settler rule. Linguistic, political, and social homogenization—not to mention the kinds of centralization caused by fast-spreading networks of modern transport and communication technologies—occurred in the nation's various regions alongside a deepening awareness of internal and regional difference. This sense of difference persisted not only in the hierarchies of the European world economy in which the colonies occupied a subordinate position, but also with South Asia itself.

The contradiction caused by homogenization despite differences of caste, region, and class in colonial space created a rift between colonizer and colonized, and manifested

differently in the different parts of colonial India. What this meant, in effect, was the privileging of region concomitant with the valorization of nation. Manu Goswami defines this late nineteenth-century phenomenon as “territorial nativism”:

[This territorial nativism was] predicated upon a doubled movement of the territorialization of history and the delimitation of organically conceived core nationals from the standpoint of territorial origin and fictive unity between past and present. It identified upper-caste Hindus as the organic, original core nationals within an intimate and unmediated relationship to an imagined nation...Territorial nativism haunted and undermined subsequent anticolonial projects and movements, especially the Indian National Congress’s project of societal unification and economic development. (10)

What was territorial nativism’s driving impetus? Driven by the positivist/Enlightenment will to knowledge—the categorization and containment of the colonized world—nineteenth-century Orientalist scholars were critical of ancient Indian society, seeing it as “static, retrogressive, conducive to economic backwardness,” Romila Thapar writes (5). They constructed “the all-powerful, despotic, oriental potentate” and a powerless and apathetic Indian public (Thapar 6). Indian nationalist historians appropriated such Orientalist knowledge and embraced ‘Aryan race theory’ (emphasizing the racial connections between Europeans and upper caste Indians) as a means to assert equality with the colonizer. These historians deliberately invoked the spiritual wisdom of ancient India, describing a pre-Islamic past as “characterized by an inclusive Hinduism” (Thapar 85). Consequently, they fashioned a Hindu identity based on “their own idealised image of themselves, resulting in an upper-caste, brahman dominated society” (86).

When nineteenth-century British imperialists such as George Grierson claimed that Hindi was an artificial language the British “created” in the absence of a uniform

national language,⁵ Hindu nationalists in 1860s and 1870s, themselves implicated in the creation of myths and genealogies about Hindi, rejected the colonizer's artificial theory. Their counterclaim was that Hindi descends from Sanskrit, language of the Aryan, and was spoken before the Muslim invasion. Therefore, they asserted, Hindi was the only viable language for the national literature of the Hindus. The Hindi instance shows groups speaking different dialects coming together under the common umbrella of language. Western educated intelligentsia might be said to have provided reformist impulses whereas Hindu traditionalists focused on the revival of "ancient" practices and their homogenization. The traditional and modern became the two ends of the debate, Dalmia notes, and corresponded to "indigenous" and "alien" respectively (5). Of course, the two poles inflected and affected one another, including a variety of actors such as missionaries and Orientalists, and Indian and western thought paradigms.

Hindi's creative development and subsequent politicization occurred, Dalmia states, through three idioms:

- the European concept of a nation and national language (colonialist policies)
- the literary and cultural heritage invoked by nineteenth-century Hindus
- a concretized notion of a modern national language that developed out of nationalist and colonialist discourse, that allowed projecting backwards a consistent and linear development for a national language and nation.⁶

Dalmia's overall argument indicates that the homogenization of language parallels the constitution of modern Hinduism and modern Hindu identity in the Hindi speaking states. Such homogenization involves the absorption and excising of sects and dialects that deviate from the normative Hinduism still under construction. Complicit in such knowledge production, the Indian National Congress questioned the role and status of English under colonial rule and vigorously championed Hindi in the late nineteenth and

early twentieth centuries. According to proponents of Tamil, this championing occurred at the expense of other regional languages, dialects and cultures. “Hindi as the language of the Hindus not only shut out Muslim participation, but in its increasing sanskritization, unwittingly, as it were, also achieved polarization with the Dravidian languages of the south” (Dalmia 221).

The rift created by territorial nativism’s homogenizing impulses was expressed in numerous ways in the Tamil state. The sheer volume of historical fiction generated by Kalki, the enthused response of his audiences, and the spate of historical novels and novelists that followed in his wake reflect a strong revivalist turn in the Tamil literary sphere, a response to similar movements across British India but also an indication of a contestatory/complementary linguistic regionalism.⁷ The competing regional, class, and caste ideologies that helped define a “Dravidian” identity for Tamils created varying degrees of resistance to Indian nationalism’s claims about Indian identity among Dravidian activists, writers, and reading publics. This turn was a result of parallel Orientalist and nationalist preoccupations with historiography in the Tamil context and the Tamil brahman subject’s desire for a national, pan-Indian grand narrative in distinctively Tamil terms.

Kalki himself publicly denounced the continuing emphasis on racialized caste wars in the Tamil region, in a 1953 essay titled “Aryar-Dravidar Ennum Arivinam” (The Aryan-Dravidian divide), claiming that Tamil ideologues make such distinctions based on colonial categories that were designed to create dissent among the colonized. “At this time [when the Tamil people are finally free of the colonizer’s yoke], those who imagine and promote feelings of divisiveness and enmity do a disservice to the Tamil people;

ultimately, they do great harm to the Tamil land” (Kalki, *Valka Sutantiram Valka Nirantiram* 482).

Despite Kalki’s own protestations, pan-regional explanations for Kalki’s abiding interest in reconstructing the past—the revivalist and reformist agendas used by nationalists in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as a counter to the British colonial presence and rule—must be considered alongside specific ideological shifts and turbulences in Tamil political and public spheres concerning the issue of Tamil language and literary history for a richer and more complex account of Tamil identity formation.

As this chapter demonstrates, the Tamil public sphere reflects a set of multi-layered and heterogeneous responses to colonial rule that complement and contradict Orientalist and northern Indian nationalist discourse discussed so far in this chapter. Providing a layered account of the processes of colonial and indigenous interaction in the Tamil instance, Ravindiran argues that missionary Orientalism and the Dravidian resistance played upon each other in vital ways: “European orientalism was dependent upon and responsive to the discourses of locally dominant groups and reflected many of their visions and interests. Similarly, far from being passive victims of orientalism, dominant groups in the colonies actively participated in the construction, maintenance, and propagation of orientalist knowledge” (52). The balance between regional, national, and colonial influences/intertexts/histories in the Tamil region was precariously maintained at best because of this phenomenon of Dravidian nationalism in the south. Ravindiran identifies two key moments in the spread of Dravidian nationalism and ideology. One was the effort to present Tamil and the other South Indian languages as having a genealogy distinct from those of the Indo-Aryan family and its speakers in India.

The second key moment was the identification and resurrection of a Dravidian religion, which later came to be identified as Saiva Siddhantam, with writers and journalists such as P. Sundaram Pillai, J.M. Nallaswami Pillai, and Maraimalai Adigal as its chief proponents (53-54).

Such currents in Orientalist and nationalist discourse as Dalmia, Goswami, and Ravindiran describe are evident in Kalki's reformulations of national and regional identity. His fictionalization of the Pallava and the Cola periods—300-888 and 880-1279 CE, respectively—is traceable to his nationalistic aspirations for the Tamil public, his desire to develop a distinctive Tamil presence in Indian literary and political history and to resurrect pride among Tamil audiences in the ancient Indian and Tamil past. He aimed to subvert colonial cultural hegemony by reconceptualizing an ancient Hindu past in indigenous terms. However, casteist assumptions and constructions of ancient India that emerged from the discourses of Indian bourgeois nationalism problematize Kalki's versions of history and influence his role and perceptions of it in the Tamil public sphere.

As I discussed in my introduction, education and language, major sites for colonial intervention, became the principal bearers of inter-regional and anticolonial battles. A “national language” was a “concept initially introduced by the British and applied to the Indian situation” (Dalmia 146). Dalmia asserts that until the nineteenth century, no language could claim “national” status in the subcontinent. The College of Fort William was established in Calcutta by the British East India Company in 1800, and European missionaries and British and native schoolbook writers all contributed greatly to the standardization of modern Hindi prose, vocabulary, and orthography.

The installation of Hindi as the new national language had drastic political consequences. The attempt to popularize Hindi was viewed in the southern states as a linguistic and political takeover by the north, particularly in the Tamil region. One of the distinguishing features of the southern provinces in the colonial period was the desire to be distinct from the north. Such feelings of cultural and political separateness in southern India can be traced to patterns of administration during colonial rule.⁸ The result was a rejection of Hindi's claims to national language status among Tamils, a response to what was perceived as the Aryanization and brahmanization of the new nation that would serve the ends of a brahmanical elite. As a result of this debate, throughout the twentieth century, proponents of Tamil from different camps debated "what kind of Tamil one should serve" and "who ought to be involved" (Ramaswamy 135).

In the south, nineteenth-century missionary orientalism used both questions of language and indigeneity to interrogate Hindu orientalism (Ravindiran 52). Missionaries played up the tension between Sanskrit and local languages, believing that brahminism and the caste system were the greatest evils among the colonized. In doing so, they strenuously supported knowledge production about the local languages. Robert Caldwell's 1856 *A Comparative Grammar of the Dravidian or South Indian Family of Languages* was the earliest to introduce the word "Dravidian" into Orientalist and nationalist vocabularies. Caldwell wrote in his preface that northern sources refer to Dravidian languages as the language of demons, something that caused, or should cause, a sense of injury among southerners (Caldwell 6). Missionary intervention also involved finding "in the ancient Tamil and other vernaculars religious and literary works evidence of an ethical and religious system that was ... more compatible with the Christian

tradition” (Ravindiran 54). The work that Caldwell and other missionaries put into asserting an independent and pure Tamil was invaluable to the Tamil renaissance, Tamil *marumalarcci*, a phrase that has taken firm hold in the Tamil literary and political sphere.

Dravida (Dravidian) and *Dravida Nadu* (the Dravidian land) thus became important markers in the genealogy and history of the four South Indian languages, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, and Malayalam, and crucially affected formulations of Tamil nationalism.⁹ What’s most intriguing about the politicization of the “Dravidian” family of languages is that it was in the Tamil region that solidarity was established around the cause.

The Tamil renaissance movement originating in 1905 was coeval with a vociferous non-brahmin movement built on the legacy of the missionaries and later evolving into Dravidian nationalism. The disproportionate representation of Brahmins in colonial administration at a time when various non-brahmin elites belonging to landowning and merchant castes had started questioning their inferior status caused deep antibrahmin sentiment (Arooran 36). In 1944, brahmans, who constituted 3% of the total population, and occupied 820 administrative posts, 37% of the total. Forward-caste nonbrahmans—who constituted 22% of the population and were instrumental in the Dravidianization of Tamil politics—occupied 620 posts, 27% of the total. The backward-caste nonbrahmans, on the other hand, comprised 50% of the population and garnered 50 posts, a mere 2% of those available (Barnett 59). Brahmins led the Tamil population in the matter of English literacy in this period. They came therefore to be associated with two alien languages, English and Sanskrit, the latter because of their traditional/caste role as classical scholars and performers of Sanskrit-based rituals in Hindu temples.

The formation of the Madras Dravidian Association (1894), Madras United League (1912), and the South Indian Liberal Federation (later the Justice Party, Dravida Kalakam and Dravida Munnetra Kalakam, 1917) signaled the growth of the nonbrahmin movement. Members from these groups and later the Justice Party, the DK and DMK, often spoke out in opposition against brahminical discourse and its institutions, structuring political discourse in the regional state around anti-brahmin sentiment.

Established in Madras in 1879 under the aegis of Annie Besant and C.W. Leadbetter, The Theosophical Society was a curiously placed target of Dravidian ideologues. In particular, the society's efforts through oratory and print to revive interest in ancient Aryan society, performing arts, and literature in order to promote cultural nationalism among Brahman intellectuals and politicians came under scrutiny. But the Society's reformist efforts did make an impression on the Tamil national imaginary: "[The poet] Subramania Bharati drew upon Annie Besant's *On the Education of Girls* (1904), in which a theosophist, reminiscent of other Irish-Indian feminist nationalists, advised girls to set high academic goals but also retain their innate Eastern wisdom by not competing with men on the worldly plane" (Anantha Raman 105). Nonbrahmins nonetheless regarded the nationalist (Home Rule) movement sponsored by such figures as Besant as extremist and casteist and demanded extensive revisions of political policy, including representation in legislature, in the agitation for self-government, implying that in brahmin-dominated India, they would never gain sufficient political clout.

By this time, and as a response to both brahmin and nonbrahmin need, print culture was developing rapidly in both English and Tamil. (Printing presses had arrived in the eighteenth century courtesy of the European missionaries.) Weekly, monthly, and

daily periodicals circulated in the seventy thousands in both Madras city and the districts. By 1912, a number of Tamil periodicals (including some sponsored by the Theosophical Society) devoted articles to religion, spiritualism, and philosophy. Critical commentaries on the Saiva Siddhanta and on the Tamil language were also in circulation.

In the field of education, there was much debate over linguistic favoritism, and the university was seen as privileging English and Sanskrit over Tamil. Tamil courses and courses in Oriental studies were introduced into the University of Madras in 1912 and 1926, respectively. A Tamil-medium university (Annamalai University) was founded in 1929-30. Such debates over language preference also raged in the sphere of classical music, with two warring factions, the Music Academy (1928) and the Tamil Icai (Music) Movement, at loggerheads in the forties. The former insisted that Sanskrit and Telugu were the languages that had yielded the richest compositions in classical music, and the latter advocated building up a classical oeuvre in Tamil, insisting on its rightness for the job.

What of modern literature? The earliest novel in India published in a vernacular language was Bankimchandra's *Durgesanandini* (Bengali, 1865). The earliest Tamil novel, Vedanayakam Pillai's *Pratapa Mutaliar Caritram* (Pratapa Mudaliar's Story, 1879) combined didacticism and social satire in order to expose Tamil orthodoxies and prejudices in colonial times. The second social realist novel in Tamil was Sithilabbai Marikar's *Asenbe Charitram*, published in Sri Lanka in 1885. Other pre-independence Tamil novels include Rajam Iyer's *Kamalambal Caritram* (1896) and A. Madhavayya's *Padmavati Caritram* (1898). Sita Anantha Raman writes: "The vernacular novel crystallized ethnic and national aspirations...[T]his literature ignited both ethnic and pan-

Indian consciousness through its use of mythic, semi-mystical metaphors on womanhood, motherland, and Tamil unity... These idealizations irrevocably shaped public perceptions of the female persona and became blueprints for Tamil fictional characters” (95). Authors such as Vedanayagam Pillai, Madhavayya, and Cupiramaniam Bharati undertook the representation of female characters who retained their purity and chastity in the face of temptation and strenuously fought for their own freedom and for the freedom of the colonized. These female characters were, though thwarted in their bid for independence by male villains, were ultimately assisted and encouraged on the path to literacy and autonomy by male heroes. In return, they gave the latter their unswerving loyalty. Anantha Raman notes that in the 1890s and beyond, feminist themes predominated in Tamil journals targeting male and female readerships (99).

Kalki’s depictions of woman and motherland clearly draw on this legacy of representation and social reform from the early Tamil and Indian novelists. At a time when male novelists treated themes such as widow remarriage, sati, child marriage, female infanticide, and women’s education, several women’s magazines such as *Mather Manoranjini* (Brightener of women’s minds, 1887), *Tamil Mathu* (1905), and Cupraminiya Bharati’s *Chakravartini* (Empress of justice, 1906), contained writings by and about women that taught women how to live, work, and conduct themselves in the world (Anantha Raman 101). In one such 1927 essay expressing the kind of fears of corruption that pulp fiction can cause, especially among women readers, scholar-activist and labor leader Tiru Vi. Ka writes: “Young women should not be permitted to hear reveling stories, pseudo novels and other such stuff... Parents should take especial care in this regard. These pseudo-novels (*poli novelgal*) are corrupting the woman’s world.

Women should realize these pseudo-novels would ruin their lives like poison” (qtd. in Venkatachalapathy 88). Tiru Vi. Ka.’s use of the word “hear” in connection with women’s exposure to literature is telling in this regard; Venkatachalapathy notes that it was in the inter-war period in the first half of the twentieth century that saw a change in reading practices, from reading aloud to silent reading, revealing “a contrast between old and new generations...the grandmothers being at the receiving end of stories with the advancement of new culture” (98).

The turn of the century saw the success of the careers of nationalist poets such as Gopalakrishna Bharati, Desika Vinayakam Pillai (1876-1954), and the much-revered Cupiramaniam Bharati (1882-1921), whose songs, stories, and plays are still taught and sung in Tamil schools today. The next generation of poets such as Bharatidasan (1891-1961) and Kannadasan (1926-81) followed in the nationalist and romantic mold of Bharati before them. The twentieth century saw a burst of literary activity with the emergence of the “little magazine” on the Tamil scene; short story writers, poets, and novelists such as Putumaipittan (1906-48), B.S. Ramiah, Na. Pichamurti, Ka. Na. Subramaniam, “Chitti” Sundara Rajan, La. Sa. Ramamirtam, and Ku. Pa. Rajagopalan not only experimented with different western genres in the Tamil language but also consciously fostered an atmosphere in which a cosmopolitan base for Tamil literary criticism and translation could be built. Critics such as K. Kailasapathy (1982)—author of the acclaimed *Tamil Heroic Poetry* (1968)—continued in their wake, publishing literary criticism in both Tamil and English.

Educated Tamils were keenly aware of the status of Tamil history on national and regional fronts. A rapid succession of Tamil histories, some biographical and some

dealing with the ancient literary and poetic traditions, were published at this time. Tamil historical research came into vogue as a result of attempts to foster this consciousness, with Krishnaswami Iyengar's *Ancient India and Beginning of South Indian History*, Vaiyapuri Pillai's *Tamil Language, Literature, and Culture* (1956), and Nilakanta Sastri's *A History of South India* (1947) were all first published in the first half of the twentieth century. These scholars emphasized the need to address gaps in the grand narrative of Indian history through greater representation for the south. Articulating the need to go beyond what was perceived by south Indians as a habitual neglect of the south, Sastri wrote in 1947: "All over India the foundations of Indian culture were laid by the fusion of Indo-Aryan and pre-Aryan elements...and in the languages, literatures, and institutions of the south, there had survived much more of pre-Aryan India than anywhere else" (2).

Showing his awareness of such efforts by historians, Kalki's prefatory remarks indicate that his constructions of the Pallava monarchs were conceived in ways that addressed this bias in colonial and national historiography. In his preface, Kalki recollects a joking exchange on the subject of his romances' reception among Tamil readers between himself and T. Sadasivam, the friend, fellow nationalist, and business manager with whom he launched the Tamil cultural and political weekly *Kalki* in 1941. When he informed Sadasivam of his intention to write a *totar katai* (serialized novel) for the magazine, he writes, Sadasivam categorically banned the undertaking; faced with a nationwide paper shortage, he was worried about meeting the spurt in sales that would almost certainly accompany the serialization of a new novel from the ever-popular Krsnamurti's pen. The author responded to Sadasivam's concern with characteristic

humor: “I am going to write a story mighty enough to actually reduce our requirement for paper,” he said. “This effect will be observed within the first few issues of its serialization.” “What kind of amazing story is this,” asked Sadasivam. “It’s a Tamil historical novel named *Partiban Kanavu*,” Kalki informed him. “In Tamilnad, our people only get excited at the prospect of reading historical fiction about the Rajputs and Moguls. Tamils don’t really like Tamil history” (x).

Coming in the wake of his resounding success as a writer of historical fiction and at a time when the question of Tamil identity was foremost in the minds of many actors in the Tamil context, this passage from Kalki’s preface throws light on the key issues surrounding his role as a Tamil brahmin nationalist, social reformer and author. His 1944 Tamil reader would have known that Sadasivam, husband of renowned singer M.S. Subbulakshmi and long time associate of our author, could not have set much store by Kalki’s joking claims about his story’s somewhat unusual powers, nor his readers’ disinclination for all things Tamil. The reader would also have been no stranger to either Kalki’s quirky humor nor the immense popularity he had garnered through his writings (fictional and non-fictional) on the subjects of literature, history, culture, cinema, the arts, religion, the nationalist movement, and global politics. And, as the author unrepentantly discloses, *Kalki*’s sales increased dramatically during *Partiban Kanavu*’s 1941 serialization. Sadasivam had to travel all over the country looking for newsprint, Kalki proudly tells us in the preface, indicating the kind of revivalist turnaround that has occurred in the Tamil imagination as a result of his historical fiction.

Like other historical novelists before him, Kalki aimed in his fictional reconstructions to transport the audience to a consideration of its present via the past.

However, as a colonized subject, Kalki was invested in recovering a historical moment untainted by colonial contact to envision an indigenous nation within the strictures of colonial rule. Having served his first jail term for making seditious speeches against the government, Kalki, like some illustrious others before him, evolved different ways of expressing nationalist sentiments. The Press Act of 1908, following the 1878 Vernacular Press Act that gave district magistrates and presidency commissioners of police the right to confiscate “objectionable” printed matter, “gave power to local authority to take judicial action against any paper which indulged in writings calculated to incite rebellion” (Murthy 439). In this context of censorship and the lack of authorial privilege, the historical romance provided a way to navigate the searing, often-contradictory, ethnic, linguistic, and regional tensions that constructed colonial Tamil identity in the 1940s, invoking a spiritual past for a vision of secular nation.

The Emergence of Kalki

Despite everything I’ve read about the death or disintegration of the author, I confess I went looking for Kalki in his public and private incarnations, through first hand accounts and by reading selections from his prolific and eclectic pen on my research trips to Chennai in 2001-2003. I met an impassioned storyteller, a sly humorist, a champion of Tamil language and literature, and a staunch Gandhian with unswerving faith in the nationalist project. Despite constantly being in the public eye, and involved in several projects for the recovery and propagation of the Tamil and nationalist cause (going to jail was one of them), not to mention producing pages upon pages of writing on a weekly basis, he bore his personal and professional burdens lightly (according to fans and foes alike). For the biographical information on Kalki’s life and writings in this chapter, I

have relied heavily on Sunda's hefty literary biography of Kalki in Tamil, titled *Ponniyin Putalvar*,¹⁰ and containing careful chronological documentation of Kalki's life-history and work as a public intellectual. Sunda's account—as voluminous as Kalki's own historical novels—is peppered with extracts from Kalki's fictional and non-fictional oeuvre; Tamil scholars treat it as the authoritative version of Kalki's life and work, frequently mining it for quotations from Kalki's writings and details of his life.

What cultural, social and political imperatives drove Kalki, an Indian nationalist and social reformer who self-avowedly wrote for the “good of the nation,” to expend his writerly energies on crafting period fictions about *this particular time* in Indian history and these particular kings? And how might this particular historical romance in Tamil nuance scholarly understandings of print culture and the regional literary sphere? Though the genre itself was a secular inheritance from Europe, its twentieth-century Tamil incarnation invoked ancient Tamil history, secular/sacred texts and contexts, and pan-religious mythologies and symbols to influence formulations of region and nation in the Tamil public sphere. Its practitioners sought deliberately to infiltrate the colonial imaginary with their revivalist narratives of a Tamil/Indian nation founded on hoary spiritual traditions, fashioning a distinctive vernacular public sphere in the process.

In Kalki's work, a heightened awareness of Tamil arts, language, oral traditions and literature was coeval with the campaign against social ills among the colonized. Cultural and social-reformist agendas for the Tamil and Indian nation were seen by the author and other nationalists as a crucial component in a free India's cultural and socio-economic progress as a nation and are inextricably woven into *Civakamiyin Capatam*. However, despite his desire for an inclusive pan-religious India, Kalki was faced during

his lifetime with ethnic and caste conflicts in the Tamil region during the colonial period that led to the contestatory Dravidian nationalism and regionalist separatism described above. His historical romances were written for a loyal and ever-expanding magazine readership and evolved amidst specific socio-political movements that gained momentum in the early and mid twentieth centuries: Dravidian political separatism and anti-brahmanism; the *tanitamil* (separate Tamil) and *suya mariyatei* (self-respect) movements; the resurgence of *Saiva Siddhanta* religious tenets, the advent of theosophy; and Tamil *marumalarcci* (cultural renaissance), a phenomenon that included a spate of historical studies celebrating ancient Tamil kingly dynasties and cultures. These discourses in the Tamil region challenged and contributed to the unifying discourses of Indian bourgeois nationalism. Kalki was deeply invested in formulating a regional identity untainted by colonial oppression and compatible with a pan-regional/pan-religious vision of India as a nation. Such characterizations indicate that Kalki's work embodies a distinctive form of interventionist literature from the nationalist period that was nevertheless peculiar to the Tamil context. His work was necessarily riddled with contradictions owing to prevailing tensions between nation and region.

During his lifetime and beyond, Kalki's investment in anticolonial and social reformist agendas led to the accusation of partisanship. He was seen as an author who wrote more for political than aesthetic ends. Kalki replied to such allegations with characteristic sangfroid. Gowri Ramnarayan writes:

In 1933 Kalki admitted that art for art's sake left him cold. In a reply to a written charge that he preferred propaganda to striving for literary worth, he begins [his riposte] by saying that henceforth he would be motivated by literary concerns alone. This is followed by a glowing description

of spring and summer, reminiscent of the classical poet Kalidasa, which somehow turns into an exhortation to all to wear nothing but khadi [the homespun cotton independently woven and worn by many Indian nationalists], as khadi was the most suitable in hot months, and indeed for all seasons. (xvii)

This kind of humor rapidly became Kalki's trademark, allowing him to cheerfully eschew any pretence at literariness. Kalki was also extraordinarily prolific; between 1927 and 1954 (the year he died), he wrote over one hundred and twenty short stories, ten novellas, five social realist novels, three historical romances, one prison notebook, and two screenplays. He also translated Mahatma Gandhi's autobiography into Tamil. During the 1940s, the period when his historical romances were serialized, *Kalki* magazine's circulation reached 71,000, the highest for any weekly periodical in the country. Each romance has yielded eight book length editions, and each re-serialization of the novels in *Kalki* magazine has generated a rise in readership of 20-25,000.¹¹

Kalki was born in the village of Putamangalam in Tanjavur district, in the old Cola country. Archaeological remnants of Cola, Nayak, and Maratha rule still abound in this area, as well as relics of Buddhist, Jainism, and Hinduism. The celebrated fourteenth-century Tamil poet Kampan, venerated by Kalki, was reportedly born in Tanjavur, a city seen from medieval times as the seat of a flourishing culture in which the intermingling of the two ancient languages of Sanskrit and Tamil took place over centuries. Kalki's earliest experiences of storytelling were through his father, Ramaswamy Ayyar, the village accountant. Ramaswamy Ayyar delivered musical renditions of Puranic and epic stories to his children and village audiences. Taking a leaf from their father's book, Kalki and his brother would travel to the neighbouring village to

watch performances of *katha kalaksepa*, a form of storytelling that was exceedingly popular among pre-television Tamil audiences. Inspired by such performances and the example of their father before them, the brothers would enact the stories they heard at local gatherings. During such performances, Kalki demonstrated an aptitude for on the spot humor, improvising songs, jokes and references to local goings-on in his renditions. Ayyasami Ayyar—head of the village school— introduced the young Kalki to novels in Tamil and English, and the nationalist songs of Cupiramanian Bharati. At seventeen, Kalki moved to his aunt's house in the neighboring town of Tiruchi, where he entered middle school after faring poorly in the entrance test. He redeemed himself by winning a scholarship to National City High School.

Being in Tiruchi afforded Kalki the opportunity to participate in the nationalist revolt. After Gandhi's launch of the non-cooperation movement in 1921, and inspired by a particularly fiery speech by nationalist T. S. S. Rajan, Kalki left school to train with Rajan in public speaking and khadi-spinning (as part of the nationalist refusal to buy British mill-made cloth). After a meeting with Gandhi in September 1921, during which he sang Bharati's patriotic songs to his idol, Kalki traveled throughout the district, making public appearances at rallies and meetings. A popular speaker who employed an easy conversational style and off-the-cuff humor, he was charged with sedition and served a one year jail term in 1922 at the Tiruchi jail, at which time he wrote the semi-autobiographical novella, *Vimala*, which featured the patriot as hero; the novel was serialized the next year in the nationalist magazine *Swatantram*. After his prison term Kalki was appointed as clerk and pamphleteer at the Tiruchi office of the Tamilnadu Congress Committee, where he met brahman politician C. Rajagopalachari who served,

among various other political offices, as the first Governor General of independent India. The meeting began an enduring friendship and professional association between the two, with Kalki playing the self-appointed defender of his mentor's political decisions through much of his political career. Kalki became an ardent champion of Rajaji through editorials, and published his scholarly mentor's essays, as well as his redactions of Indian epics. Both Rajaji's *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* appeared in Kalki in the 1940s; *Vyasar Virindu* (The Feast of Vyasa) so titled after the Mahabharata's fabled author Vyasa, was serialized concurrently with *Civakimiyin Capatam* in 1944. The relationship between the two public figures led to allegations of favoritism and brahminical bias in the magazine, and the perception that, for Kalki, Rajaji could do no wrong.

In October 1923, Kalki moved to Madras to become a sub-editor at the nationalist magazine *Navasakti*, run by nationalist, Vellala labor leader Tiru Vi. Kalyanasundaranar. Tiru Vi. Ka. had distinguished himself as the founder of the 1913 *Desabhaktan* (translating to "devotee of nation"), taking an editorial stance that was directly critical both of the government and Tamil society, and forging a more radical Tamil journalistic style that reached beyond the elite to the middle and poorer classes. In *Navasakti*, however, Tiru Vi. Ka. adopted a more serious literary tone and style that marked him as a propagator of *centamil* (pure Tamil) and Saiva Siddhanta (constructed as the religion of the Dravidians and seen by missionaries as the religion most compatible with the Christian faith). By adopting the tone of the Tamil pundits, Tiru Vi. Ka. "gave Tamil journalism a literary stature and quality it had not possessed before" (Irschick 309).

While such an elevation of diction might jibe oddly with Tiru Vi. Ka.'s earlier populist moves, the use of *centamil* for political discussion democratized the language

and took it out of the hands of the Brahman pundits, paving the way for later Dravidian rhetoric. Railing against apathy in the Tamil region vis-à-vis the non-cooperation movement spearheaded by Gandhi, Tiru Vi. Ka. wrote, “If the old Tamil civilization, education and rule were now prevalent in the country spiritual movements like that of non-cooperation would spread without any effort. But modern civilization, education and system of administration stand in the way of that movement whose express object is the destruction of these three things” (qtd. in Irschick 309). Kalki’s moves in his later writings to foster the education of Tamil publics proved to be similarly motivated; he constantly sought in his fiction and nonfiction to render the greatness of ancient Tamil civilization in accessible terms.

Kalki’s journalistic and writerly association with Tiru Vi. Ka. proved formative, fuelling his interest in investigating the relationships between language, society and the Tamil past in a present-day political context, and combining “spiritual” and “secular” goals for the Tamil nation. While still at *Navasakti*, he was given full license by his mentor to innovate a more conversational style approaching the spoken form of Tamil, thereby creating a wider audience for the tri-weekly; in a regular column liberally spiced with humor, he dealt with a wide variety of social and political issues. Kalki also translated into Tamil Gandhi’s *My Experiments with Truth*, serialized in the English publication *Young India* at the time. The Tamil translation, *Satya Sotanai*, was published in serial form by *Navasakti* in 1922-23. During this period, Kalki had the opportunity to meet and dialogue with a number of Tamil intellectuals and politicians, including E. V. Ramasami Naicker (known to Tamils as Periyar, the “Elder”), the founder of the Justice Party which was later renamed Dravida Kalakam (Sunda 145).

Periyar, a much beloved, irascible pioneer of the Dravidian movement, anti-brahmin and anti-religion, was reportedly impressed by Kalki's quick wit and industry. He would frequently engage Kalki in conversation, remarking later to Tiru Vi. Ka. that his protégé was destined for great things.

Kalki left *Navasakti* in 1928 in search of greater financial reward, intending to join the editorial staff at the weekly *Ananda Vikatan*, which focused on current events, culture and literature. However, he gave up a lucrative offer from the weekly's (and later film studio) proprietor S.S.Vasan at Rajaji's behest, and moved to the Gandhi ashram in Tiruchengodu, Salem district, in 1929, where he and his wife, Rukmini, lived in austere simplicity. Rukmini Krsnamurti was to state after her husband's premature death that the ashram years were the happiest times of their married life.¹² During the Tiruchengodu period, Rajaji produced and Kalki edited *Vimocanam* (Release), a magazine propagating abstinence from alcohol. Alcohol awareness was seen by nationalist reformers as crucial for the necessary removal of the greatest social ill among the colonized. Kalki continued to contribute articles to *Ananda Vikatan* while living at the ashram. This initial relationship, Rajaji's and Kalki's first professional collaboration, paved the way for later associations between the scribe and the politician.

Kalki served his second prison term, this time for six months, in 1930, the charges this time including his pamphleteering and picketing activities during and after the Rajaji-led salt satyagraha to Vedaranyam. During this second term he met fellow-nationalist and future collaborator T. Sadasivam (M.S. Subbulakshmi's husband), with whom he would eventually launch *Kalki* magazine in 1941. Kalki then returned to Madras to edit *Ananda Vikatan* in 1931, and the magazine became the Tamil weekly with the largest

circulation under his editorship. In 1932, he met Tamil scholar T. K. Chidambaranatan (T.K.C) in 1932, the beginning of a deep friendship that influenced both Kalki's journalism and his fiction. T.K.C. and Kalki were fervent proponents of the Tamil Icai movement, a campaign for the inclusion of Tamil songs in the classical Carnatic music repertoire, and the dance form of Bharata Natyam. Rajaji, T.K.C., and Kalki constituted a powerful intellectual and cultural nexus. Their families often spent vacations together at T.K.C's home in the verdant hill town of Kutralam, whose landscape inspired much of Kalki's description of Tamil countryside. The three friends would discuss the philological, literary, and cultural issues that seemed to them most prominent well into the day and through the night. They drew on a rich Tamil tradition of etymological and literary debate known as *sol vivatam* (speech debates) in Tamil. Taking their roles of arbiters of culture and language seriously, they would argue furiously about the origins of words, the usages from centamil (high classical and formal written script) that were portable into a new Tamil idiom, and the puranic and bhakti literature that was worthy of mention in literary circles. Together, they allegedly coined the Tamil word for culture, "panpatu," a word that has since entered the mainstream. Kalki would allegedly instigate such debates, according to T.K.C.'s grandson Deepa Natarajan, asking a seemingly innocent question and watching his two compatriots argue hotly over the language-related issue pertaining to it.¹³ The ensuing debate would then become fodder for his next editorial or essay. But the fashioning of standards and tastes according to Tamil bourgeois notions of culture was not accomplished by such debates alone. Kalki also spoke out during the *Ananda Vikatan* years and after against what he perceived as vulgarity in pulp fiction and popular film.

Kalki's third prison term lasted three months in 1941, and followed a fateful quarrel with magazine and film studio proprietor (owner of the still successful Gemini studios) S.S. Vasan. Kalki resigned from the editorship of *Ananda Vikatan*—the popular weekly magazine in which he first began writing under the pen-name Kalki, and strenuously promoted Tamil *marumalarcci* in the spheres of literature, film, and visual and performing arts throughout the 1930s—on account of Vasan's objections to the increasing strident nationalism inflecting the magazine's output. As the story goes, Kalki applied for leave to serve his third prison term right after he wrote editorials deploring the arrests of nationalists who protested India's involvement in World War II, disobeying Vasan's explicit orders to tone down the magazine's incendiary political stance. Many writers and critics remember this extremely public feud, which was ultimately reconciled years later.

After this fallout, the magazine *Kalki* was born in 1941, with funds raised by Sadasivam's second wife, the celebrated vocalist M.S. Subbulakshmi who enjoyed a brief stint in the Tamil popular film world in the 1930s and 1940s. Subbulakshmi acted in the 1941 film *Savitri*, playing the mythological character of Narada, a male trickster figure who was also a musician. While the role may seem a bold and unconventional move for a woman of her time, Subbulakshmi was in fact hugely unhappy about playing a male character and did so long-sufferingly in order to help her husband and his dear friend and colleague launch the new magazine! As mentioned in the introduction, in 1944, Subbulakshmi played the bhakti poet-saint Meera in the film of the same name. She also starred in "Seva Satanam" (1938) and "Sakuntalai" (1940).

In 1941-1942, Kalki wrote a series of editorials supporting Rajaji's every political move since the latter's assuming the Premiership of Madras Presidency under British rule in 1938. Rajaji, regarded widely as Gandhi's political successor along with Nehru, was a controversial figure in the early forties for persuading the Congress to go against the Mahatma in its political support of Britain in World War II. Also under scrutiny were his turnaround from a rejection of the notion of Pakistan, his impulsive gesture of cooperation with the Muslim League to form an anti-Japan alliance in the south that led to his fall in the Congress, his opposition of Congress's Quit India movement (which he feared would mean the abnegation of British responsibility for the state of the subcontinent) and what was perceived among northern members of the Congress as his southern separatism. Kalki wrote an epistolary editorial in the first issue of September 1941 beseeching the Mahatma to understand the position of a people torn between the principle of nonviolence and the possibility of Japanese military action, particularly in the south. Replying to Kalki's own English translation of the editorial in a letter dated September 10, 1941, Gandhi lauded Kalki's request that leaders should take into account public opinion and make a careful and considered decision about India's position on the war. Gandhi's almost immediate response to Kalki's published letter shows the leader's regard for popular opinion in the south and the increasing role that the south now played in Indian politics, not to mention the sway Kalki himself held over an emergent Tamil readership through his new magazine.¹⁴

A weekly supplement to *Kalki* was launched in the second year of the magazine, focusing chiefly on Rajaji's political maneuvers, photographs of his followers and their

biographies. On Rajaji's own evolving stance regarding Pakistan, Kalki wrote on May 31, 1942:

What does Rajaji say that seems so contradictory [from what he said before]? Before, he said, "[the notion of a separate] Pakistan is bad. Does he now say "Pakistan is good?" He continues to insist that Pakistan is bad even today... Even among evils, there is such a thing as great and small. The concept of Pakistan is a "small" evil; subordination and slavery are the most terrible of evils. "To get rid of the terrible evil of enslavement [one can] accept the smaller evil of Pakistan," Rajaji says. (Sunda 550).

The very fact that Rajaji refused to back down from his position in the face of monumental opposition signaled his political integrity, Kalki contended (Sunda 550). However, Kalki's support of Rajaji also brought on allegations of brahmin partisanship just after the anti-Hindi agitations of 1938, when E.V. Ramasami's Justice Party saw Indian independence under the Congress as another form of Aryan colonialism—linguistic and political.

What did *Kalki* magazine look like in its early years? A large part of it was written by Kalki himself, mostly under that pseudonym. The magazine included a table of contents that always began with a section on government affairs titled "AraciyaI," which contained a section called "Enna Ceiti" (What's News?) summarizing the latest events of local, regional, national and global importance and a longer political "leader" essay usually by Kalki himself. The next section titled "Ilakkiyam" (Literature) usually contained versions of classics from the Tamil and Hindu literary pantheon, to which Rajaji and T.K.C frequently contributed. After "Ilakkiyam" came "Kataikal" (Stories), usually launched by episodes from Kalki's historical romances. The section also

contained stories by other upcoming and established Tamil writers. Then came “Katureikal” (Essays), in which humor and serious social reformist writings were published. In addition, the magazine contained a section for children (“Pappa Malar”), reviews of films as well as dance and music performances (“Atal Patal”) and was peppered with political and socio-cultural funnies or “Cartoons.” This layout for the magazine continues into this day. This kind of general interest approach in *Kalki* and other popular magazines which regularly published fiction and literature was in stark contrast to the “little” magazines of the day. The latter focused on forging a new and contemporary idiom for Tamil literary criticism and exposing Tamil readers to experimental and avant-garde writings from the Tamil region, Europe and the rest of India (Vallikannan 62).

However, Kalki’s ideological and pedagogical agenda was something quite different, as the initial emphasis on political affairs in his magazine reveals. Throughout the forties, he mediated issues of national and global significance, especially the events surrounding the Second World War and the Indian freedom struggle, to readers in a style that was simple and direct, yet demonstrating a keen awareness of colonial political tactics and strategy. In the *Kalki* issue of April 30, 1944, Kalki wrote a sharply satirical political column titled ‘Tampitikku Tampiti’ that describes the advent of British colonial rule. The title itself loosely translates to ‘a coin for a coin,’ but this translation does not encompass the irony of Kalki’s clever use of the word “tampiti,” an informal designation of a coin that is almost worthless, the most paltry denomination of currency possible. He begins the essay by declaring: “That’s all! A coin’s profit for every coin spent, that’s all! The English trading in India do not wish for any profit above this! And what does it

matter? Sometimes, they are able to get, for one coin spent, maybe even two or three coins in profit. They don't look at this [gain] as any sort of deterrent. If they get one coin in return for one coin spent, they are more than ready to be satisfied" (9).

Having launched his diatribe in this exclamatory style—here Kalki is poking fun at the British government's protestations of innocence against charges of profiteering in the colonies—Kalki then plunges into an account of how, in his estimate, the English arrived in India in the first place:

From ancient times, when the vellaikkaran [white man] first came to in India, there exists a story about how exactly he arrived. At the forefront, there comes a vellaikkaran carrying a big bundle on his back, dressed in a Pulayar costume [a reference to the Hindu god Ganesha, the remover of obstacles]... Typically, the bundle holds clothes, or jewelry, or fancy bags, or perinkayam¹⁵, or some variation on these kinds of wares to sell. Next, after this trader vellaikkaran, and carrying a gun in one hand and a bottle of liquor in the other, comes the soldier vellaikkaran. After him, in order to bring the dead people to shore and the rest [presumably living] to salvation, usually comes, bible in hand, the padre vellaikkaran. (9)

Kalki here uses the word vellaikkaran to suggest the arrival in India of different European nations and their emissaries—Dutch, Portuguese, French, and English—at different times in colonial history. But the word for white man repeated throughout the essay also carries ever-so-slightly pejorative (bordering on racist) connotations in the Tamil original, though both writer and reader could conceivably disclaim any malicious intent in its use. Kalki goes on to observe that, of all the white men, the English have always had one powerful weapon, the cunning trader who never forgets his business aspirations for even an instant. This English trader, he says, “is, during every single moment, whatever he is employed in doing at any particular time, always plotting how he can get rid of his goods,

on whom he can dump them, and what kinds of profits he can make in the transaction”

(9). This commerce-driven, calculating mentality is exactly what has made the Britain a successful colonizer, Kalki concludes. Kalki’s column can be read as extolling the achievement of the English trader on the surface, but both Kalki and his reader know better. In a magazine that espouses Gandhian ideals of selfless spirituality, asceticism, and sacrifice, the British trader’s ability to make money, something Kalki is aware his middle-class audiences possibly envy and half-heartedly or secretly crave, is painted most unfavorably.

In fact, after starting off his column in this comic fashion, Kalki goes on to harshly criticize British economic policy in India during wartime, alleging that it is the economic exploitation of the colonies that funds the Allied effort. In the June 18, 1944 issue of the weekly, Kalki’s column titled “Katavul Enke?” (Where is God?) is noticeably darker in its comedy; the heavens are emptied as the horrified gods watch the destruction at Normandy from above, having never encountered bloodshed on such a scale in the human world (8-11). The September 24, 1944 issue resumes in the comic vein, carrying a lead column titled “Where is Churchill?”, in which Kalki’s author-persona engages the British Prime-Minister-in-hiding in (what is an obviously fictive) conversation about the British presence in India and World War II (12-15). At the very end of the essay, after taking Churchill to task for forcibly commandeering Indian forces for the Allied effort, Kalki slyly asks him to comment on the irony of using an enslaved India’s army in the Allied effort in order to free Italy from the Germans (15). In the column “Romapuriyil Kutunkal!” (Gather in Rome), Kalki asks Churchill, Stalin, and Roosevelt to convene a summit at Rome, where they can reflect on the rise, decline, and

fall of the Roman empire, and learn a valuable history lesson (9-11). Rome fell when her own citizens became slaves; the only way the British nation can ensure its future prosperity is by granting freedom to all its colonies, Kalki asserts (11). The April 24, 1945 cover page of *Kalki* carries the image of a snarling and swastika-festooned Hitler looming large over similarly adorned Nazi battlements. On the first page of the issue, Kalki bemoans the transformation of Germany, and its capital, Berlin, into a deadly war-zone under the monomaniacal Hitler.

In his political essays, Kalki is careful to denounce Hitler's actions as well as to conditionally support the Allied resistance to the Germans in Europe, though he frequently takes England to task for its colonial ventures in Asia and Africa. In all, as the Indian independence struggle and World War II wear on, Kalki's political and social commentary gets noticeably bleaker and darker, though his revivalists efforts on the cultural scene are unflagging. This darkness of political vision and horror at war's ravages are noticeable in the latter half of *Civakamiyin Capatam*, in the description of the final face-off between the Pallavas and Chalukyas and the destruction of the Chalukya capital Vatapi.

Literary Texts and Contexts

In what other ways does *Civakamiyin Capatam* capture the movements of the 1940s Tamil public sphere outlined above, invoking the spiritual past in its vision of secular nation? First, the historical novels rose out of Kalki's self-perception as a social and cultural reformist, an arbiter of literary/cultural standards, tastes, and values in the Tamil public sphere. Second, it arose out of the spirit of the Tamil renaissance, a revival of ancient literature and culture and reform of existing perceptions of the same.

Sentiments similar to Kalki's declaration to Sadasivam—about Tamilians' lack of regard for their own history—were expressed in 1928 by an anonymous letter-writer published in the September 20 edition of the English daily *The Hindu*. Caviling against the British government's ban on the works of Tamil nationalist poet Bharati, and alleging that English-educated Tamils preferred Shakespeare and Milton, the writer complained, "If at any time they [the Tamil people] feel inclined to read any indigenous poet, they will go in for the English poems of Sarojini [Naidu] and Chattopadyay, Toru [Dutt] and Tagore, and not for the Tamil songs of Bharati" (qtd. in Irschick, 288).

Kalki and his anonymous counterpart reveal in their addresses on Tamil literacy (I use this term in the broadest sense)—one in English and the other in Tamil—a widespread concern among scholars, activists, and nationalists about the perceived rejection of Tamil language and literature by the Tamil intelligentsia. Their diatribes were consonant with erstwhile attempts to activate a Tamil "cultural self-consciousness" and Tamil sensibility, stemming from colonial, nationalist, and regionalist discourses of language, culture, and nation in the early nineteenth century and beyond. At a time when India's independence and the violence of Partition were imminent, when regionalist and religious divides were being strenuously overridden (though not completely covered up) in Indian nationalist discourse, questions of religious fundamentalism and viable frameworks with which to imagine nation were very much on the minds of an emergent middle-class.

An examination of nineteenth- and twentieth-century historiography lends further insight into Kalki's interest in the Pallava period. Many historians focus on the Pallavas as builders of the first great south Indian empire, and describe the Pallava capital city,

Kancipuram, as a flourishing centre of Hindu and Buddhist learning. T. V. Mahalingam describes the Pallava king Mahendravarman's reign (610-630 CE) as a religious and cultural "renaissance" that saw a spurt in the growth of philosophies—Saivism, Vaisnavism, and Buddhism—educational centers, literature, architecture and the arts (64-65). South Asia historian Burton Stein notes:

The religious devotionism called bhakti ...first took shape in Tamil country during the sixth century...According to historians and theologians, between the sixth and tenth centuries [when the Pallava empire was at its height], sixty-three Shiva- and twelve Vishnu-worshipping poets created a large corpus of Tamil devotional songs. Nor did theology lag far behind. Shankara's work in providing an intellectual base for the popular worship of Shiva was also intended to maintain and strengthen brahmin leadership...Religious movements spurred the development of the first Tamil and subsequently other languages between 1000 and 1300 CE...Languages and literatures underwent a regionalization that made possible the spread and particularization of popular devotion to Vishnu, Shiva and the goddesses. Everywhere devotees imitated the Tamils ...[heralding] the development of all the modern languages of the subcontinent, those based on Sanskrit throughout the north, and others based on a mix of Dravidian and Sanskrit words and grammatical forms in the south. (123)

The kinds of linguistic, religious and cultural efflorescence that occurred in the Tamil bhakti period are a crucial ideal for Kalki in his novel, setting the tone and aspirations for the twentieth-century Tamil renaissance.

Even while emphasizing the Tamil region's former glory, Kalki is careful to establish a pan-Indian ethos of spiritual and cultural exchange across regions in the preface: "What is [also] historically true is that the arts flourished during this period. The beauteous arts of sculpture, painting, music and dance developed greatly in the Tamil

region. In particular, painting traveled from the Vindhyas to Lanka [the reference here is to the country of Sri Lanka)—with a unique style and technique of painting used in the Ajanta caves, and the caves in the Tamil and Lankan regions” (xii-xiii). In the novel itself, one of the first descriptions of Kancipuram runs in this manner:

In those days, Kanci was the most famous city in the southern lands. Every street was wide as a highway, and every house a mansion. At regular intervals, large earthen lamps atop stone pillars burnt through the night. The streets were filled with the din and bustle of crowds. Everything produced in the country from Kashi to Kanyakumari could be found in the marketplaces. There were rows of shops, each row selling flowers alone, or fruit, or sweetmeats, or grain. Yet another row of shops sold pearls and precious gems. The market street seemed to stretch on with no end in sight. (35)

Out of Kalki’s construction of Kancipuram emerges an idealised public sphere characterised by high intellectual, religious, and philosophical dialogue; a flourishing literary and artistic culture; and a free citizenry.

Both Kancipuram and Mamallapuram are popular destinations in Tamil Nadu today, and the Pallava temples and rock-cut shrines in both towns have profound significance for Kalki’s Tamil audiences. Kalki himself spent many months researching both sites, and visited them repeatedly as he wrote his novels, gaining a reputation among Tamil and Indian scholars for historical veracity in his fiction. Tamil ancestry is emphasized over and over again in Kalki’s preface. This depiction of Tamil culture as uniquely civilized is clearly related to the perceived hegemony and dominance of northern India over the cultures of the south, so that “Tamil readers didn’t like Tamil history,” preferring stories about Rajputs and Moguls. It is also related to what Nalini Natarajan describes as “the phenomenon of hierarchy within Indian languages,”

hierarchies by which certain regional languages, and by extension, cultures, are positioned as somehow superior to others (6).

The preface to *Civakamiyin Capatam* contains a number of serious revelations from the author: his dream visions of medieval south India experienced during a visit to Mamallapuram, the Tamil coastal town that was once a major port of the Pallavas, his sense of wonderment at the glorious Tamil past symbolized by the Pallava reign, his unswerving mission to record for present-day Tamil readers what he felt was a crucial, though forgotten, chapter in Tamil history, and his delight at their favorable response. Throughout the preface, and for that matter, the novel itself, Kalki betrays strong regionalist loyalties in identifying what he considered a crucial epoch in Indian history. The tone employed in the preface exemplifies the chatty, celebratory style adopted by the novel's narrator, who revels in the achievements of his Tamil forebears. With a focus on the medieval south, which nationalist Tamil historians saw as neglected in Orientalist and northern Indian historiography, Kalki strove to establish a pan-Indian cultural ethos rooted in a distinctively Tamil context for his Tamil readers.

If language and storytelling, sculpture and painting, song and dance, are depicted in *Civakamiyin Capatam* as living traditions to be nurtured by the state, a deeper knowledge of these traditions was something that Kalki strongly desired for his audience, and consciously fostered in all his work. The story of a dancer in 1944 would have resonated with the Tamil reading public because of the efforts of various twentieth-century reformers/crusaders such as E. Krishna Ayyar and Rukmini Devi Arundale to resuscitate what had been considered a "fallen" art practiced in establishments of ill repute. Representing a dancer who dared to fall in love with royalty, Kalki created

interest in and legitimacy for the artform even as he tailored depictions of this figure in history for a middle class and mass audience. Through his characterization of Civakami in the novel, he took on the task of popularising the traditional dance form of *Sadir* or *Bharata Natyam*, fallen into disrepute among the brahmanical elites. Kalki's revolutionary women characters were one reason for his popularity among women readers; it is often claimed that his novels brought Tamil women out of the home and into the public sphere as independent actors and agents.

Civakami's character was reportedly inspired by the legendary figure of Rukmini Devi Arundale (1904-86), a dancer-theosophist-reformer who "brahmanized" the art form by emphasizing bhakti (spirituality) over the more traditional srngara (erotics). According to Sunda, Kalki asked Rukmini Devi Arundale, a controversial practitioner of south Indian dance who founded her own dance academy Kalakshetra in 1936, to play the character of Civakami on film.¹⁶ A theosophist, Arundale helped revive the Indian classical dance form Sadir (now Bharata Natyam) through Kalakshetra — based on the traditional gurukula system — as part of her crusade for India's spiritual revival. Despite such lofty ideals, it is said that the move to 'rescue' Sadir, fallen into disrepute because of its association with alleged temple prostitutes (devadasis), meant that Arundale took inexcusable liberties with the art. By replacing eroticism (srngara) with devotion (bhakti) to appease the brahmin palate in an era of Victorian prudery and colonial rule, she allegedly took away Sadir from its original practitioners.¹⁷

In invoking this figure, Kalki's sole aim appears to be the valorization of the form itself for his target audience, largely brahminical and middle-class. In 1936, Kalki wrote a glowing review of a performance by Rukmini Devi Arundale held at the Theosophical

Society in Madras, exclaiming: “When Srimati Rukmini Devi Arundale took the stage, for one second, one wondered whether the performance was set in the heavens...To gain greatness in a chosen art form is not just a matter of pride in its achievement nor the desire to achieve perfection. Each and every art form has some aspects that cannot be learned through diligence, [aspects] that are instinctively known. Rukmini Devi has been endowed with this intrinsic ability in the realm of dance.” (qtd. in Sunda 366). Having established Arundale’s closeness to divinity, a kind of eulogizing that repeatedly accompanies Civakami’s performance in the novel, Kalki remarks approvingly: “Her attire and ornaments were tastefully chosen, befitting the occasion. The costume and ornamentation was in accordance with the ancient traditions of the Tamil people; however, the new was intermingled with the old...[Her costume] was comfortable enough for dance moves, yet when you observed her in motion, it seemed as though a figurine carved by a sculptor in ancient times had come to life” (qtd. in Sunda 366-67). This type of rapturous effusion combines neatly with Kalki’s tutelary agenda in the representation of the female artist, something we see frequently in descriptions of Civakami’s performances in the novel. Kalki is here a strong advocate of innovations in costuming and performance that he naturalizes as “tasteful,” appropriate, and pleasing to the eye, aesthetic and moral categories acceptable to the brahmin palate. At the same time, he is careful to link his strictures on and approval of the clothing and performance of the female artist to a traditional Tamil past.

Kalki is also said to have drawn his depiction of Civakami from the performances and career of Arundale’s multitalented and outspoken rival Balasaraswati (1918-84), hailing from a family of performance artists associated with the Tanjavur court (Kalki’s

place of birth) and celebrated for her evocation of *srngara*. The descendant of a centuries-old musical and performance lineage patronized by the Tanjore court, Balasaraswati first performed in Kalki's presence at a wedding. Kalki and T.K.C went to see her unwillingly, at the behest of their political comrade Tiru Vi. Ka., who sought to resurrect the artform among Tamil audiences. Sunda reports Balasaraswati's memories of Kalki's reactions. "At the time, T.K.C. and Kalki opposed this dance form. They were shocked that it was being performed at a wedding. However, after the *kutcheri* [concert] they changed their views. After witnessing the kinds of *shastras* [texts] and traditions contained in the art, they said, 'This art form, with its rich evocations of *rasa*, has evolved out of the most elevated creative realms; along with the aesthetic response it generates, it is capable of eliciting emotions relating to the divine in the most sophisticated manner '" (qtd. in Sunda 364). Kalki writes of the same performance in 1933: "When I watched Veenai Dhannamal's granddaughter Balasaraswati dance... I realized that she was one performer in Tamilnad who had extraordinary ability...In modern times, when comparing [this art to] western cinema and talkies and the kinds of dancing we view in them, it is obvious that Bharata Natyam easily outclasses the rest" (qtd. in Sunda 365).

The character of Civakami summons not only the images of artists from Kalki's present but also a range of absent presences from Tamil/Indian mythology such as Sita, Draupadi, Kannagi, Savitri and Manimekalai (as discussed in Chapter Four of this study). Poised between doubting complicity and outspoken social critique, she expresses the chafing constraints of history and patriarchy through her art. Dancing forms both her rebellion and her yoke.

My brief account of the Tamil context hopes to show that, in his writings, Kalki exhibits the achievements, interests and vexed position of Brahman intellectuals, politicians and writers who took an interest in Tamil culture and nation owing to movements as diverse as theosophy and Dravidian nationalism. He is conditionally embraced by non-brahmans for his efforts in indigenous identity formation, like scholar historian U. V. Caminata Iyer and Subramania Bharati before him (two figures for whom he had the utmost respect and contributed to making visible). Tamil politicians of the fifties, sixties, and seventies, such as Annadurai and Karunanidhi, used the Cola reign as a powerful symbol of a utopian Dravidian nation.¹⁸ They often publicly attributed their understanding of ancient Tamil history to Kalki's novels at political rallies and in print.¹⁹ In a newspaper article hyperbolically titled "A novelist whose genius remains unmatched" for a pan-Indian audience, journalist V. Gangadhar writes:

The leaders of the Dravidian movement, themselves brilliant writers and orators in Tamil, whipped up public enthusiasm and earned popularity with their devotion to Tamil. They often pointed out proudly how Tamil kings like the Cholas had defeated powerful kings of the North and built temples for Tamil gods and goddesses.

Kalki seized upon this wonderful past. He portrayed the Pallavas as not only brave, but also promoters of culture. The evidence lay in the wonderful temples and stone carvings of Mahabalipuram which withstood the test of time. His research was impeccable and he spent months in Mahabalipuram and Sri Lanka studying the impact of the Tamil culture...Kalki's sense and feel for history and obsession for facts could not be challenged. Former [Indian] President R. Venkataraman and the Chairman [the] Atomic Energy Commission, Dr R. Chidambaram, referred to these qualities at the Mumbai function. Said Dr Chidambaram. "People in Tamil Nadu learnt more about their history from the novels of Kalki than the routine

history books. Kalki never distorted history. His blend of fact and fiction was first rate.” (Sunday, July 25, 1999)

During Kalki’s lifetime, one of the most influential “little” magazines in Tamil, *Manikkoti*, repeatedly attacked him for writing fiction that pandered to popular taste, and for an over simplified style that led to flat, one dimensional characters.²⁰ In today’s Tamil literary sphere, characterized by its multilingualism, cross-cultural influence, and a necessarily syncretic and multilingual ethos, Kalki’s historical and social realist fictions elicit mixed reactions. Marxists and feminists praise his depiction of women, but are mistrustful of his reliance on accounts of royalty and his telling silence on the subject of caste. Writers who represent the present day achievement of little magazines in the Tamil region, more invested in a rationalist and European modernist literary temper, dismiss his writings as popular, but make a place for his social realist fiction and humorous writings. Kalki’s *Alai Osai*—a sprawling fictional work detailing the lives of ordinary, middle-class, citizens during the freedom struggle—won India’s highest literary prize, the Sahitya Academi Award, in 1956. However, Tamil writer R. K. Narayan—the author of *Swami and Friends* and *Malgudi Days* and a pioneer of the Indian English novel—thought Kalki a careless writer who spread himself too thin over genres and political causes. He said as much—not without a hint of mischief—to my mother on more than one occasion during my childhood when we visited his home in Madras!

Recounting and recanting his claim that Tamils don’t appreciate their own history in *Civakamiyin Capatam*, Kalki re-enacts the cultural and spiritual awakening that must accompany nationalistic sentiment: “After the end of *Partiban Kanavu*, I thought I could experience peace of mind, but Ayanar and Sivakami did not permit. Since they were the

first to appear before my mind's eye at Mamallapuram, I could not cast them aside. And so *Civakamiyin Capatam* began, but would not end very easily. Civakami took her vow in writing.²¹ To realise it, Mamallar²² had to put in supreme labour for nine years. And to write that history has taken me all this time" (x). This depiction of the trajectory of his own growing veneration of ancient Tamil culture is crucial to Kalki's undertaking as an inspirational chronicler of a unique Tamil past. With this prefatorial move, Kalki implies to Tamil audiences that the road to a broader conceptualization of pasts, places, races and nations leads first to home. The repetition and importance of the word Tamil to his rhetoric and the crucial couplings it involves—Tamil land, Tamil kings, Tamil culture, Tamil forebears, Tamil society—are significant.

In writing this historical romance, Kalki not only asserts an important moment in pre-colonial Tamil history but also points to a kind of spiritual and poetic transaction between Tamil and Sanskritic classical traditions facilitated by a benevolent though battle-ready monarch. He writes: "Inscriptions in history and archaeological evidence demonstrate that the Pallava kings were keen scholars, connoisseurs of the arts of painting, sculpture, music, and dance, masters of disguise, famed military strategists and fierce warriors on the battlefield" (xi-xii). Kalki's emphasis on south Indian cultures reflects contemporary investment in the medieval Saivite devotional hymns the *Tevaram* attributed to the *Nayanmar*, Civa-worshipping Tamil poets who composed between the sixth and the eighth centuries. Kalki himself sang *tevarams* during his boyhood and beyond and threads the songs through the historical fictions he wrote. The sixth-century poet Appar is an important figure in *Civakamiyin Capatam*. The *Tevaram* are of particular interest for a reading of the novel's poetics and politics. According to legend

reported both in the novel and historiographical accounts, the Saivite guru Appar, one of the twelve Nayanmars, inspired Mahendra Pallava to convert from Jainism to Buddhism. In Tamil literary history, the Saivite Nayanmars are constructed as the original romantic visionaries interpellated by god.²³ Through direct and indirect invocations and allusions, Kalki aligns himself with the visionary poet of the ancient Tamils. He is also the mythmaker and historian compelled to document the “truest” and most “authentic” account of ancient civilization, even as he adds to the previous accounts through his own interactions with sacred and secular accounts of the past. For instance, though Kalki provides a detailed list of the historical figures and incidents in the novel, it is telling that he cites as chief inspiration the fictional characters of Ayanar and Sivakami. These two characters embody the spirit of bhakti devotionism in Kalki’s redaction of the past, as also his ability, like the bhakti poets before him to add to legend and myth, contemporizing them for present-day audiences.

In *Civakamyin Capatam*’s preface, Kalki describes a dream-vision brought on by a snatch of a song sung by his friend T.K.C. on the sands of Mamallapuram, the medieval stronghold of the Pallava dynasty, a vision that purportedly drove his writing of the historical romance:

Suddenly, thousands upon thousands of ships and boats
appeared on the ocean. The shore teemed with people.
Flags bearing the bull and lion crests flew high and joyfully
in the distance. Sweet music wafted through the air in all
directions, creating a state of bliss. Sculptors with chisels
appeared, perched against every rock visible to the eye.
You knew someone was dancing from the rhythmic sound
of bells on feet. (v)

While describing this dream-vision, Kalki's prose exhibits a transcendent tone as well as a synaesthetic rhythm and lilt linkable to oral traditions in the south—medieval bhakti poetry, the storytelling tradition of *katha kalaksepa*. The bull and lion crests are a reference to the royal emblems of Mahendra and Narasimha Pallava, respectively, an indirect signaling of historical context to the reader. This type of recreation of the past, complete erasure of colonial presence, and harking back to a Tamil golden age through romanticized description was Kalki's trademark. His audiences had come to eagerly anticipate and revel in such evocations. Kalki continues his travelogue with customary chattiness, the resuming his tone of rapt transcendence:

We stayed for two days in Mamallapuram. We saw black rocks bearing exquisitely carved sculptures. We saw temples and palaces chiseled out of stone. Each stone told its own story. Each sculpture evoked wonderment. Looking meant wonder, listening made meaning. To think of the great sculptors who used their chisels like magic wands to create Mahendra's wizardry, was to bow to them. It is not only that what I had heard about the prestige of Tamil land was true; it seemed that, to an extent, the truth had been watered down. I had heard some say that temples, temple towers, carved mansions and rock sculptures are products of torture and cruelty, commissioned by the kings of yesteryear. I came now [while in Mamallapuram] to the conclusion that such a claim is completely untrue. It may be possible to get other types of work done by way of torture and force. But such artistic wonders could never be created by means of torture. The land can be tilled through the use of physical force, cloth may be woven, taxes and levies paid, but the arts can never flourish through the use of force. A child can be made to cry by beating, but not to sing. Blow after blow can make a child run, but not dance. The sculpture wonderland in Mamallapuram could never have been created by means of might. As a result, no matter how I imagined it, my devotion to the ancient Tamil peoples grew greater.

It seems the leaders of that ancient Tamil land were passionate about acquiring name and fame. They wrote their fame on black rock, never to be erased, and only then did they leave [the earth]! Whether by design or accident, deliberate or careless, their actions live on through the ages and all manner of change in both land and political climate. ...I had heard and read about the prestige of the ancient Tamil land and the uniqueness of its culture for many years now. But what I'd heard from others and read about did not really sink in. Nor was I inspired with belief. What I saw with my own eyes in Mamallapuram, dubbed Mahabalipuram,²⁴ gave rise to belief. That great sculptors who carved such exquisite sculptures existed more than one thousand three hundred years ago in our Tamil land! That there lived kings who gave them respect, honour, encouragement, who let their talents shine forth. If this were indeed the case, how advanced must Tamil culture and society have been in those times? For a society to reach these levels of advancement, how many hundreds of years before then must that society have fostered its arts and education, experienced a peaceful reign and maintained ethical standards. When I think on such things, I am filled to overflowing with respect and devotion towards our ancient Tamil forebears. (vii-viii)

I quoted (and translated) this section of the preface in its entirety to demonstrate how, through heavily romanticized and visionary retelling, Kalki sets the tone for the entire novel, in which language and storytelling, sculpture and painting, song and dance are depicted as living traditions to be nurtured by the state. Written after the novel's initial serial publication, the preface serves the twin functions of anticolonial narrative—the performative and the pedagogic²⁵—through visceral and symbolic techniques. Kalki combines imaginative flight and a faithful description of the actual remnants of Pallava civilization in the rock-cut caves and sculptures familiar to his Tamil audiences in his rendering of a singular Tamil past and identity. But there is also a specific anticolonial ideology of non-violence and resistance that figures in Kalki's descriptions. Such

cultural achievements could not have been accomplished through brute force or might, he suggests. In the novel, the Chalukya king Pulakesin is associated with despotic brutality, both in monomaniacal coveting of Kancipuram, the Pallava capital, and his careless, yet vindictive, cruelty towards Civakami. The disavowal of violent conquest and state brutality occurs alongside Kalki's insistence on the importance of state patronage of the arts, the springboard for unsurpassed and unsurpassable artistic creation. But Kalki is also directing his audience to cultivate their sensibilities, to learn how to make meaning by looking and listening, to derive from his rendition of the past the achievements of Tamil culture.

Invoking traditions indigenous to the Tamil region also allowed for a strong regionalist and pan-Indian consciousness navigating Orientalist, colonialist, and nationalist discourses. Such knowledge was something that Kalki strongly desired for his audience and consciously fostered in his fiction and non-fiction, making Tamil visual, written, and performing artforms palatable to the brahmanical elites of which he himself was a part. Using broad and familiar strokes, Kalki's novels provide a political, spiritual, and social canvas against which a new regional middle-class can imagine its own identity, a version of empire against which his Tamil audiences could measure themselves and their society's achievement. His success in capturing a wide-ranging Tamil readership reflects the complete identification of his Tamil readers with this redaction of Indian history rooted in the ideal of a hoary and culturally diffuse Tamil past.

By examining parallels and contradictions between the public sphere constructed within Kalki's novel and without—the colonial and postcolonial, national and regional, contexts that spawn its serializations—this chapter nuances recent arguments on the

formulation of Hindu identity, the regional Indian novel and the public sphere. I hope through such analysis to forge, and problematize, understandings of the Tamil/Indian instance in the region's proliferating contexts of globalization, diaspora, Hindu fundamentalism and Tamil nationalism. Chapter Three, "Hybridity and Na(rra)tion in *Civakamiyin Capatam*," takes a closer look at the narrative strategies employed by Kalki within the pages of the historical romance, examining the kinds of multi-genre, multilingual, and multicultural legacies he draws upon while refashioning the past for Tamil audiences.

NOTES

¹ All translations from Kalki's works in Tamil and other critical literature from Tamil language originals in the dissertation are mine unless otherwise noted.

² See Nandy's influential sociological account of colonial contact, *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of the Self under Colonialism* (1983). In many ways, Nandy's scholarship has provided the antidote to the Foucauldian bias in subaltern studies by locating itself in material culture and thorough qualitative research.

³ Examples of such work include Vasudha Dalmia's 1999 *The Nationalization of Hindu Traditions: Bharatendu Harishchandra and Nineteenth-century Banaras*, Francesca Orsini's *The Hindi Public Sphere* (2002), and Tapan Raychauduri's *Europe Reconsidered: Perceptions of the West in Nineteenth Century Bengal* (1988).

⁴ For scholarly rejoinders to and developments after Habermas's initial formulation, see Craig Calhoun's anthology *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (1992). See especially Nancy Fraser's "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy" (109-142) and Michael Warner's "The Mass Public and the Mass Subject" (377-401).

⁵ The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw the publication of Beame's *Comparative Grammar of the Aryan Languages* (1872-79) and Grierson's *The Modern Vernacular Language of Hindustan* (1889). Appointed to compile and conduct *Linguistic Survey of India* (1903-1928), Grierson attempted a scholarly history of the growth of the Indian classical languages of northern India. Grierson traced Hindi and all its so-called dialects in the northern regions to the ancient languages of Sanskrit, Arabic, and Persian. His work in this regard is seen as pivotal in the Aryanization and standardization of Hindi, the creation of clear linguistic hierarchies in modern India.

⁶ See Dalmia's introduction (1-20) and Chapter Four, "Hindi as the National Language of the Hindus" (146-217).

⁷ In "Middle-class Consciousness and Patriotic Literature in South Asia," Sumit Sarkar notes the connection between the development of patriotism and the growth of regional literatures in India (265). Shivarama Paddikkal identifies the search for a distinctive regionalism that involves a unique linguistic identity simultaneous with national identity (226).

⁸ See Irschick's influential *Politics and Social Conflict in South India; the Non-Brahman Movement and Tamil Separatism, 1916-1929* (1969).

⁹ See SV Rajadorai's monumental biography of E. V. Ramasami Naicker or titled *Periyar* (2000), for an account of the Dravidian party and movement as seen in the eyes of its

Marxist founder. Also see V. Geetha and S. V.Rajadurai's *Towards a Non-Brahmin Millennium: From Iyothee Thass to Periyar* (2001) and J. Pandian's *Caste, Nationalism and Ethnicity: An Interpretation of Tamil Cultural History and Social Order* (1987).

¹⁰ The title of Sunda's biography translates to "Ponni's son." The word Ponni means "the golden one" and is a reference to the Kaveri, a major river in south India that flows through Kalki's native Tanjavur. Sunda signals Kalki's deep ties to Tamil soil, a symbolism that includes Kalki's reverence for and patriotism towards his state.

¹¹ Interview with K. Rajendran (September 10, 2004).

¹² Seetha Ravi, *Kalki's* current editor and Rukmini's grand-daughter, shared this story with me in September 2003, as did other members of the family who lived and worked with Kalki.

¹³ I spoke to Deepa Natarajan several times during my trip to India, visiting his ancestral Kutralam home in September 2003. This is one of the many stories he generously shared with me on that visit.

¹⁴ See *Kalkiyin Katitankal*, a collection of personal and published letters written by and to the author during his journalistic career published in 1963.

¹⁵ Here Kalki is playing on the word *perinkayam*, the Tamil appellation for the spice asafetida, commonly used in Indian cooking (a pointed reference to the British spice trade and wars). But the word *perinkayam* can also mean "a great wound" (*peria*=big/large; *kayam*=gash/sore/wound).

¹⁶ See Part One, Chapter 51, of Sunda's biography of Kalki (347-54).

¹⁷ For more on this controversy, see Avanti Medhuri's scholarly biography of the dancer turned social activist titled *Rukmini Devi Arundale* (2005). Medhuri takes on and treats seriously the allegations of brahminization of the traditional artform, while also pointing out the democratization and cross-cultural expansions to the form that occurred under Arundale's aegis.

¹⁸ It is telling that the Cola period was key to in Dravidian political rhetoric. The Pallavas' credentials were slightly more suspect because of their association with a pan-linguistic (in particular, Sanskrit) and multi-faith consciousness.

¹⁹ When I talked to celebrated Tamil fiction writer Asokamitran in April 2005 about the impact of Kalki's novels, he vividly recalled the impassioned oratory of DMK leaders Annadurai and Karunanidhi who invoked the Cola kings as models of Tamil masculinity at political rallies attended in his youth.

²⁰ See B.S. Ramiah's *Manikkoti Kalam* (1980) and Vallikannan's *Tamilil Siru Pattirikeikal* (1991) for a detailed history of little magazines in the Tamil region. A frequent contributor to *Manikkoti*, nonbrahmin writer Pudumaipittan repeatedly took Kalki to task for what he viewed as his lack of literary standards, and an uncritical reliance on tradition. Selected diatribes addressed to Kalki are collected in *Annai Itta Ti* (2003).

²¹ For a detailed analysis of Civakami's vow, see my conclusion. She swears while in captivity to ensure the defeat of the Chlaukya king Pulakesin through her avenger, the Pallava king, Narasimha.

²² Meaning "mighty wrestler," the appellation Mamalla was given to Prince Narasimha in recognition of his pugilistic victories.

²³ See Vidya Dehejia's *Slaves of the Lord* (2002) and Indira Viswanathan Peterson's *Poems of Siva: The Hymns of the Tamil Saints* (1989). Both critical accounts scrupulously detail the relationship between the poet and the divine realm as represented in the Tamil bhakti poets' verse.

²⁴ Here, Kalki alludes to the misnomer Mahabalipuram, the name by which many Tamilians and Indians knew the coastal port-city in his time.

²⁵ In "DissemiNation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation", Homi Bhabha outlines, qua Julia Kristeva, "performative" and "pedagogic" modes of subjectivity and narration. The pedagogic refers to the historicized narrative of national identity, the representation against which individual subjects measure themselves, and the performative, to the continual re-enactment of national subject formation, the effect of such representation.

CHAPTER 3

HYBRIDITY AND NA(RRA)TION

At the very end of *Civakamiyin Capatam*, the dancer-heroine Civakami returns to the Pallava capital Kancipuram from the Chalukya capital Vatapi where she was held hostage for nine years to find, to her sorrow, that her lover, the Pallava king Narasimha, has married a princess from the neighboring Pandyan kingdom in accordance with his father Mahendra's deathbed wish. After her initial outburst of grief, Civakami announces to her father (sculptor Ayanar) at the beginning of the last chapter, titled "Talaivan Tal" (The Feet of the Lord), that she wishes to marry Lord Ekambaresvara (the god Civa). After consulting the Saivite poet-saint Appar, a historical figure with symbolic significance for Tamil Hindus, father Ayanar consents to the "marriage." The rest of the chapter is a series of short, terse sentences, with sparsely distributed commentary on the action by a third-person narrator who, despite the ability to enter into the characters' thoughts and feelings, does so only sparingly.

Civakami took the tirumankalyam and flower garlands and reverently, with bhakti,¹ placed them around her neck. Then, as she stood in the shrine of the lord who is Nataraja, Civakami began to dance. For a little time, she danced in utter joy, after which she performed the appropriate abhinaya² as she sang Navukkarasar's holy verse:
Munnam avanutaiya namam ketal
Murti avanirukkum vannam ketal.

As Civakami danced, the sanniddhi³ began slowly to fill up with people.

Awash in an ocean of bhakti, those who saw her dance forgot all else.

That moment, Mamalla Chakravarti⁴ unexpectedly arrived. It so happened that, *once before, while performing abhinaya for that same song, Civakami noticed Mamalla's arrival and directed her abhinaya solely towards him.*

Now, Civakami did not see Mamalla coming.

Lord Ekambaranatha absorbed her gaze and her attention.

Her eyes saw nothing else; her soul had room for no-one else.

Like the others present, for a while Mamalla Chakravarti forgot himself watching Civakami's exquisite abhinaya.

His large eyes brimmed and overflowed in a river of tears.

He then remembered that he was the Pallava king, and that the people around would pay attention [to his behaviour].

Without a sound, Mamalla slid out of Iraivan's shrine.

While he was passing the main gopuram entrance to Ekambaranatha's home, he heard—Talai patal nankai talaivan tal—the last line of Navukkarasar's [Appar's] song in Civakami's sweet voice. (my italics, 1007-8)

As the italicized portions of the passage demonstrate, Civakami is completely absorbed in her art, her devotion surpassing temporal forms of identification and passion, while King Narasimha is overcome by his emotions, translatable to feelings of desolation and tragic loss. The narrator gives the reader enough information about the characters' mind-states to underscore and emphasize the themes of thwarted earthly love, duty towards one's people and nation, and the ability of the individual devotee to transcend the travails of and snares enfolding human existence.

At the time of its initial serialization, how did Kalki's readers react to these final moments in a story whose outcome they knew from the start? "My mother, when she read out chapters from *Sivakami* to father, often wiped her tears. The romance had no future, a mere dancing girl could not aspire to marry a king and ultimately the heroine

‘weds’ Lord Shiva and becomes his earthly consort. There were hardly any dry eyes in Tamil Nadu homes when the last chapters describing these events were read,” V.

Gangadhar writes (The Sunday Tribune, July 25, 1999). The metonymic narration at the end of the novel, the means by which the novelist chooses to unfold its much-anticipated tragic denouement, reveals, I would argue, the complexity of Kalki’s text, its ability to provoke multiple readings, some resistant, some not.

As discussed in Chapter Two, Kalki took on the task of popularizing the traditional dance form of *Sadir*—renamed as *Bharata Natyam* in its more sanitized, brahmanized form during the 1930s—through his characterization of Civakami as a dancer. Civakami’s name itself signals both her profession as a dancer and her ultimate fate in the novel. A portmanteau word in Sanskrit (Civa+kami), the first part of the name refers to “Civa,” the destroyer god of the Hindu pantheon who is also the god of dance. The second part, “kami,” means “beloved” or “one who loves.” The implications are two-fold; the character’s name designates her as one who loves/yearns for Civa, or as Civa’s beloved. At the time Kalki wrote the novel, however, exponents of *Sadir*, called *devadasis* (literally, the lord’s slaves) and traditionally “married” in a ritual ceremony to the temple deity under whose auspices they performed, were regarded by the brahman elites as symbols of degradation and vice.⁵ That the novel should end with a description of Civakami singing and dancing after her “dedication” to the Lord in the temple, returning, as it were, to the traditional *devadasi* role, poses vital questions along gender, caste, and class lines, questions instrumental in understanding Kalki’s social reformist, political, and aesthetic agenda and aspirations.

Does Civakami's return to her traditional role as a temple dancer signal her victimhood? Is the temple the only social and cultural space to which she can return? Is there no room for Civakami in the temporal world? Or is her removal from the temporal sphere and dedication to her art an indication of her resistance, the failure of patriarchy to contain her? The tragic undertones of this union are brought out further by the arrival and departure of Mamalla, gone unnoticed by Civakami. Finally, it is the voice of Civakami singing the words of Appar that end the novel.

Once she heard his name,
Then heard of his lovely form.
Then she heard of his excellent [exceptional] town,
And fell madly in love with him.
That same day she left her mother and father
And the proper ways of the world,
Lost herself,
Lost her good name,
This woman has joined the feet of the Lord, her lover (trans.
Peterson 245)

The reader's last impression in the novel is the image of Mamalla leaving the temple courtyard as he hears Civakami singing the last line of the song. Both characters have returned to their proper place in the story universe, the king to the realm of governance and public affairs, the dancer to the temple.

This ending, its pathos and psychic complexity underscored through a return to devotional song, signals a striking formal and ideological moment for the secular colonial text. Central to the novel's tragic resolution is a celebrated poem from the medieval bhakti corpus, a poem sung in Civa temples and Tamil homes to this day that symbolizes a revivalist moment in Tamil cultural and literary history. This invocation of Appar's verse for the explicit purpose of resolving Civakami's situation and restoring her social

standing in the world of the text is a crucial one, calling into question the role of the artist and the place of the devotional arts in a nation rife with political uncertainty. With the song allusion, Kalki also positions the novel as an indigenous genre, the rightful inheritor of an extensive secular and sacred corpus that predated colonial contact by hundreds of years. In formal terms, the historical romance becomes in Kalki's hands the site for the development of an indigenous literary language that reworks oral, performance, and written genres from the precolonial past, a language, I would argue, demanding a different kind of critical intervention.

This chapter examines the narrative strategies and ethics of the novel's invocation of the Pallava cultural and historical past in *Civakamiyin Capatam*, exploring Kalki's use of diverse oral, visual, performance and print forms within a particular mediation of the genre of historical romance. I analyze why and how *Civakamiyin Capatam* strategically brings into play indigenous modes of storytelling and description—the mono-dramatic folk practice of *katha kalaksepa*, the framework of the Hindu epic (the *Ramayana*), classical Carnatic music and the indigenous dance form known today as *Bharata Natyam*—to fashion a distinctive Tamil/Indian ethos and aesthetic.

The larger project of this study is to use Kalki's novel as a lens with which to examine erstwhile formulations of Tamil identity, an identity that was, and continues to be, heavily interpellated by Indian nationalist and colonial rhetorics; Tamil political separatism, caste and gender politics; and Tamil *marumalarcci* or cultural renaissance; a movement in which Kalki's historical romances played a pivotal role. Within this larger framework, I show in this chapter how Kalki's novel represents a kind of indigenous literature that has gone largely unexamined by postcolonial scholars, owing at least in

part to the fact that this body of work from the pre-independence period was not written in English. I argue that an examination of Kalki's forays into the historical romance, his attempts to craft an aesthetic refracting the richness and diversity of the Tamil cultural experience for popular consumption among Tamil audiences, grounds such benchmark notions in postcolonial criticism as "hybridity," "mimicry," and "appropriation," with which scholars aim to define the ways colonial cultural authority is thwarted and subverted by the colonized subject. That is, my analysis of Kalki's text allows a ringside view of a particular (post)colonial novel in terms of its formal genesis, revealing it to be a complex amalgam of histories, cultures, ideologies and intertexts.

With this study, I challenge elite-cosmopolitan definitions of the hybrid text by critics such as Homi Bhabha, who formulate their arguments around the South Asian metropolitan novel in English, conceptualizing hybridity in a meta-theoretical realm that is neither historically nuanced nor locally situated. For Bhabha, it is "between the edict of Englishness and the assault of the dark unruly spaces of the earth, through an act of repetition, that the colonial text emerges uncertainly" (107). Bhabha's principle objects of analysis besides that most English of English books, the Protestant Bible, are Conrad and Naipaul, colonial writers whose fiction attempts, and fails, to fix or dominate the unruly, terrifying, and chaotic other, that is, the colonized subject. By this account, the specter of European dominance looms over the text, with psychic consequences for both colonizer and colonized, the colonizer ambivalent about his own authority and faced with the enormity of his own deception, the colonized miserably aware of his or her status as other, as secondary to the colonizer's self. However, Bhabha argues, through repetition

and mimicry of the English book, the hybrid text alters its (the English book's) contours, affording moments of intervention or resistance for the colonized subject.

Such criticism, predicated in the main on the novel in English, neglects issues of form and formal appropriation vital in understanding the workings of any hybrid text, while creating a priori frameworks of textual resistance, recalcitrance and/or indeterminacy with which to understand *all* South Asian literature. Examinations of South Asia's literary oeuvre along these lines do not allow a tracing of the forces that produce this textual hybridity—both complicities and resistance—to reveal the intricate interplay of the text with indigenous socio-cultural precept and practice.

Resisting easy transpositions of text and context that characterize the kind of postcolonial orthodoxy outlined above, I argue that Kalki's hybrid text represents a very particular kind of intervention by the colonized subject that necessitates a materialist tracking of its own production and consumption. In drawing upon populist and working-class forms, in welding together performative, visual, and verbal elements from multiple storytelling genres (indigenous epic, song, sculpture, drama, music, dance, film), Kalki's text has far-reaching consequences in the formation of a new indigenous aesthetic and nationalist sentiment among his readership, an analysis of which complicates any easy reading of its bourgeois provenance and limits. It reveals a complex network of intertextual influence - aesthetic, ethical, political - which, when examined, leads to a richer conception of the South Asian novel's ideological operations and appeal to various audiences.

Narrating the past, envisioning the future

To excavate its intertexts and locate the different kinds of hybridity at work in the novel, I situate my analysis in close readings of particular scenes. But first, a brief sketch of the novel's layout: *Civakamiyin Capatam* is comprised of four parts. Part One, *Paranjoti Yattirai (Paranjoti's Journey)*, traces the migration of young Paranjoti, a historic figure from the period known to most Tamils as Sirutondar, from his native village to the Pallava capital; his recruitment by Emperor Mahendra into the Pallava army; his growing friendship with Prince Narasimha, whose absolute trust he wins during this period; and his subsequent rise in the Pallava army's ranks to Senapati, or army commander. Part One also chronicles the beginnings of Civakami's relationship with the young prince Narasimha, and the initial phase of the Pallava-Chalukya aggression leading up to the siege of the Kanci. In Part Two, *Kanci Murtrukai (The Siege of Kanci)*, the lovers are separated from one another after Mahendra extracts a promise from Narasimha to stay within the bounds of the Pallava capital. The Chalukya spy Nakanandi takes Civakami and Ayanar on a tour of the south in the attempt to lure them away from Pallava territory; Mahendra and his cohort of Pallava spies intervene, preventing harm to the royal sculptor and his daughter; they also prevent an assassination attempt on the life of young Narasimha. Nakanandi's true identity is revealed in this section: he is Pulakesin's brother and a Chalukya spy who uses Buddhist missions and monasteries as intelligence gathering hubs. At the end of Part Two, the besiegement of the Pallava capital by Pulakesin, the Chalukya king, begins in earnest. Part Three, *Piksuvin Katal (the Bhikshu's Love)* stages the first face-to-face talks between Mahendra and Pulakesin, in which Pulakesin, granted safe passage into Kancipuram, demands the release of

Chalukya prisoners, including Nakanandi. A memorable dance performance by Civakami occurs during the visit, subsequent to which she is abducted by Chalukya warriors along with her father, and forced to dance on the streets of Vatapi in front of a jeering crowd. Part Three ends with the routing of the Pallava army, the demise of Mahendra and the ascension of Narasimha to the Pallava throne. However, the Chalukya army after several futile attempts to storm the Pallava capital. Part Four, *Sitainta Kanavu (Shattered Dream)*, details the marriage of Narasimha to the Pandyan princess, digresses into the romance and trials of the Pandyan prince Nedumaran and the princess Mangayarkarasi. It also details Narasimha's avenging of his father's defeat and the destruction of the Chalukya capital Vatapi.

Each of the four parts of Kalki's mammoth novel contains anything between 47 and 57 chapters, each chapter varying in length from 3-4 pages to 7-8. The length and organization of the chapters owes to the fact of their serial publication in *Kalki* weekly and the variable attention span of the magazine reader. Borrowing from the conventions of nineteenth-century European adventure novel and historical romance, Kalki crafts a sprawling, action-packed narrative peopled by many different characters, taking care to keep the length of his chapters short and the action tight, dexterously weaving in and out of seemingly unconnected episodes in lives of his characters and alternating between different plot threads. At the end of each chapter or set of chapters published weekly during the original serialization, a character's fate or an event's outcome is left hanging in the balance, even as the narrative moves on to another interaction or character's situation the next week. Slowly, the reader begins connecting the dots, seeing how the lives and the worlds of the characters are intertwined.

Kalki also took care to give each chapter a catchy title that stimulates readerly interest and presages plot twists and turns, a move designed to keep the popular magazine reader faithful. And so in Part One, Chapter 41 is *Pilaitta Uyir* (The Life that Survived), Chapter 32, *Mottu Vetitatu* (The Bud Exploded), Chapter 49, *Kanciyil Kolahalam* (Chaos in Kanci), and Chapter 23, *Raja Hamsam* (Swan King, a reference to the swan-shaped Pallava battleship). Plot devices from the nineteenth-century European novel, particularly the historical romance and the Gothic novel, that mark the text overall are its representations of doppelgangers and doubles, mistaken identity and disguise, factionalism and feudalism (religious and otherwise), rural to urban migration, failed romance, and the constant tropes of journey and companionship. Such devices were appropriated by Kalki from writers such as Victor Hugo and Alexandre Dumas, Walter Scott and Jane Austen, Edward Bulwer Lytton and Samuel Shellabarger, not to mention the early Tamil novelists who imitated their European counterparts and welded European form to Indian content. Kalki read all these writers copiously through his teens and early twenties.⁶

The first part of *Civakamiyin Capatam* is devoted to the fortunes of a young character named Paranjoti, sent by his family to the Pallava capital Kancipuram in the hope that he will straighten out by devoting himself to higher studies in the city. Introducing the action through the perspective of an outsider allows the narrator to supply context and historical details with which neither the reader of the novel, nor Paranjoti himself, are familiar. We learn that Paranjoti travels by foot from his village, Tiruchenkatakudi, to Kancipuram in order to pursue Sanskrit studies at the Saiva poet-saint Appar's matam (monastic house of learning) and to apprentice with Ayanar, the

protagonist Civakami's celebrated sculptor-father. Paranjoti is first seen on the road to Kanci in the company of the Buddhist monk Nakanandi (who turns out later to be enemy Chalukya ruler Pulakesin's fictional twin brother) who he meets on the way, a sign that he is unintentionally embroiled in trouble. Once in Kancipuram, Paranjoti demonstrates his courage and quick thinking, flinging a spear to divert a maddened temple elephant running amok on the streets, thereby saving the lives of sculptor Aayanar and his dancer daughter Civakami, who are directly on its path.

The streets of Kanci are abuzz with the news that Civakami's arangetram⁷ was halted because of enemy ruler Pulakesin's border aggression on Pallava territory, news of which arrived during the performance and caused King Mahendra (600-630 CE) and Crown Prince Narasimha (630-668 CE) to leave in haste. The occurrence of two inauspicious incidents so early in the novel—the frenzy of a normally docile temple elephant, a symbol of the elephant god Ganesha who is worshipped as the remover of obstacles; and the halting of Civakami's arangetram, an event imbued with religious and professional significance in a dancer's life—serve as signals to the reader that something is sorely amiss in the story-world.

After he flees to escape the charging elephant, and the animal is captured by Pallava officials, Paranjoti realizes he has lost the bundle containing his worldly possessions and most importantly, his letters of introduction to Appar and Aayanar. He is not able to find his way back to the spot from which he threw his spear. As a reward for all his labors, he is thrown into prison by two Pallava guards who find him sleeping in the street.

The narration of Part One, seen mostly through Paranjoti's perspective, is firmly rooted in third person or what Gerard Genette calls heterodiegetic narration, with a narrator who is at a remove from the characters, often disrupting the action (244-245).⁸ Kalki's narrator variably takes on the voice of the historian, observer, accomplished raconteur, or friend of the reader, providing different types of knowledge at critical junctures for the reader. This type of "narrative omniscience" is often associated with realism in the novel, and it allows the narrator to operate at varying degrees of distance from his characters, both in terms of voice and vision, the latter a question of what Bal terms focalization, "the relation between the vision and that which is 'seen,' perceived" (153). In Kalki, heterodiegetic narration serves specific purposes at specific times, the voice he adopts an indicator of the aim of the interpolation. In chapter one, Kalki uses the narrator's voice to throw light on what the characters see in order to foreshadow the impending war while Nakanandi and Paranjoti stop for a moment on the road. "Above the horizon, the whirling sun blazed gold like Tirumal's⁹ celestial chakra. Its scarlet rays seeped into the sky, seeming as though a torrent of blood was unleashed on a battlefield during a particularly terrible war" (22). While there is no doubt that the characters' vision is involved in the above example, it is also clear that the simile is developed by the heterodiegetic narrator who steps efficiently in and out of the action to build atmosphere, and in this case, to foreshadow events to come. When Paranjoti is trying to figure out in Chapter 2 where the Ekambaresvara (Siva) temple is located in the city, the narrator, now a scholar historian, interpolates for the reader's edification: "At the time of this account, that is, one thousand, three hundred, and twenty years ago, the temples of Tamil Nadu did not have tall towers at the entrance. Towers of moderate height were usually built over

the sanctum sanctorum. Moreover, the towers of temples, Jain monasteries, and royal palaces were all similar in appearance” (30). In another such interpolation, when the villainous Nakanandi goes to meet Aayanar, he throws a barb at the sculptor about Civakami’s choice of music for a humorous dance piece she performed at the palace. The narrator explains Nakanandi’s jibe by letting the reader know that the play in question was a farcical piece attributed to Mahendra named *Mattavilasa* that mocked Buddhist and Jain rivalries during the period [and written after his conversion to Saivism] (85). The purpose of this diegetic address seems to be the establishment of the narration as “authentic” and true to history, so that the novel in this narrator’s hands educates while it entertains.

The variable tone and shifting registers of an elusive narrator in the novel can also be traced to *katha kalaksepa*, a still-extant, consciously hybrid folk-classical form of storytelling intermixed with song popularized in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and practised all over the regional south. *Kalaksepa* practitioners recited and sang verses from the ancient epics interpolating explanations of lofty classical texts in colloquial Tamil. They borrowed vocal and orchestration techniques from musical traditions all over India, and improvised banter, making high classical forms accessible and relevant to audiences by drawing connections to present-day contexts (Gurumurthy 15-20).

Since Kalki’s earliest experiences of storytelling—performing and listening—were through *katha kalaksepa*, that his writing is infused with witty or formal asides to his audience as well as frequent explanations of character and action is no surprise. At the very beginning of chapter 20, the narrator directly addresses the reader: “Please go back a little, till before a melancholy Civakami went in the direction of the lotus pond

taking her pet fawn with her, and pay attention to what then happened in Aayanar's house" (110)¹⁰. By directly addressing the audience, a move reminiscent of the *katha kalaksepa* practitioners as well as heterodiegetic narrators in the European novel, Kalki is able to play with temporal sequence and create a variable ethos of intimacy and formal distance for his readers. In other words, the heterodiegetic narrator is able to break the temporal chain in the storyworld, allowing the reader to experience two separate pieces of action out of order. Such narratorial interpolation occurs frequently in Kalki's nonlinear text running sometimes to entire chapters that contain biographical or historical background. For instance, after we have met Paranjoti and seen him thrown into a jail cell in Kanci by Pallava guards in Chapter 4, Chapter 5 takes the reader back to Paranjoti's youth, the anxieties he caused his family, and his decision to leave the village for the city.

In formalist terms, the narration of the beginning chapters of the novel is also marked by the use of free indirect discourse, which refers to the intermingling of voice between the narrator and the character, and by interior monologue. Both devices allow the narrator to adopt a more informal dialect that is closer to the character. This feature is striking in the passage immediately below, where the workings of Paranjoti's mind are revealed despite the fact that we are getting the account mostly in third person. I have quoted the entire passage to throw light on both this phenomenon in Kalki's narration and the other crucial question of focalization.

Actually, Paranjoti was not unduly worried over his plight. When he knew the truth was that he had been locked up in jail due to some misapprehension, he believed firmly that he would be released, for sure.

Therefore, the best thing to do tonight is get some sleep. But won't sleep come? Ah, it's all the shrunken stomach's fault. No dinner... The gnawing hunger has kept him from sleeping. Great city, this Kanchi! What can you say about a town which starves its guests after a long journey? Didn't the Digambara Jain sage appear close to Kanchi?¹¹ The sight of the man who fasts at night has deprived me of food tonight.

Even as he pondered in this fashion, a change in the room caught Paranjoti's attention. A little light seemed to have entered the dark room. Surprised by this change, Paranjoti looked up. He realised that moonbeams had entered through a little hole on the roof. For a second, Paranjoti wondered how, all of a sudden, the hole came to be there. No, no, the hole must have always been there, but the moon has just sailed above the hole, he reasoned to himself. The light of the full moon was bathing the world outside in dreamy splendour. The moonbeam has found its way through the hole only to announce this fact and to irk me in the dark cell.

But what is this? The moonlight inside has become so bright. The hole seems to be getting bigger. Look. At first it had seemed too small for even a hand to squeeze through. But now, a man could easily pass through it. Is this Indra's wizardry? Or Mahendra's wizardry?¹² Emperor Mahendra's Kanchi seems to be a realm of magic.

Oh my god, what horror is this? Paranjoti's breath stopped for an instant. A huge snake came slithering down from the hole on the roof. No, no, it's not a snake. Just a rope. Too bad that the bhikshu had startled him in the afternoon with the dead snake. Now, even a rope looked like a serpent.

The mystery of the hole on the roof was solved. Someone had deliberately made an opening through which to let in a rope. For what? What else, but to help me escape? But who in this city of strangers could be so concerned about me? And how did they know I am in this prison cell?

By that time, the rope's end had come within his reach, and it came further down to touch the floor. Then, it began to move this way and that. Undoubtedly, whoever let it down was shaking it. Why? Are they signaling me to climb out? It's got to be that.

For a moment, Paranjoti wondered if he should accept aid which came to him in so strange a fashion. If he

did, would new problems crop up? AT the same time, he felt a great urge to know who was so concerned about him as to save him. Another reason added weight to the urge. It was the hunger gnawing at his vitals. Paranjoti tugged hard at the rope. It seemed to have been tied securely at the top. It would definitely bear his weight. At once, Paranjoti began to scale the rope. (49-51)

The first feature to note about the above passage is the quick shift from the narrator's voice in the first sentence ("Paranjoti was not worried...") into indirect discourse ("he knew the truth was ..."). The fact that Paranjoti "believes firmly" and "for sure" that he will be released from jail, a repeat emphasis on the certainty of his conviction that I have tried to reproduce from the Tamil original, reveals to the reader the opposite, that Paranjoti is desperately trying to reassure himself that he is safe, alone in his dark jail cell in a strange city, and that nothing untoward will happen to him. From this point on, the narration moves back and forth between indirect and direct speech that is not set off by quotation marks, for instance: "Great city, this Kanci! What can you say about a town which starves its guests after a long journey?" The segue into interior monologue is one that reveals Paranjoti's most private musings, a candid account of different states of mind and attitudes: the narrative voice is ironic, horror-struck, startled, apprehensive and finally, keenly curious. One sentence in the passage is ambiguous (if read out of context) in terms of its voice: "A huge snake came slithering down from the hole on the roof." Without the personal pronoun "he" or "I," it appears as though this sentence comes from the narrator. However, the "omniscient" narrator who transcends the chronology of the storyworld would know that the "snake" is in fact a "rope." Free

indirect discourse allows the narrator to get into closer proximity with the character, in a voicing far removed from the visionary passages described earlier.

The focalizing of the rope incident in terms of Paranjoti's limited, and limiting vision, as to what lies ahead, is a narrative technique Kalki employs again and again in the novel. This curtailment of perspective is something he derived from reading the nineteenth-century European novel, and is here used to create uncertainty and suspense, building up dramatic tension for the reader. In addition, intra-textual allusion is also possible in the mode of free indirect discourse, without too much stagnating cross-reference in the narration. That is, the reader likely remembers that this is not the first time a snake sighting is referred to in the novel, but it is left up to him/her to think about the implications of the image. The snake reference in the passage, for example, is an allusion to an earlier incident in the novel.

At the point in the passage when Paranjoti wonders if the rope is a snake, the reader is sure to recall the character's first meeting with the Buddhist monk Nakanandi. When Paranjoti wakes from the nap he takes on the highway while en route to Kanci, he sees above him the looming figure of a monk, a dead snake dangling from his hand. Nakanandi purports to have saved Paranjoti's life during that encounter, but even at the time, Paranjoti is suspicious of this claim, wondering how a Buddhist monk could take a life. It is significant that the monk is named Nakanandi: "Naka" the Sanskrit and Tamil word for snake. We learn much later in the novel that the monk is Pulakesin's brother and a Chalukya spy; the repeated allusions to snakes, the use of snake imagery when he is present in the action, point to his treachery and duplicity. Finally, the snake image in the

jail scene is actually a clue for readers that it is, in fact, the monk who is at the other end of the rope, something we find out in succeeding chapters.

One of the complex effects produced by the use of free indirect discourse in the passage is the introduction of a subtext on religious factionalism and corruption—Buddhist, Jain and Saiva—a subtext that goes beyond a character's individual musings. Though Paranjoti might share the narrator's irreverence for religious quarrels, he simply could not have the kind of hindsight and extra-textual knowledge that the narrator does, both about the storyworld (a medieval world in which religious factionalism is seen as a major force in state formation) and its surrounding historical context (the religious strife in the subcontinent that troubled nationalists and complicated their vision for a sovereign India).

Finally, heterodiegetic narration helps Kalki generate the kind of Tamil nationalist fantasy that Kalki's readers found, and continue to find, so persuasive. As described in the first chapter of my dissertation, the bhakti movement of the sixth century, an upsurge of devotional literature that took place during the Pallava epoch and continued into the next decade and the rest of India, was spearheaded by sixty-three Civa-worshipping Nayanmar and twelve Vaisnavite Alvars who produced poetry that had enormous popular appeal. As noted in Chapter Two, it was through the bhakti movement—in which the Tamil poets set a literary and linguistic precedent in the subcontinent—that languages in the different regions of South Asia interacted with each other and developed into their modern forms.

Many of the bhakti poets were of humble origin, including the oldest Nayanar Appar (Mahendra's spiritual guru who caused the king's conversion from Jainism to

Saivism with an extraordinary display of resistance), something that is a crucial ideal for Kalki. It seems that the author was drawing upon indigenous and popular traditions in the Tamil region in order to do the pedagogical work in the novel that would familiarize his audience with both an exclusively Tamil literary aesthetic and artistic-spiritual epoch. By extension, heterodiegetic narration is often used in the novel to insert and explore features of bhakti—the kind of Tamil revivalism it symbolizes in *Civakamiyin Capatam*—and creates a model for the colonized present. One such interpolation occurs early on, when Paranjoti is wandering the streets of Kanci, when the narrator intones:

In those days, Kanci was the abode of Kalaimakal¹³. Kanci was full of Vedic centers for Sanskrit studies,¹⁴ matams for Tamil studies, Buddhist theological colleges, and schools of the Jaina creed. There were also institutions that taught painting, sculpture, music and the other arts. Moreover, just a few years before, an event had taken place which had brought great distinction to Kanci, and sparked tremendous excitement throughout the land of the Tamils. Inspired by Tirunavukkarasar's¹⁵ charismatic power, the valorous poet-philosopher, Emperor Mahendra Pallava, abjured Jainism to become an ardent worshipper of Civa.

Under the name of Dharmasena, Navukkarasar—originally called Marulneekkiyar—had himself been a Jain theologian. He had been reconverted to Saivism by the piety of his sister Tilakavati. From that time, he poured forth honeyed lyrics in Tamil brimming with the nectar of Siva bhakti. Lost in the glory of those verses, Emperor Mahendra paid homage to the saint, “I am merely the ruler of the land. But you are Navukkarasar -- the master of the word.”

With that he gave up Jainism to become a follower of Civa. This event was known throughout the Tamil lands. Everywhere, people constantly talked about this miracle, and in amazement. It was well known throughout the land that, at Mahendra Chakravarti's request, Navukkarasar had established a matham in Kanci where Tamil and hymnal verses were taught. All these factors influenced Paranjoti to say that he would go to Kanci to study. (45)

Kalki's sketch of Appar's life in this passage is corroborated by historians' versions of his emergence as an important literary and religious figure,¹⁶ but, significantly, he fails to include the details of Appar's persecution by the then Jain Mahendra, before his ultimate conversion, except in one oblique reference in Chapter 35, when Appar alludes to the tortures he had to endure as a test of his faith. However, he tellingly attributes these tortures to the god Civa, not Mahendra (197). The detailed account of the poet's reconversion presages both the entry of Appar as an actual character in the novel, and the references to his poems that thread through the narrative in its most politically and emotionally charged moments.

In Part One of the novel, a picture of war with accompanying notes of suspense and intrigue emerges alongside such diegetic fantasizing on the part of the narrator, through Paranjoti's encounters with other characters such as the monk, Ayanar, and finally, a disguised King Mahendra who accompanies him on his mission to Ajanta, saves him from enemy Chalukya warriors, and eventually appoints him as the Pallava army's commander. The reader's interest in Paranjoti's fate has something to do with the fact that he is represented as someone who does not solicit involvement in affairs of state. Nevertheless, he becomes an important player in the intelligence gathering missions of the Pallavas. After his roof-top escape from orchestrated by Nakanandi, Paranjoti goes with the monk, of whom he is more than slightly suspicious despite the latter's seeming benevolence, to meet Ayanar. In his desire to unearth the secret painting techniques used by the Buddhist artists at the cave temples of Ajanta (dated approximately between 1 BCE and 600 CE), Ayanar becomes Nakanandi's pawn. He decides to send the artless Paranjoti - on Nakanandi's recommendation - to the Nagarjuna mountains in the west,

and hides his two visitors from the Pallava king Mahendravarman, Narasimhavarman's father, at Nakanandi's request. However, in Chapter 19, when Mahendra visits Ayanar, ostensibly to apologize for his hasty exit from Civakami's debut recital at the palace, he has noticed Nakanandi and Paranjoti hiding behind a gigantic Buddha statue in the house, though the reader does not get confirmation of this fact until three chapters later.

Paranjoti's willy-nilly cooptation in the stealth commissions of Pallava and Chalukya armies allows for many surprises in the novel, not the least of which is his and the reader's discovery later in the narrative that a warrior Paranjoti runs into on his journey to the mountains is King Mahendra in disguise. The warrior, Vajrabahu, drugs Paranjoti when he is at a wayside stop, finds the scroll that Nakanandi has given him, ostensibly a letter of introduction, and puts another in its place. The reader finds out later that the scroll leaks important intelligence information to the Chalukya king Pulakesin about the Pallava army's maneuvers. If Mahendra/Vajrabahu had not intercepted the scroll, the battle would have been lost early. Part One of Kalki's novel is full of surprising twists, adventure, intrigue, and a love story guaranteed to ensnare the magazine reader with its tragic undertones.

To analyze the workings of Kalki's hybrid text, and his careful crafting of an indigenous ethos for his novel, I turn to Chapter 22. Right after his departure from Ayanar's home with Narasimha which begins chapter 22, Mahendra asks the Pallava spy Catruknan to apply for an apprenticeship with the sculptor, and report any unusual activities among the other apprentices, especially whether there are any new entrants among them. Partially overhearing this conversation, the prince Narasimha is surprised that Mahendra should spy on Ayanar, the much-beloved royal sculptor of the Pallavas

and father of his beloved Civakami, for whose art Mahendra has such high regard, and who Narasimha has known since childhood. As he wonders about this, Narasimha notices that Mahendra has urged his horse to go faster, a sure sign, Narasimha knows, that his father is thinking about something extremely important. Now even more anxious to uncover the mystery, the prince leads his horse into a gallop. There is no help from the heterodiegetic narrator for the reader in figuring out what those thoughts might be.

At this point, just after rousing the reader's curiosity about Mahendra's thoughts, the narrator launches into an idyllic description of the surroundings:

Beyond the forest appeared the highway from Kanci to Mamallapuram. At the corner of the highway ran a large canal. On the canal were boats, one just behind the other, going towards Kanci. A majority of the boats were laden with sacks of paddy. There were two people¹⁷ rowing each boat. The entire surroundings, the wide highway bordered by dense trees, the clear waters of the canal, the boats floating along the canal, the lush, green plain glimpsed far beyond the trees flanking the canal, made for a beautiful sight. The dark shadows of trees imprinted there, and there, on the canal's waters were refreshing¹⁸ to the eyes. (125)

The procession of grain-filled boats described in the passage above clearly augurs the siege of Kanci that is yet to come. For both readers and watchers of the scene (Mahendra and Narasimha), the lone weapon-bearing ship signals the weakness and unpreparedness of the Pallava army in a region that has dwelt for many years in peace.

As the narrator's description continues, a boatman breaks into a song in which a (probably) female persona asks her pet parrot, "Who is it, red-lipped, that plays a bamboo flute, pouring sweet nectar [into the universe]?" The boatman's voice is described as "sweet" and "filled with feeling," suggesting that he is at peace with himself and his environment even as he works ferrying heavy sacks of grain from the port to the city.

Kalki's readers would almost immediately discern that the "who" in the boatman's poem is the Hindu god Krishna, as would the characters—Mahendra and son—watching this scene, so that the song takes on cosmic significance, marking an almost celestial moment. The sylvan setting, the image of king and prince gazing benevolently, paternally, upon the industrious subject whose song spills forth nectar like Krishna's flute, suggests a harmonious Hindu universe. In the context of impending war, and Narasimha's inkling that Mahendra's mind is working furiously after his injunction to Satruknan to spy on Aayanar, there is a sense that this peace, this cosmic harmony, is soon to disappear. And it does. "Almost as if in warning that this atmosphere of tranquility, love, calm and beauty," the narrator discloses, "will soon be disrupted by thunder and lightning, cyclone and earthquake, a vessel full of all manner of weapons advanced through the line of boats filled with grain. (124). The appearance of the lone weapon-bearing ship signals the weakness of the Pallava army, and the inability of a kingdom that has dwelt for many years in peace to resist the Chalukyan invasion. (In Part One, Chapter 3, Mahendra looks at the spear that Paranjoti left behind, regretting that more of these could not be had.)

Mahendra breaks the silence at this moment by saying, his voice throbbing with cynicism and bitterness: "The Pallava kingdom's weapons of war seem strong indeed" (125). It is significant that there is no glossing or interpretation of this moment from a recently loquacious narrator, so that the reader is left to make the connection to previous mentions of the sore lack of weaponry and soldiers. Meanwhile, Narasimha asks his father why Catruknan was sent to spy on Aayanar. Mahendra replies: "During wartime, it is important to be very careful. In times like these, inside a sanyasi's¹⁹ saffron robes

could lurk an enemy's close associate. Inside the art of sculpture could be a conspiracy to kill..." (125). The obvious reference here is both to Nakanandi and to the fact that Mahendra has just spotted Paranjoti and Nakanandi hiding in Ayanar's house. The reader, who knows this from earlier chapters, guesses that Mahendra is a shrewd statesman, one whose eyes are open and ears are to the ground. His despair is revealing in characterological terms as well as in terms of foregrounding the action, the imminent defeat of the Pallava army at the hands of the Chalukyas. In terms of broader implications, Mahendra's words, suggesting imminent war and instability in the land, not to mention the intertwining of religion and politics, undercut all the careful, painstaking descriptive groundwork in the narration (the description of the canal, the boatman, the two watchers) for the fulfillment of bourgeois nationalist fantasy.

Reminding Narasimha of his status as ruler and crown prince responsible for the fate of the land, Mahendra ends with a little homily: "Mamalla! Those involved in the affairs of state must always keep their eyes and ears open. In times of war this is extremely crucial. What were your eyes doing when we at Ayanar's house?" (126). Faced with his father's piercing question and glance, the young prince blushes. He recalls that he spent the entire time making eyes at Civakami. As if to signal a return to the love story on which the entire novel pivots, at this point in the story, the boatman's song resumes from even further off, signaling the chapter's end. This time, the female persona of the song asks the parrot if what the other young girls told her is true, that there exists here a thief named Kannan...²⁰ "How has this butter-stealing youth turned my entire being inside out, s/he asks? What has he said with his eyes?" (126). Her voice ventriloquized through the boatman, the persona pines for her divine lover, representing

an interesting moment of gender inversion in the novel, and not, I argue in the next chapter, its only one. We are left in Chapter 22—after this grim interchange between king and prince, the foreshadowing of the war to come, the theme of pining love articulated in the boatman's song, the reminder of the prince's own preoccupation with his love for Civakami—with an awareness of the tension between the interior world of art and romantic love and an encroaching exterior world of politics and warfare around which the narration pivots.

In terms of traditional plot and character development in the novel, by the end of Chapter 22, the reader gets a better sense of Mahendra's psychology, his shrewdness and worldliness despite his deep misgivings about war. The relationship between Mahendra and his son also seems to be evolving. There is less coddling for the impetuous Narasimha to rebel against, as he does in Chapter 8, and more mentoring and training for kingship, signaling that Narasimha's ascension to the throne is not too far off. It seems, however, that Narasimha is still young, and that both his romance with Civakami and his idea of war are the product of youthful naivete, making him as yet unfit for the throne. As the conversation unfolds in succeeding chapters, Mahendra opens up to his son about his own leadership, wondering aloud if he should have spent less time building temples and promoting the arts and more on shoring up the Pallava kingdom's military strength, demanding his son's word that he will continue to build temples and shrines housing all religions as well as avenge his father, should he be defeated. Finally, it seems that the spy Catruknan is an important device in the action; he and Nakanandi between them embody the elaborate spy networks of the Pallava and Chalukya kingdoms. It is also obviously possible to link Mahendra's quandaries of country and culture, Narasimha's

love for a girl below his station in caste and class, the meditations on religious fraud and spiritual mentorship, the juxtaposition of “good” and “bad” citizen-subjects, the narrator’s imaginings of a homeland steeped in Tamil traditions, Tamil language and Tamil literature, to a reading of the colonial novel as national allegory qua Fredric Jameson.²¹

Many features of Kalki’s narrative technique, and reasons for his popularity, can be gleaned from the passages described above. Drawing upon the popular novel—detective, historical romance, spy thriller—Kalki creates suspense and a keen sense of anticipation for the reader on what lies ahead. It is this ability on the author’s part that made “tens of thousands of readers look forward to the next instalment... the unique phenomenon, never seen before, of all normal work being suspended in thousands of Tamil homes till the weekly instalment had been read” (Subramanian, qtd. in Kalki, xv). It was for the serialized novel that Kalki evolved a style of beginning that reflects a journalistic predilection for precise and efficient summary that he managed to sustain week after week. For instance, after dedicating Chapter 5 to explaining Paranjoti’s upbringing, ending with his uncle’s stern parting injunctions to throw away his (Paranjoti’s) spear after he reaches Kanci, Kalki’s narrator begins Chapter 6 with: “Lying all alone on the reed mat in the dark-filled²² prison chamber, Paranjoti recalled his uncle’s parting advice described above” (46). With this opening sentence, Kalki firmly connects the preceding chapter, a departure from the chronological progression of the story, to the present action, helping the magazine reader find her place in the narrative. The first sentence of Chapter 22 contains this very precision and word economy while immediately locating the reader in the narrative: “After leaving Ayanar’s house, King

Mahendra spurred his horse towards his entourage, which was standing at a little distance” (122). The opening phrase immediately connects the Chapter 22 to Chapter 19, when we last saw Mahendra. By extension, the tantalizing ending was Kalki’s means of ensuring that the casual reader who picked up the magazine out of boredom or idle interest came back. At the conclusion of chapter 22, which ends with the boatman’s song, the reader is left guessing as to how much the king already knows, both about the interlopers in Aayanar’s home and the clandestine romance between Narasimha and Civakami.

Mythologizing narratives and the development of a hybrid poetics

What is missing from such an account of narration in *Civakamiyin Capatam* is that Kalki, consciously or otherwise, was drawing upon mainstream indigenous symbolic frameworks based on Sanskrit and Tamil poetics. The most obvious indigenous intertextual influence on *Civakamiyin Capatam* supporting readings of religious, and by extension, a spiritualized pan-Indian nationalism, is the *Ramayana*, both the classical Sanskrit version of Valmiki (c. 1500 BCE) and the more immediately accessible (for Tamil audiences) version by Kampan (1180-1250 CE), one in which Tamil audiences could take regional pride. (Even the fact that both these intertexts are invoked indicates how the claims of Tamil nationalism complicate the larger project of Indian nationalism.) The four-part structure of the novel is an obvious inheritance from the *Ramayana*. In addition, Hindu audiences would immediately identify the developing storyline of *Civakamiyin Capatam* as parallel to the epic in which Ravana, the asura (demon) from Lanka, abducts Sita who vows not to leave his kingdom till her humiliation is avenged. Similarly, Civakami is abducted by Pulakesin later in the novel and made to dance on the

streets of Vatapi to save the lives of Pallava warriors. Despite having had the opportunity to flee her captors in Catruknan's company (the same opportunity as Sita did when the monkey god Hanuman offered to help her escape), Civakami stays in the Chalukya capital. She vows to Nakanandi she will not leave till the city is reduced to ashes. Making explicit links between the Ramayana's storyline and her own fate, she likens herself to Sita, and Narasimha to Rama in this celebrated passage (723-24). As already detailed in the opening section of this chapter, instead of the happy reunion of lovers according to epic convention, after Narasimhavarman's victory, Civakami returns to Kancipuram to find he is married and has had two children in the intervening years. Civakami then dedicates herself to the god Civa, in Hindu mythology, the founder of her art. Despite this turn, it is evident that Civakami's character is arguably influenced in its construction by the representations of women in the different Tamil and Sanskrit epics—namely Sita, Draupadi, Kannaki, Manimekala, and Savitri. The epic contours of the novel will be the subject of more detailed analysis in the next two chapters of the dissertation, in which I undertake a feminist reading of the novel and examine Kalki's uses of history, respectively.

To devise such a fate for a fictional heroine as Kalki did in a story of epic proportions demonstrates a response by this writer to different, though not radically opposed, set of aesthetic imperatives. The Tamil *bhakti* corpus, described earlier as a collection of devotional songs in medieval Tamil attributed to celebrated poet-saints and spanning the sixth to twelfth centuries, was something with which Kalki, a native of Tanjavur district (the site of the former capital of the Cola dynasty and a famous temple-town in the Tamil region) was intimately familiar. In the heart of Cola country, *tevaram*

and *pasuram*, hymns dedicated to Siva and Vishnu respectively, had been sung for centuries in the Hindu temples. “The Tevaram helped forge a new cultural and communal identity for the Tamils in the age of the Nayanars [the name given to the Saivite poets]...its veneration as ‘the Tamil Veda’...played a crucial role in helping the Tamil Saivas maintain a distinct, and distinctly sectarian, identity” (Peterson 52). Many of the bhakti poets were of humble origin, including the revered Saivite Nayanar Appar, the Pallava king Mahendra’s spiritual guru who caused the king’s conversion from Jainism to Saivism with an extraordinary display of resistance. Reclaiming the Pallava past as a moment in precolonial history that reflects a multi-lingual and pluralistic cultural ethos was a crucial part of Kalki’s bourgeois nationalistic fantasy, embodying his ideals and aspirations for a new nation. It is not surprising that Kalki should offer during the 1940s a revivalist account of the bhakti movement, which sparked a *marumalarcci* (renaissance) during the Pallava period. It was during this very time, in the first half of the twentieth century, that another efflorescence of Tamil culture, scholarship, performance arts, literature and history, was being strenuously promoted by nationalists. That such revival should then complicate Kalki’s account of pan-Indian identity in the text, claims of region warring with claims of nation, seems inevitable.

In terms of poetics, Kalki relied on classical commentaries or grammars belonging to the Sanskrit and Tamil corpus respectively and designed to help readers interpret literary works. A look at such influences helps shed light on the aesthetic frameworks employed in the novel; additionally, Kalki’s readers would have had at least a passing acquaintance with the commentaries in question during a time of intense interest in Tamil cultural history. These written grammars include the Sanskrit

Natyasastra (c. 200 BCE), codifying the practices of classical music, poetry and performance for the Hindu epics, and the Tamil *Tolkappiyam* (c 200-700 BCE, arguably published in successive collections), doing the same for the Cankam poetical corpus between the second and fourth centuries CE. The most important concept that Kalki inherited from the Sanskrit was the notion of “rasa,” a term used to codify aesthetic experience or mood for the reader (Selby 21-22). The *Natyasastra* outlines nine *rasas* in all that correspond to nine *sthayibavas* or root emotions, that is, “the aesthetic transformation of underlying human emotion” (Selby 27).

Rasa	Corresponding sthayibhava
erotic (srngara)	passion (rati)
comic (hasya)	mirth (hasa)
compassionate (karuna)	grief (soka)
cruel (raudra)	anger (krodha)
valorous (vira)	exertion (utsaha)
terrible [inspiring fear] (bhayanaka)	fear (bhaya)
abhorrent (bhibatsa)	disgust (jugupsa)
miraculous (adbhuta)	astonishment (vismaya)

(Selby 27)

If the nine *rasas*, and their relationship to human emotion are central to Sanskrit poetics, so too is the notion of “dhvani” or “poetic resonance” (Selby 13). If rasa is the artistic rendering of human emotion, dhvani, literally, sound, reverberation, or resonance, is the means by which rasa is evoked or made flesh in poetry (Selby 23).

Kalki’s narrative consciously evokes the nine rasas in keeping with its epic form. The fictional romance between Civakami and Narasimha, figuring in Kalki’s narrative as the catalytic impulse for Narasimha’s historically documented destruction of the enemy capital Vatapi and as an essential plot ingredient, thematizes *srngara* or the erotic in multiple ways—through letter exchanges between the pining lovers, lush descriptions of

their secret meeting place in the forest, stylized depictions of their encounters, the heavy symbolism of their dreams, and strategic interpolations of song and dance in the narrative. The meditations by Mahendra on his kingly role in Chapter 22, his remonstrances to Narasimha about kingly duties during a time of war, reports of the bravery and cunning of both Pallava kings on the battlefield, makes the question of *vira* or valor an important one for the novel, one that clashes with and interferes with the fulfillment of its counterpart mood, *sringara*.

The villain of the piece, enemy king Pulakesin, is described over and over again as harsh, cruel, without compassion or feeling, and exemplifies *raudra* (cruelty) and *bhayanaka* (fearsomeness). His twin brother Nakanadi's obsessive lust for Civakami was certain to seem abhorrent (*bhibhatsa*) to middle-class Tamil readers, all the more so since in the novel he wears the disguise of a Buddhist ascetic. *Adbhuta*, or wonder, is suggested repeatedly in the novel as the mood which Civakami evokes through her dancing and to which watchers are transported during her performances. It can also be said to be the mood of Chapter 6, in which Paranjoti scales the mysterious rope. Comic moments dot the earlier parts of the novel, for instance, the rope incident and Paranjoti's musings during it, but, not surprising for a tragedy, *hasya* recedes as the narrative nears its resolution. I would argue, however, that the predominant *rasa* in *Civakamiyin Capatam* is *karuna*, or compassion, along with its accompanying root emotion, *soka*, or grief. *Karuna* is evoked from the start, with Mahendra's musings on the war, his reflections on kingship and religious/cultural patronage, his fears for the Pallava kingdom alongside his feelings of guilt about having devoted too much time during his hitherto peaceful reign to promoting the arts, his intervention in the romance between Narasimha

and Civakami which leads the former to forsake his love, and his concern for his subjects. Mahendra's heroism and his determination to fulfill his "dharma" or duty as a king,²³ his representation as the founder of a pluralistic Hindu ethos for his subjects in the model of the ancient Hindu king Asoka, marks him both as an epic hero whose character engages with complexity and as the ideal Hindu nationalist. Kalki, an ardent follower of Gandhian socialism and nonviolent nationalism, creates in Mahendra a character forced by his own vision of the greater good, his abiding and deep patriotism, to defend his nation against malevolent aggressors.

The scene surrounding the boatman's song and Mahendra's subsequent conversation with his son in Chapter 22 may be interpreted as evoking *srngara*, *karuna*, and *bhibatsa* for the reader. The boatman's song, with its female persona yearning for a glimpse of her lord, thematizes *srngara* to be experienced by both the onlookers in the scene and the reader. It also connotes bhakti, a state reflecting the complete spiritual immersion of the devotee who has momentarily transcended the temporal world in his exploration of the sacred. By contrast, Mahendra's grief and worldly disgust at the futility of the war is designed to evoke both despair and compassion for the intended reader. The narrator's simile of thunder and lightning, cyclone and earthquake, similarly thematizes war as abhorrent. By incorporating the *rasa* tradition into his novel, Kalki was innovating a new aesthetic based on the knowledge of indigenous performance practices among his readers.

Narratological frameworks establishing the novel's chief preoccupations, the role of the state, nation-building, the place of religion and the arts, love, and war can also be recast in terms of Tamil poetics. The central concepts contained in Tamil literary

criticism are the poetic categories of *akam* and *puram*, signifying inner and outer worlds, and the development of *tinai*, which connotes the collapsing of physical and psychological terrain. In addition, *mey-p-patu* and *iraicci* constitute the Tamil equivalents of the Sanskrit *rasa* and *dhvani*, though these are considered to be slightly differently nuanced.²⁴ *Akam* (inner or interior life, love) and *puram* (outer, public life, politics, warfare) are two interdependent categories of classical Tamil poetry (Selby 47). Poems are classified as *akam*, expressing the inner journey of the protagonist, or *puram*, representing negotiations of the public realm. However, the categories are not watertight, and elements of one may be found in the other. Chapter 22 exemplifies such a juxtaposition of the love theme in the novel, its interiority emphasized through the description of boatman lost in song, and the impending war, the public, exterior world in which the song takes place. In terms of *akam/puram*, the pastoral scene, the site of erotic outpouring, is encroached upon by the workaday and public world (the boats filled with grain), the world of commerce and war (the boat filled with weapons).

The motifs of journey and travel that thread through Kalki's novel—the procession of boats in Chapter 22, Mahendra and Narasimha on horseback, Paranjoti's initial journey and mission to the mountains, Narasimha's journey to the Chalukya capital to avenge his father and rescue Civakami—not to mention the detailed mapping of place that occurs in almost every chapter of the novel, also suggests the presence of and use of *tinai*, a complex term that connotes context, both physical and psychological. The *aintinai*, or five landscapes, reflect a psychology of place, space and time that maps the journey of physical and spiritual love:

Kurinci, the hills	lovers' meetings
Neytal, the seashore	Anxious waiting and secret meetings
Palai, the wasteland	The lovers' journey through the wilderness
Mullai, the forest	Patient waiting and happiness in marriage
Marutam, the lowland	The lover's unfaithfulness after marriage

(Ramanujan 3)

Most significant in Chapter 22 is the use of song, and the use of lilting repetition in the description of the canal. The lyrics of the parrot song in Chapter 22 described earlier, for instance, were written after Kalki heard a similar refrain in the mythological Tamil film *Shakuntala* released in 1939 (telephone interview, Anandhi Ramachandran). The songs in both film and book are appropriations of a type of folksong belonging to the *kilip pan* (parrot musical) tradition. Hybridizing folk, classical and filmic influences through the voice of legendary Indian classical vocalist and crossover actress M.S. Subbulakshmi in *Sakuntalai*, and the simplicity of the folk refrain in the film, Kalki formulated his own lyric in the style and wake of the kalaksepa bhagavatar (exponent) set to the classical/folk raga *Karaharapriya*. Significantly, this was a melody characterized by a wistfulness and longing that his Tamil readers would instantly recognize from the poetic form of the lyric. In addition, by threading the poems sung by the bhakti poet Appar—traditionally pictured with a hoe in his hand and said to have joyfully done the most menial of labors in temples—through his novel, Kalki forged a pan-theistic, syncretic, populist cultural consciousness among his reading public. He also made a strenuous case for legitimizing Tamil as a language for music, dance, and literature through such efforts.

It is not only through the medium of lyric and song, clearly set off from the prose sections of the novel, that Kalki embeds an indigenous poetics and ethos in his text. I would like to suggest that in *Civakamiyin Capatam*, the intermingling of *akam* elements including the incorporation of *tinai* (traditionally a device used within the *akam* poem) occurs alongside the standard *puram* themes, classified by Ramanujan as “kings at war, poets and dancers, chieftains, lessons, war and after” (111). With its deft manipulation of song and lyrical/pastoral interlude within a larger narrative, strategies that are also traceable to the oral tradition of *katha kalaksepa*, the novel carries far more complex overtones than readers and critics guided solely by a metropolitan sensibility would allow.

In order to investigate how such interpretive devices as *rasa*, *akam/puram*, and *tinai* operate in another section of the narrative, I now turn to Chapter 15, titled “Rati’s Message” (Rati, the name of Civakami’s pet fawn), the first encounter between the lovers, Civakami and Narasimha, in the novel. The reader is given to understand that this is not the first time they have met; Narasimha has accompanied his father to Ayanar’s house since he was little, and Civakami and he were childhood playmates. What is striking about this first encounter for the reader is its slow, ritualistic progression, with every gesture, every look exchanged between the characters explained in some detail. The meeting is tempestuous, for Civakami is angry that the prince did not attend her debut recital. For the first half of the chapter, the conversation between the two lovers is in the form of indirect address. Civakami is standing by the lotus pond, the usual trysting place of the two lovers. The setting, a secret hiding place, a sanctuary for the lovers, immediately indicates the ethos of an *akam* poem, the inner world, a place within which a range of expression relating to romantic passion is made possible. But *puram* elements

intersect with *akam*; the horse Narasimha rides is a purebred, indicating his station as a *kshatriya* or warrior; the reason he could not attend Civakami's recital was news of Chalukya border aggression on the Pallava kingdom. When Civakami hears the sound of a horse nearby, she does not look up to ascertain who has arrived, and says nothing even when she can plainly see the prince's reflection beside hers in the water of the lotus pond. Instead, she addresses the fawn, asking, "Rati? Who is he? Why he has come here, will you ask?" (88). Civakami's tone is formal, as is her dialect. In the Tamil original, her speech contains the markers of respect that accompany the pronoun "he" and all its attendant constructions, in this case, the verb "come." These markers are typically in place when the speaker addresses someone exceeding him or her in age, rank, or class.²⁵

However, Civakami's obvious anger at the prince and her pique at his absence from her recital, not to mention her obvious pretence of not recognizing her childhood friend turned romantic interest, all serve to undercut her respectful address. According to the heterodiegetic narrator, now at a remove from both characters, Narasimha's smile disappears, and his eyebrows furrow. He says: "Rati! Has your mistress not become the queen of the arts in the nation of Bharata²⁶? Can an old friendship be remembered [by her]? She could only think to ask: Who is he? This comes as no surprise to me, Rati." At these words, Civakami retorts: "Rati! After you convey a thousand salutations to the one who knows no surprise, the blessed offspring of the Chakravarti [king of kings], also say this: He is none other than the son of the ruler of this earth! He is the lord of all nations at whose feet king after king would fall, paying humble obeisance; how is friendship possible between a great one such as he and a poor sculptor's daughter? It is my own stupidity that led me to desire fruit beyond my reach, Rati!" (88).

Narasimha reacts impatiently to Civakami's hyperbolic outpouring: "Rati! Remind your mistress of one fact: Civakami Devi, scholar of the Bharata sastra, is not standing on stage right now, not performing abhinaya. Tell her to set nrityam, nrityam, hastam, abhinaya,²⁷ and other such matters aside for the moment and speak to me with courtesy" (89). With this response, Narasimha proves himself to be as proficient in the vocabulary of dance and dance theory as Civakami has exhibited herself to be in the language of the court.

This initial exchange between hero and heroine introduces the core thematic preoccupations of Kalki's novel, that is, the difference in class and caste between Narasimha and Civakami that makes it impossible for their love to come to fruition, an inevitability of which both parties seem to be uncomfortably aware. In addition, the passage also sheds light on Kalki's uses of language in the novel. The characters play with various registers, from courtly to coquettish, and they both appear equally equipped to handle the range of voicings with which they work. The stylized portrayal of the characters' interaction, the detailed recording of facial reactions and gestures along with dialogue, reveals a consciousness in the novel of the speech act as performance. At different stages of the conversation, the reader learns that Narasimha's words make Civakami's eyes "redden with anger like a kovai fruit"; that he speaks as "one whose heart has softened, in a voice brimming with love"; that his fury is made palpable by the "fire in his eyebrows"; that Civakami turns fiercely, majestically, around to face him like a female lion (87-89). The heterodiegetic narrator here bears a strong resemblance to the *kalaksepa* bhagavatar, the storyteller who animates the written word, bringing the characters he represents closer to his audiences.

Kalki's dramatization of this first lovers' meeting according to indigenous performance, filmic, and narratological conventions reflects his interest in fashioning a polyglot poetics for an indigenous audience that shared his vision of the interrelatedness of the arts. In sum, Chapter 15 begins with the elaborate repartee between the two lovers with the fawn as the silent emissary, continues into direct address and the reconciliation of the lovers who sit together on a wooden plank under the tree nearby, and ends in a description of Rati, who, when she realizes, according to the narrator, that her services are no longer required, begins to graze by the pond. Its progression can be analyzed on several fronts. For one, the narrative adheres closely to a solo performance piece in classical dance in terms of its dramatic structure and stylization, and could be enacted as a monodrama, as is typically the custom, with the wrathful or jealous nayika [female persona] at the centre of the action. Second, the explicit fleshing of the principle narratee, the reader/listener within the storyworld (a similar role is assigned to the parrot in the boatman's song in Chapter 22), Rati the fawn, is a device used regularly in folk and classical song in order for the persona to indulge in lyrical outpouring, lament, or a series of rhetorical questions. Third, Kalki's initial vision for *Civakamiyin Capatam* was as a radio play; he decided to turn the story into a novel after receiving feedback at a reading of the play attended by close friends and critics. As a consequence, the conversational structures of Chapter 15 parallel the formal registers of film dialogue of the era.

Lastly, I would like to return to the question of Tamil and Sanskrit poetics, and the particular inflections produced by rasa and tinai in this chapter. In the case of Chapter 15, I would argue that it is no coincidence that the name of Civakami's fawn is Rati. In Sanskrit poetics, rati is the *sthayi bhava* or the root human emotion (passion)

from which *srngara* emanates. To elaborate *srngara* or erotic love, Kalki uses several rhetorical triggers from the landscape. The lotus pond, the sound of the approaching horse, the nearby tree, the plank on which the lovers sit—which recurs much later in the novel as a shattered symbol of their love—the kovai fruit (a symbol of fecundity) and the fawn provide the *dhvani*, the “sounds” or “poetic resonances” that help bring *srngara* to life. A similar analysis can be undertaken of Chapter 6, where the moonlight, the hole in the roof, the snake/rope slithering down towards Paranjoti, all work to produce a specific effect of wonder or dawning realization.

Finally, in Chapter 22, song functions as an erotic trigger, while the procession of grain- and weapon-bearing boats in the presence of the king and the thunder/lightning/earthquake simile situate the reader in the world of *puram*- warfare, lessons to be learned, heroism to be put to the test. In the last chapter of the novel, *puram* themes (the place of poets and dancers, war and after, the role of the chieftain) gird the *akam* elements delineated in Appar’s song (lost love, faith, lovers’ union), so that Civakami embraces one world at the expense of the other. Of this particular poem by Appar, Peterson writes: “Appar describes the progression of the devotee’s love for Siva in terms of the progression of the classical *akam* poems” (245). The invocation of Appar by Civakami is especially poignant at this juncture because there have been other occasions in the novel when she sings and performs his poems, once in the poet’s presence, once in the presence of Mahendra and the enemy king Pulakesin. These passages will be analyzed in more detail in the next chapter of the dissertation.

However, in terms of *rasa*, Civakami’s performance at the temple, her final enactment of devoted worship, could be said to symbolize a return to *shanta* or peace, the

state from which all the nine *rasa* emanate and finally resolve. *Akam* and *puram* elements intermingle in Civakami's song, as do elements of *srngara* and *bhakti*. Appar's lines are ventriloquized through and dramatized by Civakami even as she seeks oneness with Nataraja (Civa, the lord of the dance), making for a complex instance of ststuas and gender inversion in the novel. Tamil readers would also be keenly aware of the incarnation of Civa as Ardhanarisvara (the lord who is half-woman), a symbol of androgyny and that the final moments of the novel reflect the union and complementarity of masculine and feminine principle.

By selectively appropriating a range of formal devices from various literary and performance traditions for his novel, Kalki forged a new literary language for his middle-class readership, one that guaranteed his popularity among them. What Kalki inherited from his literary predecessors in Tamil was a diglossic language, that is, one with clearly demarcated spoken and written dialects with little or no resemblance to one another. However, because of his forays into journalism, screenplay, translation, and oratory for the nationalist cause, Kalki brought to his fictional writings a style that, according to Ra. Mohan, was marked by clarity and pathos; stylistically, he wrote in a type of distinctive "gait that made readers feel that they were being taken along" the way by the writer (63).

However, this literary language, complex and nuanced as it might prove, had its limitations. It can be argued that Kalki's characters speak a uniform dialect of his own making, a homogenizing dialect that masks caste, class, socio-economic difference and/or disenfranchisement. This dialect, moreover, has more in common with the Tamil spoken in brahmin homes in Kalki's time than with the Pallava period. Kalki's easy, almost unthinking, appropriation of indigenous symbolic frameworks from classical and folk

systems underscores his own privilege as a brahmin writer. Besides, Kalki's "brahmanization" of the Pallava period, the fact that he had the authority to radically rewrite and homogenize the medieval past from what is undeniably a position of brahmanical authority and privilege, arguably contributes to what is perceived by Marxist and Dalit²⁸ critics in the Tamil literary scene today as an upper-caste stranglehold over cultural production.

But does this process of evolving a new novelistic language on Kalki's part necessarily involve a silencing of dissident voices at the margins of his text? By making Civakami a "commoner" and a devadasi, a tragic figure imbued with strength and the ability to resist patriarchal oppression, Kalki aligns his non-brahman heroine with the resistant figure of the bhakti poet, who, in Appar's case, was valued for being a working-class figure flouting convention. The question of Civakami's subject-position will be explored further in chapter 4, which undertakes a detailed materialist- and postcolonial-feminist reading of the novel.

Containment and Subversion, Complicity and Resistance

Emerging out of the spaces between the oral and the written and at the confluence of several different genres, Kalki's own text, much like the songs described in it, represents both the containment and subversion of the canonical systems it invokes. For one, Kalki's narration complicates the distinction made by Walter Benjamin between the storyteller and the novelist, where the storyteller, a link in the cultural transmission chain, has an organic relationship with a community of readers, and a novelist writes and is received in solitude (Benjamin 190). The fact that traces of the oral and the oral-formulaic are distinctly present in Kalki's writings means the blurring of generic

distinctions; it also means a messier account of the novel's evolution, not merely confined to the Tamil region and the subcontinent. What critics identify as the chief feature of Kalki's language, namely, his clarity of tone, his ability to adopt a narrative gait that brings readers right along, makes possible a discussion of his novel as "open-ended storytelling," a concept outlined by discourse analysts Eleanor Ochs and Lisa Capps (6). This type of narrative is characterized by "hesitation, queries, and consideration of alternative perspectives" so that it exhibits "the struggle to formulate an account that both provides an interpretive frame and does justice to life's complexities" (Ochs and Capps, 23-24). A complex time it certainly was for Kalki and his readers, both of whom grappled with a lingering colonial presence; the ironies of being colonial subjects affiliated with the Allies during World War II; acrimonious debates about the partition of India and Pakistan; gender, caste, and social reform movements; the national language debates; Dravidian separatism within the region; and the quest for a pan-Indian identity. Such preoccupations infiltrate *Civakamiyin Capatam* in terms of both form and content, so that its narration exceeds its epic, lyric, and novelistic frameworks even as it complies with such formal dictates.

Through my analysis of the hybrid text, I hope to have laid bare its *open-endedness*, a phenomenon/quality accompanying the colonial text and far more vigorous and forceful than Bhabha's definition of hybridity-as-repetition would allow; in *Civakamiyin Capatam*, characters come and go in the storyworld, surprising shifts occur in narrative mood and tone, and multi-genre elements are deftly manipulated by a shape-shifting narrator. The novel's week-by week serialization over two years in a rapidly changing social, cultural, and political climate may also have something to do with the

experimental and protean quality of the narration. Finally, perhaps owing to its initial publication in serial form, Kalki's open-ended novel energizes and closes the gap between high and popular fiction, its author pioneering a distinctive genre for the Tamil print audiences of his time.

By explicating some of the different threads that weave into Kalki's hybrid text in my analysis of *Civakamiyin Capatam*, I call for a more multivalent picture of the role of the pre-independence writer in Indian nationalist enterprise, undercutting static notions of bourgeois identity and cultural production in the colonial period circulated by the likes of the Subaltern Studies Collective in postcolonial studies, and providing a more historically volatile conception of the South Asian novel and its role in the cultural and political contexts of its own emergence, production and circulation.

NOTES

¹ The tirumankalyam represents the symbolic union of bride and groom in a Hindu wedding. It is a necklace tied by the groom around the bride's neck, much like the wedding ring in present-day Christian ritual. The word "bhakti" means devotion and has several complex connotations; the predominance of bhakti as a mood in a dance performance can dictate improvisational choices, leading to more chaste (less eroticized) forms of expression. As discussed earlier, the medieval bhakti movement is perceived as a democratizing force in Hinduism; the emphasis on devotion meant that that spiritual enlightenment could be achieved by all irrespective of caste or gender.

² A basic term in classical dance theory, abhinaya is defined as the emotive or poetic aspect of performance and includes the explication of lyrics and ethos.

³ Shrine from which the temple's inner sanctum can be viewed.

⁴ Mamalla, another name for Narasimha, the Pallava king, meaning "mighty wrestler"; Chakravarti means "king" or king of kings."

⁵ Sadir and its practitioners were the subject of much debate in the 1930s and 1940s. Both the dancer and the dance were associated with prostitution, and efforts were underfoot to abolish the dedication of dancers to temple deities among allegations of their lapses into sin and debauchery. Chief among the reformers was Dr. Muthulakshmu Reddi, herself the daughter of a "devadasi," who successfully promoted the anti-nautch agitation of the forties. This denial of their traditional roles and livelihood to devadasis is now viewed by present-day activists and scholars as evidence of the Brahmin stranglehold over culture and cultural production in Tamil Nadu. A more detailed discussion of this issue occurs in the next chapter.

⁶ See Part One of Sunda's biography, *Ponniyin Putalvar*, for a detailed description of Kalki's exposure to European literature and culture.

⁷ The *arangetram* or debut recital is a ritualized occasion for which the date and time are carefully chosen in accordance with astrological charts.

⁸ What's most useful about Genette's term is that he separates voice from vision, the one who speaks from the one who sees. Even though the action is presented so far in Paranjoti's wondering eyes, the narrator's speech frequently interrupts the action.

⁹ Vishnu, the bearer of the spinning discus. According to myth, Vishnu normally assumes the protector role, helping those who seek his help in vanquishing enemies. Once he releases the chakra, it will find the target and behead him/her.

¹⁰ Kalki uses the pronouns “tam” (you) and “tan” (yours) in the sentence as a respectful and more formal type of address, an address that the imperative form doesn’t easily accommodate in English. He chooses “tam” over the more familiar (though still respectful nir (you), this form generally associated with upper-caste dialects in the Tanjavur region, where Kalki grew up) and the more intimate “ni,” both of which appear in dialogue in the novel, each used depending on which character addresses which other character and the hierarchical relations therein.

¹¹ Paranjoti’s musings on Kanci recall a chance meeting with a Jain monk leaving the city with a parting shot about the unfair treatment of Jains by the Pallava monarchy,” What have I to do with this wasteland? Don’t you know that the Pallava empire has turned into a graveyard for Siva’s frenzied dance? I’m off to Pandya country” (9). This moment of brooding dialogism between a corrupt Buddhist monk, a world-weary Jain ascetic and a young Saivite has prophetic irony. Also, the Digambara sect in Jainism is said to involve harsh monastic and ascetic practices, including fasting, unlike the house-holder friendly Svetambara stream.

¹² The name of the Pallava king Mahendra, is another appellation of the Hindu god Indra, the ruler of devas, or lesser gods. The Tamil/Indian reader would know this and understand that Paranjoti was making a subtle connection between divine and temporal magic/intervention.

¹³ Kalki uses the Tamil epithet Kalaimakal for the goddess of learning, Sarasvati. The word can be parsed as kalai (the arts), and makal (daughter). Sarasvati is traditionally pictured with a veena (the South Indian string instrument resembling the lute).

¹⁴ Kalki describes Sanskrit learning as vatamoli kalvi, vatamoli literally meaning the language of the north (vata: north; moli: language).

¹⁵ Also known as the poet Appar.

¹⁶ Both Indira Peterson and Vidya Dehejia provide detailed biographies of Appar in their introductions to the Tamil bhakti movement. See Peterson’s *Poems of Siva* (New Jersey: Princeton UP, 1989) and Dehejia’s *Slaves of the Lord* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 2002).

¹⁷ The word for men here is “aatkal” which could imply person, fellow, or worker. It seems from the context that the canal, or channel, is a narrow one used for transport, or irrigation, or both.

¹⁸ The word “kulircci” used to describe the effect of the tree-shadows here literally means “made cold.” In the often blinding sub-tropical sun, the shaded areas would provide welcome relief to the eyes.

¹⁹ sanyasi: a Sanskrit loanword meaning ascetic, sage, monk.

²⁰ The word, kanniyar, translated by me as young girls, can also imply virginity. Kannan is the Tamilised version of Krishna, with variations of “kanna” and “kannu” often used as endearments for children of either sex.

²¹ Fredric Jameson positions all literature not of the First World as ‘national allegory,’ and as incomprehensible to “First World” readers who expect private rather than public experience in literature, in his 1986 essay “Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism.”

²² Kalki describes the jail cell as “irull culnta arai”, which suggest a chamber enveloped (culnta) in darkness.

²³ Dharma refers to duty or action; the dharmic quandaries of kings and leaders undergird all Indian epic literature.

²⁴ Mey-p-patu is defined as “physical manifestation of emotions,” while iraicci means “flesh,” the “suggestive meaning conveyed ... by the physical elements” Selby (22-23).

²⁵ The masculine pronoun “he” in this case is “ivar”; if Civakami were addressing someone junior to her in age or lower ranked in status, she would use “ivan” instead.

²⁶ Bharata or Bharat are often used to designate the subcontinent, more specifically, the Indian nation. The term still has currency in Hindi and other regional languages.

²⁷ Technical terms associated with Bharata Natyam to do with technical and emotive aspects of the dance.

²⁸ Belonging to the oppressed “untouchable” castes, the Dalits were called Harijans by Gandhi, a label they rejected for one of their own (Dalit, meaning “the oppressed”) that pointed to their ongoing oppression in regions across India. Dalit literature coming out of the various regional language is an emerging body of work; an ongoing task of Dalit critics and feminists is to engage in the question of brahman cultural, political, and economic hegemony in the subcontinent.

CHAPTER 4

ARTISTS, ASCETICS, ANTICOLONIAL NATIONALISM

On January 7, 2006, I attended a religious gathering in Columbus, Ohio, convened at the temporary headquarters of a Hindu temple, a large, unfinished showroom in a strip mall off Sawmill Road. Posters of the latter-day swami, Sai Baba, whose expatriate devotees were responsible for the existence of the temple, were prominent alongside flashy reproductions of the Hindu pantheon—Ganesha, Vishnu, and Civa—in the makeshift sanctum sanctorum. The day's event was dedicated to the ninth-century Tamil poet-saint Andal, to whom a collection of thirty songs, named the *Tiruppavai*, expressing a woman's love for Lord Ranganatha (Vishnu), is attributed. The legend of Andal, a female bhakti poet who forsook love in the temporal world for holy union with god, was narrated in English over a microphone as each song from the *Tiruppavai* was performed by different groups of singers, young and old, all belonging to a largely Tamil expatriate audience that easily numbered a hundred. Some of the older women in the audience had brought their copies of the *Tiruppavai* with them, following the centuries-old text of each song as it unfolded. Many who attended assumed expressions of rapt transcendence (despite the often amateurish and off-key singing); a few had tears in their eyes.

The incident above powerfully illustrates the continuing uses of mythic and historical narratives for postcolonial communities: the celebration and exaltation of the

medieval Hindu past among Tamil audiences in the postcolonial present, as well as the hold that nationalist constructions of Tamil/Indian history, in general, and the “bhakti” period as a symbol of Tamil cultural achievement in particular, have for the postcolonial Tamil subject at home and abroad. It is in “the sphere of the nonmodern,” as subaltern historian Dipesh Chakrabarty puts it, that anticolonial struggle based itself (39). And, typically, in such recovery, it was the “nonmodern” woman, whether fictional or non-fictional, the legendary Andal or Kalki’s Civakami, who embodied the spirit of tradition, purity, and sacrifice, all that was glorious, lasting, and true from India’s history.

I propose in this chapter a dynamic reading of gender in Kalki’s historical romance. A postcolonial feminist historiography addresses a crucial gap in scholarly understandings of the past, even as it recognizes the imbrication of gender in class, caste, and race, the indivisibility, as it were, of the performance of gender—written, spoken, and enacted—from other ideological formations in the constructions of nation and national identity. Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid suggest: “Historiography may be feminist without being, exclusively, women’s history. Such a historiography acknowledges that each aspect of reality is gendered, and is thus involved in questioning what we think we know...A feminist historiography rethinks historiography as a whole, and discards the idea of women as something to be *framed* by a context, in order to be able to think of gender difference as structuring and being structured by the wide set of social relations” (2-3). This definition of feminist undertaking guides my approach to the entire study, even as it provides the rationale for this particular chapter.

In order to historicize the gender constructions in Kalki’s novel, I trace the culture of kingly patronage represented in the novel through the relationship between the

monarch and the Tamil dancer/courtesan or *devadasi* (the figure of Civakami). I explore how colonialist and nationalist legal reforms resulted in the gradual marginalization and ostracism of this once-powerful female figure and artistic community in Tamil society, and the brahminization and consequent “sanitization” of the art forms she/they practiced. Second, I examine images of the woman artist, goddess, and courtesan in Tamil history and culture, how Civakami’s representation invokes various “real” and “imagined” figures symbolizing a range of positions for the woman within indigenous/colonial patriarchal paradigms. My reading of Kalki’s representations of women here is based on the groundwork already laid out in Chapter Two, which examines Kalki’s choice of woman dancer as heroine in context of the careers of real-life women artists, Rukmini Devi Arundale and Balasaraswati, whose rise to fame represents a revivalist cultural turn in the Tamil and Indian public spheres.

Finally, I examine the ways in which Kalki constructs masculinity in the novel: his repeated invocations of Civa, the destroyer god, his construction of nationalist heroism through the characters of Mahendra, Narasimha, and Pallava army commander-in-chief Paranjoti, his portrayal of male villainy and decrepitude through Chalukya king Pulikesi, and his portrayal of the male ascetic in Pulikesi’s fictional twin brother Nakanandi and Paranjoti in the later stages of the novel. Kalki’s representations of masculinity and femininity in the novel serve an important purpose, the (failed?) attempt at an idealized indigenous identity—with complementary male and female roles—that is region-specific, non-sectarian, and communitarian, i.e., beyond caste-, language-, religion, and race-based explanations of Tamil subjectivity.

The tragic ending of *Civakamiyin Capatam*—the marriage of Civakami to the god Civa in the temple—clearly invokes the centrality of the temple dancer’s role in medieval society and culture. Sacrificing the opportunity for temporal love, Civakami becomes the preserver of an age-old tradition, the ever-auspicious sumangali (unmarried virgin) who weds god, thereby ensuring the welfare of the nation and the preservation of social and symbolic order in the Hindu state. This moment of transformation is climactic, representing the zenith of Civakami’s and the Pallava state’s spiritual and temporal achievement. It comes after much soul-searching and questioning that Civakami undertakes through the medium of her art.

In representations of Civakami’s performances earlier in the novel, Kalki has his heroine repeatedly question her status in the Pallava court and in society at large. In one notable instance of such resistance, Kalki depicts Civakami’s impassioned dancing and singing in King Mahendra’s court in Part 3, in the presence of the enemy king Pulakesin. Angry that Mahendra has subjected her to the humiliation of dancing after Pulakesin’s repeated insults, Civakami invokes a celebrated verse by the Siva worshipping poet Appar. According to Tamil legend, when King Mahendra, then a follower of the Jain religion, ordered the poet’s immediate conversion, Appar sang the following lines:

Namarkum kudi allom, namanai anjom (556),

We are slaves to no man,
Nor do we fear death,
Hell holds no torments for us,
We know no deceit,
We rejoice, we are strangers to disease,
We bow to none...”¹

In the Tamil Hindu imagination, Appar's flouting of Mahendra's authority under threat of torture and the subsequent conversion of the king back to Siva worship symbolizes the moment when the Hindu poets of the Tamil region came into their own, their voices spearheading a medieval religious and literary movement called *bhakti* that was instrumental in the spread of the vernacular languages in the entire subcontinent. It also signals the glory days of the medieval south, when the peninsular kings built magnificent monuments and enthusiastically patronized the literary, performance, and visual arts particular to the region. However, as Champakalakshmi observes: "There was, admittedly, an element of protest or dissent in the Alvar or Nayanar [Vishnu or Civa worshipping] poetry, representing an attempt to provide avenues of social acceptance and even mobility to the less privileged castes and economic groups. A certain reformatory zeal characterizes some of the *bhakti* saints like Tirunāvukkaracar [Appar] and Nammālvār... Yet, the movement itself does not reflect a popular character or a broad social base till at least the twelfth century AD" (143).

Despite the systematic debunking of the role of the *bhakti* poets by subaltern studies scholars, these poets' verse continues to be a powerful symbol of empowerment for south Indian brahmins and non-brahmins alike. During a gathering in my last visit to Chennai, for instance, Seetharam, a former book retailer who gave me my first summer job, spontaneously burst into "Nammarkum kudi allom," reciting the entire verse by Appar with obvious passion, providing his own on-the-spot translation when he heard I was researching the Tamil *bhakti* movement for my doctoral project.

When Civakami invokes Appar's song improvising gesture and movement to its tune, she fashions a form of doubled resistance directed not only towards the enemy king

(the marauding colonizer) but also her own patron (the indigenous male unable or ostensibly unwilling to protect her). Her abduction by Chalukya warriors only foreshadows the humiliation she undergoes at the hands of Pulakesin later in the novel. She is forced to dance on the streets of Vatapi—quite a comedown for the Pallava court dancer whose performances were considered peerless throughout the south.

A scene noteworthy for its complex, layered presentation of the workings of kingly patronage and debates surrounding the role and status of the arts, Part 3's Chapter 14 features Civakami's impassioned dancing and singing in King Mahendra's court in the presence of the enemy king Pulakesin. In the initial stages of his aggression on the Pallava region during which he lays siege to Kanci, Pulakesin has been invited to the Pallava court to talk truce and negotiate the release of his twin Nakanandi, captured and jailed by Mahendra. The first time Pulakesin sees Civakami is in his hostile atmosphere; even so, the narrator informs us, he is transfixed. The setting is Mahendra's court, the very same spot in which Civakami's debut recital was arranged and then aborted at news of the encroachment of the Chalukya army. This time round, Civakami has been summoned to the Pallava court to perform in front of the Chalukya king. "It seemed to him as though one of the wondrous forms from the paintings he had seen in the deepest caves of the Ajanta mountains, had come to life and was now walking towards him" (552). According to the narrator, her feet don't seem quite to touch the ground; she is ethereal in her movements. When her gaze unexpectedly encounters Pulakesin's own—Civakami is looking around to see if Narasimha, her lover, is present in the royal court—she feels a sudden chill sweep over her body. Quelling her instinctive revulsion, Civakami moves towards the stage. The performance that follows, the narrator explains,

makes everyone present forget their earthly constitution and existence. Civakami herself knows “[t]hat this is one of the most important days of her life, and that her dancing that day signals a momentous occasion” (554).

Now entering into Civakami’s private musings about the performance, the narrator tells us that she is beset by waves of emotion.² She is torn between her love for the prince and her passion for her art; she is conscious that performing on so important an occasion at the royal court is a once in a lifetime opportunity; however, she has reason beyond the prestige of the event to shine on that particular day. She seeks to impress upon Mahendra her artistic achievement, an impression she surmises will cause the king, overwhelmed by her performance, to consent to her marriage with his son. But once she begins her recital, the narrator interpolates, “the artistic feeling that had had been brimming all these days in Civakami’s being began to brim over” (555). Her engagement is depicted as absolute; it is as though she was possessed by the art form that is dance, the narrator opines. Civakami’s initial thoughts on the kinds of worldly stakes involved in her performance must be replaced by this “forgetting” of the temporal world; so that her dance constitutes a sacrosanct and inviolable idiom. The inner/outer demarcation from the Tamil *akam/puram* lyrical traditions dating back to the *Tolkappiyam*³ takes on additional resonance when coupled with Chatterjee’s genealogy of nationalism, in which he argues the category of woman is equated with inner or private realm and that of man with outer or public sphere.

In terms of diegesis, Kalki’s depiction of Civakami in performance is telling; time and again, the narrator exhibits a kind of reverence towards the artist that is indicative of his pedagogic function in the novel. His tone is not unlike that of Kalki the music/dance

critic, a staunch proponent of art forms indigenous to the Tamils.⁴ While performing, Civakami is transformed, no longer the young, fallible heroine infatuated with the Pallava prince and seeking to ingratiate herself with the king. She now represents the pinnacle of a people's achievement and the preservation of living arts. This elevation in status foreshadows her inevitable fate, her queenly ambition to be sacrificed at the altar of the state. We have already heard the bhakti poet Appar's fears when he confesses to Civakami's father Ayanar in Part One that some incurable tragedy awaits her.

Before Civakami actually begins, Pulikesi turns to Mahendra and says contemptuously: "Why do you pay them so much respect? In our land, we beat them with staffs and order them to dance!" Mahendra replies: "Satyasraya! It is not so in our land. We give the arts and artists utmost respect. Just as there are rulers and emperors of kingdoms here we have rulers and emperors of the world of the arts. We bestow such titles as "emperor of sculpture" or "emperor of poetry" [on artists]. The people give them the same respect as they do the rulers of different lands" (556). This reply establishes Mahendra as a cosmopolitan intellectual whose connoisseurship is unparalleled. After Civakami performs her first piece, Mahendra asks Pulikesi—obviously transfixed by her performance—whether he has changed his mind about the status accorded to artists. Pulikesi is belligerent in his response.

The conversation between the two kings is one that many Kalki fans proudly recall from the novel as a sign of his reverence for the past and desire to represent the glory of Tamil culture and kingship. Kalki's insistence on art's transformative powers is coeval with his emphasis on the growth of indigenous arts through state support and sponsorship. The espousal and patronage of the arts makes Mahendra markedly different

from his rival. “Mahendravarman took on the role of arbiter and patron of early Tamil culture... [He] was a dramatist and a poet of some standing, being the author of a play, the comedy entitled *Mattavilasa-Prahasana* (The Delight of the Drunkards). Associating kings with literary accomplishments became another gauge of Sanskritic learning, particularly when reflecting court culture” (Thapar 329). The descriptions of Pulikesi, on the other hand, repeatedly mark him as cruel, lustful, and rapacious.

After this exchange, the narration moves to Civakami’s next performance piece dedicated to a deity much beloved of the Tamils, Murukan, depicted in sculpture, song, and dance as the wielder of the traditional spear/lance. Readers of Kalki’s novel will recall the initial appearance of Pallava army commander Paranjoti, who threw a spear at the maddened temple elephant running amok on the streets of Kancipuram. They will also recall Pallava prince Narasimha’s vow to Civakami the lotus pond, when he swears by Paranjoti’s lance to marry her. The lines of the song serve as the ending for the chapter 14 of the third part, a detailed explication which follows in the next chapter.

During her interpretive dance, Civakami takes on the persona of a woman who loves the one who wields the lance who raises and tends a pet peacock. When thoughts of Murukan come upon her, she begins to pine for her lover. She says to the peacock, “Aren’t you the steed of the Lord Murukan? Go! Go bring him here with you. Once she delivers this command, she motions as though to she beat the bird and drives him out of her sight. The woman then fantasizes that the peacock will return, and with it her lord of the lance. But her yearning is to no avail. Neither the lance-bearer nor the bird appears on the scene. The thought crosses her mind that perhaps her lover has forgotten her (557-8). The narrative audience, consisting of Mahendra, Pulikesi, and all those in

attendance at the Pallava court, is moved in different ways during Civakami's passionate exposition. Pulikesi is spellbound, though unwillingly, and he soon reverts to his cruel and villainous persona in conversation with Mahendra. Mahendra, who has by now read Prince Narasimha's letters to Civakami, uncovered from the trunk of the tree that marked the lovers' trysting place, is likely well aware of the love address directed by Civakami towards his son, for which the performance serves as a ruse. Thirdly, Narasimha himself is fully aware of Civakami's frustration and longing, but cannot in the public realm acknowledge and reciprocate her regard.

But beyond such characterological transactions, the chief function of the detailed description of Civakami's performance is pedagogic. Kalki is instructing his audience on the aesthetics of response to a traditional art-form that was no longer considered reputable in brahmanical circles. In this sense, he is inventing taste, telling his audience what kinds of content are appropriate or suitable for proscenium performance. The performance he fashions for Civakami is one that restricts/veils erotic expression during her monodramatic improvisation, expanding instead the devotional and narrative scope of her oeuvre. Her performance must operate within bourgeois morality to be palatable to Kalki's by-and-large middle-class audience. In "Fiction and the Tamil Reading Public," A. R. Venkatachalapathy recalls a "rare moment of indiscretion" in an essay by Kalki in a 1933 edition of *Ananda Vikatan* (the weekly Kalki edited before he founded his own publication), in which Kalki writes: "Some time ago, I chanced to read a couple of recent Tamil novels. Oh, I cannot express my horror. Before I could get past a few pages, I felt as though I was rolling in the gutter" (96). Kalki's reaction to the presentation of sexually suggestive content here is not surprising, and in keeping with the

anticolonial nationalist agenda of asceticism and the emphasis on spiritual—not physical—love in the private realm. According to family, friends, and colleagues, those who lived and worked with him, he would often tear up copies of short stories and novels sent for consideration to the weekly, remarking disgustedly that their content was pure filth! Both Kalki's son Rajendran and daughter Anandhi (my grandmother) were supervised carefully in the choice of their reading materials. As my grandmother told me many times, and not without a hint of rebellion still in her voice, Kalki refused to let her read *Anna Karenina* at age sixteen for fear that Tolstoy's representation of infidelity would be a corrupting influence on a young female mind!

Feminist Historiography and Cultural Memory

Why does Kalki construct his lead female character as an artist whose purity of performance is matched only by her inviolable chastity and strength? If the question of gender is indeed ubiquitous, affecting any materialist analysis or literary-cultural history of the colonized, the question also arises in postcolonial feminist historiography of how to retain some sense of the specificity, individual subjectivity, and agency of the gendered/colonized subject while paying attention to the way in which that subject is fashioned in and through language. To begin with, any feminist analysis after poststructuralism must account for the encounter of language (as representation or narrative) with colonial/postcolonial knowledge or experience (as traces of the “real” or the “stuff” of history) in order to establish the consequences of gender representations of colonized identity. However, “the greatest difficulty lies in ...relating various symbolic constructs to the lives and actions of women, and in relating the often hegemonic ideologies produced about women (converging across region, class, and caste) to existing

divisions of labour and systems of production” (Sangari and Vaid 3). An investigation that interrogates symbolic representations of women (in fictional and nonfictional narratives) should not simply map such representation one-on-one onto any perceived “reality” or “experience” of the gendered “Third World” subject.

Neither, however, is it possible to ignore the often powerful effects of representation, what Mary Elizabeth Hancock describes as “the everyday politics of gender through which representations become meaningful, that is, how they operate as lenses by which people make sense of and question their lives, their relationships, their desires, fears, and habits” (23). My study examines the novel’s strategic manipulation of patriarchal attitudes and themes in global, national, and regional discourse, and how such constructs function in the world of the story as not only sites of oppression and disarticulation but also open up spaces of questioning, dialogue, and resistance for male and female readers of the time.

To better understand the issues of gender and nation at stake in a critical reading of history, I turn to Nietzsche via Michel Foucault. In “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” Foucault writes: “A genealogy of values, morality, asceticism, and knowledge will never confuse itself with a quest for their “origin,” will never neglect as inaccessible the vicissitudes of history. On the contrary, it will cultivate the details and accidents that accompany every beginning; it will be scrupulously attentive to their petty malice; it will await their emergence, once masked, as the face of the other... The genealogist needs history to dispel the chimeras of origin” (144). Foucault reminds the present-day scholar of the importance of Nietzsche’s contentions vis-à-vis the productive tensions

between genealogy, the study of origins,⁵ and history, dominant culture's grand narratives about the past.

In contrast to the teleological imperative that beckons scholars of traditional history, the task of the genealogist is to track the ways in which history charts a nation's, or a people's, destiny, laying bare myths of origin (re)produced and propagated in dominant discourse. This brand of genealogical endeavor is what Foucault deems effective history. A Nietzschean/ Foucauldian scholarly approach thus entails analyzing the uses of history for various institutions and interest groups—the state, patriarchy, the media, the public sphere, and the private sector—in order to unpack and scrutinize an “unstable assemblage of faults, fissures, and heterogeneous layers that threaten the fragile inheritor from within or underneath” (Foucault 146). Effective history shrinks the distance between the historian and the events she seeks to locate in the past.

However, the question of whether a Foucauldian approach is entirely appropriate for nonwestern texts and contexts is an important one to consider at this point, especially since my project has so far rigorously questioned the application of post-structuralist methodologies to colonial and postcolonial production. I have chosen in this chapter not to undertake the kind of systematic dismantling of western-influenced theoretical orthodoxies seen elsewhere in the study (see Chapters One and Three) precisely because this particular instance of Nietzschean-Foucauldian nexus enables fine-grained analysis with a historicist focus that can be accomplished without the attendant reverence a traditional historian might have for his/her subject matter, a reverence that would bolster the discourses of imperialism and patriarchy. After all, Foucault's fragile inheritor is deservedly the postcolonial subaltern, thwarted in her bid for engagement by

nationalism's and globalism's doctrinaire demands. It is the postcolonial historian's task to investigate the conditions of this denial.

A postcolonial feminist historiography addresses a crucial gap in scholarly understandings of the past, even as it recognizes the imbrication of gender in class, caste, and race, the indivisibility, as it were, of gender from other ideological formations in the constructions of nation and national identity. Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid suggest: "Historiography may be feminist without being, exclusively, women's history. Such a historiography acknowledges that each aspect of reality is gendered, and is thus involved in questioning what we think we know...A feminist historiography rethinks historiography as a whole, and discards the idea of women as something to be *framed* by a context, in order to be able to think of gender difference as structuring and being structured by the wide set of social relations" (2-3). This definition of feminist undertaking guides my approach to the entire study, even as it provides the rationale for this particular chapter.

Analyzing the pedagogic and poetic function of the serialized historical romance for its Tamil readers—colonized subjects fashioning different forms of resistance to both colonialist and nationalist ideologies—necessitates locating precisely where and how such a text inscribes genealogies of gender, caste, and nation. In order to address the twin problem of feminist agency and cultural representation,⁶ the chapter outlines a postcolonial feminist historiography that lays open the narratives of consolidation, transgression, and resistance in nationalist discourse, as well as the erotic (*akam*) and political (*puram*) subtexts⁷ underpinning the novel's construction of nation.

In 1987's *Technologies of Gender*, Teresa de Lauretis outlines a literary feminist project that takes as its foundation the relationship between the world of language or signification and the world of physical or empirical reality.⁸ Reading signification as a chain of meaning involving signs, objects, and referents that have a tangible relationship with the “real,” de Lauretis posits “the movement in and out of gender as ideological representation... a movement back and forth between the representation of gender (in its male-centered frame of reference) and what that representation leaves out or, more pointedly, makes unrepresentable” (26). While these technologies of gender are produced and propagated in master narratives, it is in the “micropolitical” spaces of what is left out of these hegemonic accounts, de Lauretis asserts, that feminist intervention can occur.

What interests me most in de Lauretis's essay is not so much her parsing of a by now well-rehearsed and regurgitated poststructuralist theme of the slipperiness of language, nor even her deft diagnosis of the latent sexism and male privilege that laces the work of poststructuralist philosophers such as Lacan, Deleuze, Foucault, and Derrida. What I *am* intrigued by is an aside in which de Lauretis contemplates “a possible elaboration of semiotics as a theory of culture that hinges on a historical, materialist, and gendered subject—a project that cannot be pursued here” (41). For literary scholars analyzing the postcolonial implications of the word, the identification of the “historical, materialist, and gendered subject” and its textual representations becomes a project of paramount importance, because the identity of the (post) colonial subject is negotiated and shaped between such representations and the “reality” they attempt to construct. It is precisely this relationship—both the technologies of gender that produce colonized

female and male subjects in society and the historical and material conditions experienced by these thinking, feeling, and acting subjects—that it becomes imperative to examine in relation to *Civakamiyin Capatam*.

Why apply a *postcolonial* feminist lens to the analysis of indigenous cultural production, particularly the serialized Tamil novel? If, as Leela Gandhi suggests, the colonial encounter is “a struggle between competing masculinities[,]...colonial and colonised women are postulated as the symbolic mediators of this (male) contestation...[A]nti-colonial nationalism authenticated itself through female custodians of spirituality ” (98). There is ample evidence for this kind of move in Kalki’s text.

For the Indian nationalists, as for Indians abroad, it is in precisely such (gendered) reconstructions of a precolonial past unsullied by contact with Europe that the “real” India is to be found. This past is removed from the gritty, teeming streets of colonial cities, which, when viewed through the eyes of Europe by colonists and nationalists alike, usually represented the wretchedness, inferiority, and generally downtrodden condition of the colonized. Piercing the veil (Bengali poet and Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore’s tellingly gendered metaphor) of the real and the historical, looking beyond obvious cultural, economic, and spiritual degradation in the colonized present, was the key to understanding and loving India.⁹ The task of the nationalist writer lay in reconciling “two different and contradictory ways of seeing the nation: the critical eye that sought out the defects in the nation for the purpose of reform and improvement, and the adoring eye that already saw the nation as beautiful and sublime” (Chakrabarty 151). For Kalki, the historical novel provided the means by which to adore India, to pierce the veil; his

invocations of history were a means by which to appropriate and refashion the past with a specific kind of romantic Hindu vision.

Such appropriation of history for nationalist ends had specific consequences for Tamil self-hood, consequences that my chapter seeks to address. Two aspects of Kalki's refashioning that I am especially interested in are the kinds of counter-discourses to secular history that become available to the colonized subject, and the representation of the gendered subject.

De Lauretis's emphasis on the micropolitical—a theme echoed in postcolonial and transnational feminist scholarship—suggests the pressing need for the recovery of marginal voices not typically represented in master narratives, an emphasis that drives feminist inquiry. While her particular brand of feminism may be characterized as theoretical/postmodern, de Lauretis's prescient diagnosis of the problems in outlining a poststructuralist feminist politics in *Technologies of Gender*, her caveats about the limits of so-called western feminism, and overall interest in the intersections of feminism with other kinds of ideological analysis make her work a tenable starting point for this study.

Postcolonial feminism's emphasis on margins can be found in much of poststructuralist thought: deconstruction, postmodernism, Marxist and postcolonial theory/criticism; but the question of gender—crucial to the establishment of the nation, culture, and public sphere in First and Third Worlds—is typically elided in these accounts. Most postcolonial feminist scholars seek to address this crucial omission. In "Can the Subaltern Speak," Gayatri Spivak famously describes the colonial encounter as "white men saving brown women from brown men" (92). Her formulation—a reference to colonial agendas and practice in patriarchal Algeria—points to the casting in colonial

and Orientalist discourse of the colonized woman as victim; the colonized male as morally repugnant, effete, and craven; and the male colonizer as the savior who delivers indigenous women from the barbaric traditional practices of the colonized. Ania Loomba writes: “[A] favourite figure in colonial inscriptions was the burning widow or sati...Eastern royal or upper class/caste women being watched by, consorting with, and being saved by, European men is a feature of colonial narratives from the seventeenth century to the present...This pattern is not confined to literary texts. The barbarity of native men becomes a major justification for colonial rule, impels colonial policy, and shapes and directs colonial confrontation” (153-154). As both Loomba and Spivak suggest, essentialist representations of native men and women spawned the spurious and self-righteous rationale that could explain away the dehumanizing and exploitative basis of colonial enterprise.

Since the 1980s, white feminist privilege in the so-called “west” (North America, Europe, and Australia) has similarly been challenged by feminists of color who demand a recognition of “the history of colonialism, the economics of imperialism, the linguistics of English language dominance in much of the feminist world, and the pressures of western cultural forms on the lives and psyches of those in the so-called third world” (Bulbeck 2). Feminists of color argue that western feminists often did not acknowledge vital differences in race, geographical location, culture, and socio-economic status among women across the globe, nor their own complicity in colonialist and imperialist projects. Chandra Mohanty, for instance, famously argued in 1984 that a monolithic “Third World woman” was produced in western feminist discourse and was constructed as the

oppressed, illiterate, subservient, and victimized ‘other’ in dire need of rescue by her white counterpart.

However, I do not aim in this chapter to provide a blanket account of either agency or patriarchal appropriation in the Tamil novel using ad hoc theories of subaltern victimhood or agency in understanding the complex interplay of gender, culture, and nation in Kalki’s text. To do so would be to ignore crucial shifts, (dis)appearances, and elisions in representations of the gendered Tamil subject. While I see the trope of woman artist/ascetic embodied in the novel’s lead character, Civakami, as exceeding/resisting elite patriarchal appropriations of gender among the colonized, I also outline the dangers of an overarching reading of textual resistance based on Civakami’s performance of subaltern dissent. I do retain in my reading of Civakami, however, the emphasis on the problem of the subaltern, namely, the question of her voice, representation, and silence in history.

Finally, what ethical dilemmas confront the elite writer navigating the thorny pathways of gendered cultural translation, at home and abroad? Does such feminist scholarship as the kind I undertake in this chapter—reading gender in light of the symbolic identifications of Indian bourgeois nationalism—in fact replicate the hegemonies of colonialist and indigenous patriarchy? As Mohanty reminds us: “Feminist discourses, critical and liberatory in intent, are not thereby exempt from inscription in their internal power relations... Gender is produced as well as uncovered in feminist discourse, and definitions of experience, with attendant notions of unity and difference, form the very basis of this production” (76). Haunted by this question both professionally and personally, I chart a tentative postcolonial-feminist agenda for the

Tamil instance in this chapter that attempts to go beyond essentialist representations of men and women in the precolonial, colonial, and postcolonial periods. My account of gender questions the heteronormative assumptions of the nationalist imaginary performed in Kalki's text.

The woman question was thus vital to the nationalist reclamation of the past. Educated male nationalists, writes Partha Chatterjee, defined "the true essence of Indian womanhood [sic] [as] self-sacrificing, compassionate, spiritual, and possessing great resources of emotional strength drawn from personal faith and devotion. This essence, they thought, needed to be recovered from the morass of bigotry and superstition into which [Hindu] tradition had fallen" (143). What emerges from this account is the fact that it was these male nationalists who first espoused the cause of women in India, and that the woman question was taken up as a means to a nationalist end. Much before any active decolonization agenda took shape in the realm of politics, insidious and deeply patriarchal constructions of the new middle-class woman had been introduced in the private sphere, affording "the original site on which the hegemonic project of nationalism was launched" (Chatterjee 147).

Where Chatterjee fails in his critique of normative femininity and nationalism, something that Indian feminist scholars have since pointed out, is in his "mechanical application of a simple divide between the home and the world [which] is derived from an untenable extension of a mid-nineteenth-century Victorian situation into a very different socio-political context," so that Indian nationalism is reduced to a "mimetic gesture" (Sarkar 37-38). Additionally, Uma Chakravarti sees Chatterjee as unable to

account for the kinds of resistances offered by women to nationalist claims about the sanctity of the home and of marriage.¹⁰

Despite the limitations of his position, any invocation of the pre-independence Tamil novel's nationalist impulses cannot ignore the constructions of gender that, according to Chatterjee, formed Indian bourgeois nationalism's originary moment. These resistances were to be found in discursive representations of women by male and female writers and in ethnographic work focusing on the lives of women, as feminist historians such as Chakravarti, Tanika Sarkar, and Kumkum Sangari have successfully shown.

If the new Indian woman was constructed as virtuous, industrious, keeper of tradition, and imbued with the spirit of selflessness and sacrifice, the free nation was also personified in gendered terms. It was in service of the enslaved motherland, Bharat Mata (Mother India), that her patriotic sons and daughters took on that most arduous and dangerous of tasks, the fight for independence. The Tamil land, language, and nation were similarly feminized in poetry, song, and literature. In *Passions of the Tongue:*

Language Devotion in Tamil India, 1891-1970, Sumathi Ramaswamy writes:

In the fractured colonial context in which the (Tamil) male was increasingly tainted by his association with the outer, non-Tamil-speaking colonized public domain, the home-family-domestic nexus was imagined as a site where an essential "Tamil" unity, spirituality and wholeness continued to be maintained. As the woman in her incarnation as "mother" came to be marked as the very embodiment of this wholeness, spirituality, and unity, the (Tamil) language she spoke (= "mother tongue") also correspondingly found itself reconstituted in her image, taking on her persona of femininity, spirituality and desexualized motherhood. (125)¹¹

Woman as devi

Characterizations of divine female energy and spirit derived in large part from goddess mythology in the Hindu myths and scriptures. Vidya Dehejia describes the emergence of the feminine principle in *samkhya*, a dominant strain in Hindu philosophy that developed as early as the first century and was based in a bifurcated notion of “*prakriti* [female, associated with nature, motherhood] primordial matter, and *purusha* [male], the principle of consciousness. Male *purusha* is inactive and incapable of creation whereas female *prakriti*, composed of three basic qualities or *gunas*—purity (*sattva*), activity (*rajas*), and lethargy (*tamas*)—is the basis of all activity and creation” (21). Dehejia outlines two other concepts from Hindu Vedanta philosophy (c. first-century)—*maya* [paradoxically both creation and illusion] and *shakti* [cosmic energy] — that are instrumental in understanding goddess myths. The latter, *shakti*, is also an appellation for Lakshmi, the female consort of Vishnu, and for Parvati, the female consort of Civa. The goddess of all creation, Devi, embodies all three principles, *shakti*, *maya*, and *prakriti*. However, such characterizations of female divinity do not necessarily contest patriarchy or provide an alternative to patriarchal gender hierarchies. Dehejia argues:

The Hindu Brahmanic tradition has always regarded the goddess with ambivalence. In her *prakriti* aspect, Devi was considered both liberating and binding; as *Shakti*, Devi was both creative and destructive; and as *maya* she exemplified delusion. The ambivalence about the goddess was extended to human women, particularly in the realm of their sexuality. Female vulnerability to ritual pollution through sexual intercourse was deeply feared in a society that placed great emphasis on caste barriers. Woman, as *prakriti*, represented the field that could be polluted ... [D]ouble standards were firmly established; hence too the emphasis on channeling women’s sexuality through marriage and thus maintaining caste purity. (34)

It is significant that Kalki chose to have a fictional court dancer at the center of his tale, and not a royal figure, a princess or a queen. However, his heroine's sexuality must still be contained within acceptable social parameters. Civakami's name triggers a variety of associations that reflect Hinduism's and anticolonial nationalism's construction of the category of "woman." Her love of dance and her final casting as a woman united with god, her lover, are implied by "Civa" in her name (the god of dance who also symbolizes supreme yogic powers, he can only, according to legend, wed a woman whose powers of asceticism/artistic expression are equal to or greater than his own).¹² Civakami is interestingly also the one who causes Civa himself to stray from the path of asceticism and duty onto the path of desire; finally, the name Civakami is one of the appellations of Civa's divine consort Parvati, who takes on numerous forms (including Civakami) in Hindu myths surrounding particular temples in Pallava and Cola territory. The name is thus allusive on multiple levels. Kalki's move in *Civakamiyin Capatam* to center his epic story on a female character who was also an artist named Civakami (one appellation for Parvati, Civa's consort)—resonates symbolically with the Devi myth in multiple ways, a resonance that readers would pick up from the mere fact of Civakami's name, and then from other cues in the narrative: the fact that she is often addressed reverently as Civakami Devi or Ammai [mother, goddess] by other characters in the novel, the fact that her character is a dancer devoted to the god Civa, repeatedly depicted as transporting her audiences into the divine realm.

Second, by casting Civakami in the lead role, Kalki is able to unravel the complexities of and bring a human element into a culture of kingly patronage, represented in the novel through the relationship between the monarch and the Tamil

dancer/courtesan or *devadasi*. Civakami's story invokes several epic intertexts from the Tamil literary pantheon, invocations with which Kalki's audience would be intimately familiar during this period of intense Tamil revivalism. For one, Civakami's fate closely parallels the story of Cattamar's *Manimekalai*, a sixth-century epic portraying the quest of a courtesan's daughter of the same name who gives up the secular world to become a Buddhist nun. Not only is Manimekalai ruthlessly pursued by a prince, who attempts to rape her, she is overcome by many other obstacles and torments on the path to her salvation (exemption from the cycle of rebirth). One of the chief motifs of this medieval Buddhist epic in Tamil is that of service to society, hardship, and sacrifice.¹³ The story of Civakami has at least two additional intertexts, the Hindu epic *Ramayana* (both Sanskrit and Tamil versions) and the medieval Tamil epic *Silappatikaram*. Civakami represents the demure and virtuous Sita, condemned to years of sacrifice and sorrow when the demon-king Ravana abducts her and transports her to his kingdom, Lanka. Finally rescued by her husband Rama (an avatar of the god Vishnu), Sita jumps into a funeral pyre to prove her virtue after years of estrangement and captivity. It is significant that, while Sita's trial-by-fire leads to happy reunion with her husband, Civakami's abduction leads to her almost total estrangement from Narasimha. In the Tamil epic *Silappatikaram*, the Tamil heroine Kannagi, enraged at the king who wrought her husband's demise, performs a dance of death that razes the city to the ground. Civakami's vow is a similar expression of outrage, in which she announces her avengement and the destruction of the Chalukya capital Vatapi by Narasimha. The rhetoric of her vow will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

Kalki never links his lead character Civakami explicitly to the term *devadasi*, commonly used to describe traditional practitioners of music and dance—typically non-brahmins though such artists fraternized and were patronized by the upper castes—since medieval times. But the fact remains that Civakami belongs to the devadasi community by virtue of being a dancer by profession, something that carried all the attendant connotations of caste and class that were the subject of constant debate in colonialist and nationalist discourse. Legislators and nationalists warred throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries about the legitimacy of the art-form and the kinds of reform required in the customs of the cadre of temple-affiliated performers who were responsible for its preservation and propagation. A community comprised of traditional dancers, mostly female, devadasi practices and customs provided the fodder for extensive debate and discussion in Orientalist and nationalist discourse during colonial times. Much of this discussion occurred in the Tamil region, with revivalists and reformers representing an array of opinions concerning the continuing role of the devadasi community in indigenous society, a reaction to European and Orientalist commentary on the situation of devadasi women.

In *From Sacred Servant to Profane Prostitute*, Kay Jordan defines the term: “Originally, the word “devadāsi,” which literally translated means “maidservant of the god” referred to rigorously trained South Indian temple dancing women in prestigious temples [sic]... These devadasis were actually an occupational group rather than a caste. Jordan’s account is generally useful because it thoroughly historicizes the manner in which the figure of the devadasi has been deployed in nationalist and colonialist rhetorics; however, her translation of the Sanskrit “dasi” (in “devadasi”) as maidservant is

problematic. While the word *dasi* is clearly feminine (the “i” ending in the word signaling the female variant of the male “*dasa*”), the Victorian/bourgeois gender and class connotations accompanying the English “maidservant” seem anachronistic and out-of-place in this context. Though the word *slave* is not without its own etymological baggage, the notion of the *slave* devotee applies in the Hindu poetic canon not only to the *devadasis* but also to the *bhakti* poets, who frequently refer to the poet-persona as the lord’s slave. These devotees or *bhaktas* are constructed as willing and joyous supplicants with special rights including privileged access to the temple deity. In a more specifically gendered sense, *devadasi* also connotes handmaiden, a temple dancer who performs auspicious rites specific to a particular deity. This is exactly the kind of image Kalki constructs in his final scene.

Notwithstanding its limitations, Jordan’s definition does usefully reveal that acceptance as a temple dancer was contingent not upon birth but upon initiation through the dedication ceremony, calling into question the association of *devadasis* with a particular caste group in the Orientalist and Indian nationalist imaginaries. She states: “The colonial government and social reformers broadened the usage of the term *devadasi* by applying it any woman dedicated to a deity. This usage falsely implied a unified tradition when, in fact, there were significant variations in regional and community religious practices and customs. The names and duties of women dedicated to serve deities varied widely in India...They were known as *bhāvins*, *nāikins*, *jogtins*, *basavis*, *kasbis*, *mahāris*, *bogam sani*, *khudikar*, and *aradhini*” (2). In yet another instance of the kinds of homogenization that Hindu religious practices were to undergo in this period as part of their yoking to bourgeois nationalism,¹⁴ practices associated with the traditional

religious arts since medieval India—the “dedication” of female artists/musicians to a temple deity (the subject of increasing controversy and legislation among colonial and nationalist elites), the matrilineal and matrilocal customs associated with these female practitioners, and kingly patronage and sponsorship of temple arts and crafts—were the subject of intense revivalist and reformist interest.

Key to my analysis of gender history in Kalki’s novel is the notion of a devadasi as a “nityasumangali” one who is “ever auspicious,” because, as a wife of the temple deity, she “could never be widowed” (Jordan 1). In her study of devadasis, an account examining temple patronage by the medieval Hindu kings, Saskia Kersenboom-Story argues that this notion of ever-auspiciousness is pivotal.

The Uses of History

To further illustrate the palimpsestic contours of Kalki’s novel and further explore the novel’s revivalist impulse, I turn to a scene in Part Two that reflects Kalki’s ongoing preoccupation with the presence of the past. Halfway through the novel, a motley group of travelers, Ayanar, the royal sculptor of the Pallava court; his dancer daughter Civakami; Ayanar’s unnamed, partially deaf sister; the Buddhist monk Nakanandi, a Chalukya spy who is enemy king Pulakesin II’s twin brother; and the sculptor’s apprentice Kuntotaran (in reality a Pallava spy asked to keep an eye on the monk’s doings) are on the road to Tillai, a Chola dynasty stronghold. With war breaking out in the Pallava region, Civakami has decided at the Buddhist monk Nakanandi’s urging to undertake a dance tour of the neighboring territories. En route, the travelers see groups of Pallava soldiers riding to war and civilians fleeing the capital city in bullock carts and

on foot before the arrival of the Chalukya army. They decide to stay overnight in Ashokapuram.

At the very beginning of Chapter 22, the third person narrator introduces the town's historic significance in hyberbolic, vaunted tones. "In that town, there stood a majestic pillar erected by Ashokavardhana, the dharmic emperor supreme among all those who ruled the entire Bharatha khanda (India) under the shade of one umbrella" (343). The narrator continues to reminisce about Buddhism's golden age. "At one time, a thousand monks lived in the Buddhist viharas surrounding the pillar...Hundreds of prayer bells rang during the evening ritual worship, and the whole town was steeped in fragrant incense lit in worship of the Lord Buddha. Thousands of lamps shone in the inner sanctums dedicated to the Buddha" (343).

Bringing the reader back to the events taking place in the storyworld, that narrator observes: "That great Ashokapuram now stood deserted, with not a soul in sight. The magnificent pillar bearing the dharma edicts of the great Asoka stood proudly, as a reminder of the eternal life of dharma" (344). When Ayanar and Company reach the pillar, the sculptor raises his eyes to the heavens, exclaiming, "What a great king Asoka was! What a happy place this earth would be if all of its emperors and kings were like Asoka. What is the purpose of war? Why so much enmity, hatred, violence? Why should one person shed another's blood? Why can't all those who dwell on earth show anpu [love] to one another, adopt the path of ahimsa [nonviolence]?" (344).

Civakami interrupts: "Appa, What is this? A moment ago you said that you were longing to grab a knife and go to war. Now you say love, ahimsa, happiness? I have never known your heart to vacillate like this!" The Buddhist monk intervenes:

“Humanity has not achieved the (pakkuvam) level of maturity at which it can practice the Lord Buddha’s teachings” (345).

The hitherto stoic Pallava spy-apprentice, who the others have so far taken to be a simpleton, unexpectedly joins the conversation. “Among all living creatures there are both tigers (puli) and cows (pashu)... In the same way, there are differences among humans. Just like the Maurya dynasty’s Asoka before him, our very own Mahendra Pallava also strove to enshrine love. He never wanted war among his people. If a Pulikesi, a Durvinitan, a Pandyan king, come along to ruin his dream, what can Mahendra do? If there exists a snake on this earth, we need a mongoose as well” (345). Civakami agrees with Kuntotaran. An equivocating Ayanar adds, “If the world is always full of love, there would be no need for vira [heroism].¹⁵ What kind of a world would a world without vira be? What stories would we have, what poetry, what art?”

In this passage, what we have in terms of form is a pattern that repeats throughout the novel, the setting up of the action by the third person narrator whose diegetic excursions involve recreating the ancient past for his audience, after which he beats a strategic retreat. The narrator contextualizes the action; the characters react to the stimulus at hand. In this chapter, the characters, each bound by his or her limiting (and limited) visions and partial knowledges, voice their positions on the legacy of the past and the purpose of war, religion, and art. The narrator leaves the reader in charge of interpreting their conversation and its philosophical implications. For instance, Ayanar’s speech on the folly of war seems persuasive till we remember that in preceding chapters Ayanar was a crazed recluse obsessed with discovering the secret painting technique used by Buddhist monks in the caves of Ajanta. The same Ayanar who now professes

righteousness and heroism wavered in his allegiance to the Pallavas, easily swayed by the poisonous words of the Buddhist monk. And, as Civakami reminds us here, just a little while ago the sculptor suddenly proclaimed his patriotic zeal and desire to join the Pallava army. Civakami herself is unable to grasp the scope of the war, thus far cloistered in her woodland home with no-one to talk to but her pet parrot and fawn. All she knows is that she is furious with the Pallava crown prince for not visiting her in the past eight months. However, she does reveal her quick intelligence and ability to question authority when she notices her father's change of heart. That the monk is duplicitous we have no doubt. We know he is a senior Chalukya spy and the fictional twin brother of the enemy Chalukya king. Besides, his Buddhist affiliations have been suspect from the start.

All-in-all, the suddenly loquacious Pallava spy-apprentice seems the most credible of the lot. His diatribe redolent of Darwinian determinism, Kuntotaran navigates murky ethical waters in practical, straightforward terms, arguing the necessity of the use of force in times of peril and in the presence of evil. His speech brings to mind Pallava King Mahendra's own cynical musings in Part One, where he remarks bitterly to Prince Narasimha that he (the king) should have spent more time shoring up the Pallava defences and building an army during his reign than building temples and ensuring the progress of the religious arts. Finally, Ayanar's remarks on the relationship between love, heroism, and war circle the grand conundrum of artistic creation foregrounded in the novel, resonating beyond this character's understanding of the subject.

But the conversation in Chapter 22 doesn't end on this note. Kuntotaran then poses the following rhetorical question: "Who is it that will actually read the edict on this

pillar and act on the advice therein”? He strikes the pillar twice assessing the quality of the metal and gauges that if melted down it can yield at least ten thousand swords and spears. It is through the spies—Satruknan and Kuntotaran—that alternative viewpoints, the perspective from below, are expressed in the novel. As spies, they frequently know the foibles and follies of the aristocracy, the inner workings of the court, and the gossip that teems in the streets of Kancipuram and Mamallapuram.

The invocation of Ashoka in this chapter is also significant. An actual historical figure and king who ascended the Mauryan throne in c. 272 BCE, Ashoka renounced war and converted to Buddhism after a particularly bloody invasion of the eastern Indian state of Kalinga. The discovery and deciphering of the minor and major rock edicts of Ashoka helped Orientalist and nationalist historians piece together the existence under Ashoka of the biggest Indian empire before the coming of the Mughals. By the mid-nineteenth century, Ashoka was revered by nationalist historians as an exemplar of benevolent kingship. He was repeatedly invoked as the first ruler of a united India whose rock and pillar edicts extolled dhamma (righteousness), nonviolence, universal harmony, and secular and religious freedoms for the citizenry. “*Dhamma* was not defined in terms of caste duty and regulations and was left vague in terms of details, referring itself to the requirements of social ethics. Of the basic principles Ashoka emphasized tolerance. This, according to him, extended itself to tolerance towards people and towards their beliefs and ideas” (Thapar 202). This emphasis on tolerance of other sects was easily co-opted onto a Gandhian platform. It is significant that Ashoka was a Buddhist who extended his patronage not only to his own religion but Jainism and Hinduism as well. However, it was also believed at the time that during Ashoka’s later reign “his obsession with non-

violence led to the emasculation of the army, thus laying the country open to invasion” (Thapar 205). That Mahendra and his spy both have similar doubts in the novel about Pallava king’s rule is telling.

Like other anticolonial intellectuals, Kalki was a close follower of the debates in the Indian National Congress concerning the nationalist struggle, WW II, and India’s Partition, to which Mahatma Gandhi was staunchly opposed. In editorials and political essays, Kalki evolved a Gandhian stance that deplored violent aggression as a means to achieve independence discussed more fully in Chapter Two. He was, however, troubled by the debates between Gandhi and militant nationalists such as Subhash Chandra Bose (1897-1945), the Indian National Congress’s President in 1938-39. Bose advocated using force against the British and aligning with the Germans in World War II.¹⁶ While Kalki endorsed Gandhi’s stance, his portrayal of nonviolent agendas in the novel reflects his ideological confusions/ambivalences on the subject. Similarly, Kalki attacked in his political essays what he saw as the hypocrisy of a British government that used soldiers from colonized countries in the war against Nazi fascism, and Hitler’s own megalomania.¹⁷

The war also affected the city of Madras in material ways. Writer and Tamil historian S. Muthiah writes: “As the Japanese war machine rolled over East and Southeast Asia, the Allies were left with only two ports in Asia to serve their counter-offensive – Colombo and Madras...The ‘war effort’ transformed Madras turning it into a bustling industrial city instead of a quiet trading post...The demands of the war effort attracted thousands of job seekers from the hinterland...making Madras a ‘million’ city before the end of the war, more than doubling its population in that fateful decade”

(Muthiah). The face of the entire southern peninsula changed radically after the 1942 bombing of the coast by the Japanese. “The people of the coastal city of Visakhapatnam, [part of the Madras presidency] made a beeline to Vizianagaram [another city in the presidency, now in the state of Andhra Pradesh) in all possible modes of transport including bullock-carts. Many were on foot, carrying their bare essentials, fearing one more raid.” Images of citizenry taking flight in Kalki’s novel echo these real life events. Added to an increasing sense of injury and isolation in the south at the alleged linguistic and political hegemony of the north, something that the Dravidian political movement strenuously propagated, was the feeling that the south alone was affected by the war in material terms.

Finally, the Ashoka pillar passage powerfully evokes the novel’s central themes—the waxing and waning of ages, the purpose of art, the inevitability of war, the tension between love and war. In addition, it exposes the stresses and strains in Kalki’s version of pan-Indian bourgeois nationalism in the 1940s. The often godlike heterodiegetic narrator tellingly does not intervene in the conversation between the travellers, perhaps because he has nothing to add, no final pronouncement on the larger scheme of things. It is also clear that ordinary citizens will suffer most the consequences of the war. Civakami and Ayanar will spend nine years in captivity after being abducted by Chalukya warriors. The Pallava spy-apprentice Kuntotaran will become a political prisoner of the Chalukyas. Other citizens suffer the ravages of war, too. Kannapiran, Narasimha’s trusted charioteer, is killed during the aggression on the Chalukya capital Vatapi, leaving behind his wife Kamli and a son, who can only bemoan Civakami’s foolish aspirations to wed Narasimha in the novel’s penultimate chapter.

Civakami will lose her love; when she returns to the Pallava capital after Narasimha's victory, she learns that he has married a princess from the Pandyan kingdom. She finds solace in her art, literally dedicating herself to the services of Lord Civa, the Hindu destroyer god who is also the Lord of the Dance. Chapter 22 of Part Two marks a profound moment of interpretive possibility and iconoclasm in the novel in which citizen-subjects grapple with the forces of history, patriarchy, and authority. It also lays the ground for the resistances of class, caste and gender still to come in the novel.

Queenly Virtues/Anxious and Avuncular Masculinities

The queens of the Pallava court are all characterized by beauty and virtue, embodying the kind of spiritual strength and self-sacrifice befitting the consort to the king. Narasimha's mother, Bhuvana Mahadevi, is a quintessential mother figure. She is Mahendra's devoted wife, constantly worrying about her husband's safety when he is at war. She seeks to allay the frustrations of the young Narasimha, who has given his father his word he will stay close to the capital city during the Chalukya onslaught. The tensions between father and son (Narasimha cannot understand why he has been banned from fighting against enemy battalions) are smoothed over by the mother, who explains to her son that the heir to the throne must be protected during war time. After Mahendra's death, Bhuvana Mahadevi continues living in the palace, though she graciously relegates her throne to the new queen.

Vanamadevi, the Pandyan princess Narasimha marries during Civakami's capture, never once asks her husband through nine years of marriage and the birth of two children about his well-publicized love for Civakami. She maintains a stoic silence on the subject despite palace gossip and intrigue and her own misgivings deep down about the alleged

romance between the prized artist of the Pallava court and her husband, the reigning monarch. It is only when Narasimha raises the subject with her before he heads off to war, in an effort to explain that his love of Civakami is no more, does Vanamadevi even venture an account of her reactions to the rumors.

Of all the women characters, it is in the historical character of Mangayarkarasi,¹⁸ the young princess and poet-saint who weds the Pandyan king Nedumaran, that Kalki seems most deeply invested. In Part Three, Mankayarkarasi's relationship with Nedumaran is explored extensively, in what seems like a rather long and somewhat puzzling digression from the main plot, just when Narasimha is marshalling his forces for a final battle. The account of Mankayarkarasi's trial-by-fire—her devotion to her beloved Nedumaran, the Pandyan prince; and her winning piety that brings Nedumaran back to Civa worship and saves him from the clutches of evil Jain monks—provides an interesting foil to the story of Civakami. But the digression accomplishes a crucial purpose in tandem with the main narrative, namely, the establishment of the womanly spirituality/asceticism and wifely devotion as necessary ingredients for empire-building.

Kalki's daughter, my grandmother Anandhi Ramachandran, told me several times that Rukmini Krsnamurti's (Kalki's wife's) favorite character among all of her husband's novels was Mahendra Pallava. What would have appealed to her about this particular character? A woman who was illiterate when she married Kalki, Rukmini was eminently proud of the fact that her husband taught her how to read and write in Tamil and was an ardent fan of his work. Kalki's Mahendra embodied the qualities necessary in a good husband for the women in the Gandhian, Hindu reformist/revivalist audiences of the 1940s. As already noted, Mahendra is an accomplished intellectual himself and a

connoisseur and patron of the religious arts.¹⁹ Under his aegis, Pallava art and architecture flourish, not to mention Pallava trade and commerce both by land and sea. Mahendra emerges as a shrewd leader of his people, donning disguises and moving stealthily around the country to ascertain popular sentiment and snuff out insurgencies where he found them. Capable of great heroism and tenderness, Mahendra knows that he must interfere in the romance between his son and Civakami, even though he empathises with the two lovers. When Civakami refuses to give up her love, he prevails upon his son by exacting a deathbed promise; Narasimha must marry the Pandyan princess in these times of trouble to consolidate Pallava power in the south by establishing meaningful diplomatic alliances.

Additionally, Mahendra's ability for diplomacy and his establishment as a shrewd strategist who accomplishes the state's ends one way or the other, by stealth, compromise, brute force, or some combination of these elements, make him a formidable adversary and ally in times of war. The complexity of his character derives from Kalki's repeated descriptions of Mahendra's propensity for Machiavellian maneuvering that is coeval with his capacity for humanist and humanitarian undertakings.

Despite his defeat by Pulakesin and his demise half-way through the novel, Mahendra Pallava's shadow looms large over the novel. His character is etched in the likeness of the great kings before him—Ashoka in particular. Mahendra's character reflects the indigenous male at the acme of his achievement, a paternalistic leader who realizes that the great good must be achieved by a variety of actions. However, Mahendra's own qualms about his role as a king, and the fate of the Pallava kingdom, reflect the kinds of internal struggles and shape-shifts that anticolonial nationalism—

caught between a more pragmatic vision of the independent nation wrought through Nehruvian socialism and a more utopian outlook, the product of Gandhian ideals—was undergoing during Kalki's time. Additionally, Mahendra's performance of avuncular masculinity—his paternalistic attitude towards his subjects and his family (what we have in this construction is a desexualized father figure)—was not unlike the discourses of enlightened mentorship that anticolonial nationalism provided women like Rukmini Krsnamurti in the end.

In many ways, it is the evolution of the Pallava army commander Paranjoti (whom we encountered in Chapter Three of my study) that best illustrates Kalki's misgivings on the uses of violence and militaristic aggression by the state. Paranjoti, a beloved historical figure for the Tamils from the sixth-century, goes from a naïve, fearless youngster to a seasoned war veteran in the course of the novel. But the aggression against the Chalukyas leads to a growing estrangement between him and Narasimha, as Paranjoti glimpses more and more the compromises in ideals that afford the consolidation of power. He is struck by Narasimha's harshness towards Civakami in the concluding chapters of the novel, when the former asks callously upon seeing her for the first time in nine years if she is satisfied at the outcome of her vow, even as Pallava soldiers rout and loot Vatapi. The next time Paranjoti appears in the novel, it is to ask Narasimha's permission to renounce his worldly position, and to live the life of a Civa-worshipping ascetic. It is significant here that Paranjoti, like Civakami, never marries.

The Buddhist monk Nakanandi also loses his life leading the last charge against the Pallava army when Narasimha invades the Chalukya capital to avenge his father's defeat. But he too has been humanized; Nakanandi persuades Chalukyan soldiers to spare

Civakami's, and Ayanar's life in Part Three, and ensures their safe passage to Vatapi. Initially depicted as a greedy double-crosser who desires Civakami for her physical beauty, Nakanandi seems the very antithesis of asceticism. However, he becomes increasingly disenchanted with his brother Pulakesin's obsessive, lustful aggression on the Pallavas. Nakanandi dies in battle, emerging in the final analysis as one capable of nobility and heroism.

And what of Narasimha himself? At first depicted as the impressionable, impetuous, ardent youngster we encounter in Part One of the novel (analyzed in Chapter Three of this study), Narasimha's follies and foibles noticeably recede into the background as soon as he ascends the throne. The older, world-weary Narasimha resembles more the anticolonial nationalist bearing the heavy burden of the colonial present and postcolonial future than he does the passionate and blissful lover undertaking moonlit idylls in the forest glade, representing a precolonial, halcyon existence. The world of *akam* (the inner realm of romantic love) and *srngara* (erotics) inevitably yields to the world of *puram* (government, war, and public affairs) and in Kalki's representation, Narasimha has no choice but to follow suit.

Conclusion

This chapter was an attempt at effective history, posing the following questions. One, what is the task of the postcolonial literary scholar when analyzing reconstructions of the past in colonial and postcolonial communities and the questions of national, regional, and gender identification implicit in such representation? Two, how does the Tamil historical romance—constructing the medieval past for audiences in the colonial present—construct gender for nationalist/anticolonial ends? What lies in the gaps of, or

gets papered over by, such constructions? Finally, what are the consequences of such representation of the past for postcolonial Tamil identity?

Reiterating the imbrication of the precolonial in the colonial and postcolonial, a point I have argued throughout my account of Tamil, Hindu, and postcolonial identity politics, I forge in this chapter an uneasy but enabling truce between multiple readings of *Civakamiyin Capatam* produced by feminist theories of performativity and subaltern representation; poststructuralist theories of knowledge production and reception, in particular, the relationship between the oral, the figural and the written; and indigenous theories of sacred performance that determine the role of the individual artist in society. I see the gender politics and erotics of the novel as fashioning containment and resistance. That is, Kalki's gender representations both unseat the novel's, and nationalism's, patriarchal underpinnings and reify the hegemonies of class, caste, and gender that form its ideological springboard. In Kalki, the oral and the performative genres—invoked in the novel through the songs composed by the medieval Tamil poets, the rock-cut sculptures of the Pallavas, and Civakami's divinely inspired dancing—intersect with the figural and the written genres to codify male/female roles in artistic expression and nation formation. It is during the most ritualized and formally curtailed expressions of the sacred in *Civakamiyin Capatam* that such consolidation—and a subversive, flickering resistance to the bourgeois nationalist imaginary—can be glimpsed. My account of generic confluence in Kalki's *Civakamiyin Capatam* reveals how the novel refracts the revivalist and reformist aims of twentieth-century anticolonial nationalism, in particular, the novel's yoking of the woman question to its vision of national sovereignty.

In a post-colonial climate, demystifying narratives of origin emanating from colonialist and nationalist viewpoints is crucial for an understanding of the representational and material consequences of these narratives, and helps determine what gets left out of dominant accounts on both sides of the colonial equation. As part of such questioning, I examine in the next—and concluding—chapter of the dissertation my own role as a critic and translator perpetuating colonialist and nationalist constructs of the Third World woman in the US academy and the gender and cultural politics of translating a Tamil text into the language of global academic capital, English.

NOTES

¹ Indira Peterson's translation. See *Poems to Siva* (128).

² Kalki refers here to Civakami as “kanni”, which translates to young maiden. The word is one that is often used in Tamil pastoral and lyric poetry to signify virginal innocence and beauty.

³ The notion of the inner as erotic love between a man and a woman or between a supplicant and his god and the outer as representing the public sphere, kingship and war is discussed extensively in Chapter 3.

⁴ Kalki's investment in the revival and promotion of regional performing arts is discussed in greater detail in Chapter Two.

⁵ For Nietzsche, *herkunft* (descent) and *ursprung* (origin) are both genealogical markers in *The Genealogy of Morals*.

⁶ Many feminists consider it important to consider the interpellation of female subjects by institutional/dominant representations of “woman” in a variety of arenas. How do thinking and feeling subjects respond to such characterizations of their bodies and minds? How does such discourse shape/alter their attitudes? What resistances emerge as a reaction to such representation? As Rajeswari Sunder Rajan observes:

The concept of ‘representation,’ it seems, is useful precisely because ... it can serve a mediating function

between two positions, neither foundationalist (privileging ‘reality’) nor superstructural (privileging ‘culture’), not denying the category of the real, or essentializing it as some pre-given metaphysical ground for representation...Our understanding of how ‘real’ women imagine and communicate cannot lie outside the ‘imagined’ constructs in and through which ‘women’ emerge as subjects (9-10).

⁷ As discussed in Chapter Three, in ancient and medieval Tamil poetics, categorizing of a poem as akam reflects its focus on the inner realm (courtship, marriage, erotic love), while puram signifies the outer (kingship, war, affairs of the state, the public sphere).

⁸ For de Lauretis, the effect of textual representation on the material realities and lives of women is a crucial site of analysis. Invoking Charles Sanders Peirce’s conceptualization of the sign—the most basic unit of signification in structuralist linguistics and semiotics—De Lauretis sees in semiotic inquiry an entry point for feminist readings of texts. Peirce argues the existence of an actual “object” to which the sign refers and an “interpretant,” another sign formulated in the mind of the person at whom the first sign was directed (de Lauretis 41). Such a formulation is a more enabling explanation of the signification process for feminist scholarship because it does not reduce meaning-making to an endless play of signifiers and thus acknowledges the material conditions under which individual subjects live, work, and communicate.

⁹ See Chakraborty’s chapter on the poetry of Tagore in *Provincializing Europe*.

¹⁰ See Chakravarti’s “Caste Contestation, Class Formation, Nationalism and Gender,” in *Rewriting History: The Life and Times of Pandita Ramabai* (1998): 43-119. Also see the introduction of Tanika Sarkar’s *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation*.

¹¹ Ramaswamy notes that such idealization of language/woman involved “Negotiating gingerly between loyalty to Bharata Mata and Tamilttay [Mother Tamil], between the shoals of pride in the nation (tesapimanam) and pride in their language (pasapimanam), Indianism reminded Tamil speakers that the liberation of Tamil would have to proceed with the liberation of India” (48). Also see Chapter 3, “Feminizing Language: Tamil as Goddess, Mother, Nation” (79-126).

¹² See Indira Peterson’s *Poems of Siva* and David Shulman’s *Tamil Temple Myths: Sacrifice and Divine Marriage in the South Indian Saiva Tradition*.

¹³ For a more detailed account of the thematic components of Cattamar’s epic, see Paula Richman’s *Women, Branch Stories, and Religious rhetoric in a Tamil Buddhist Text*. Richman notes that it was celebrated Tamil brahmin intellectual and scholar U. Ve. Caminatan—whose memoir titled *En Caritram* (My Story, an invaluable account of his early field research and scholarship frequently referenced by Tamil and South Asia

studies scholars) was serialized in *Kalki* magazine in the late forties at the request of the editor—waxes eloquent on his rediscovery of Manimekalai in the late nineteenth-century. Caminatan went from village to village recovering rare and ancient palm leaf manuscripts from Indologists, Tamil scholars, and monasteries, teaching himself the art of deciphering the manuscripts. It is an achievement for which Caminatan is a household name in the region, where he is known as Tamil thatha, the grandfather of Tamil (Richman 10-13). The rediscovery of Manimekalai marks the origin of the Tamil “renaissance” that blossomed in the twentieth-century.

¹⁴ See discussion of cultural and linguistic homogenization as part of anticolonial struggle in Chapter Two.

¹⁵ As discussed in Chapter 3, *vira* is one of the nine *rasas*, a crucial emotion in art. It is significant that here *vira* is invoked by the sculptor. Kalki’s entire novel has been acclaimed for its explication of the nine *rasas*, something that attests to its epic qualities, according to its many readers.

¹⁶ For a more detailed look at Bose’s stance on Gandhian politics, see “Father of Our Nation (radio address to Mahatma Gandhi, 6 July 1944)” in *The essential writings of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose* (Delhi and New York, Oxford UP, 1997. 300-310). The compendium also provides the original speeches and writings of Bose from 1913 to 1945, representing the arc of his thought.

¹⁷ His influential and hitherto untranslated editorials on the subject, written when *Civakamiyin Capatam* was serialized, are discussed in Chapter Two.

¹⁸ The name literally translates to the queen/ruler of all women, or the peerless one among women.

¹⁹ In Part One, Mahendra bemoans the time he spent in cultivating the Pallava arts, time he felt he should have spent on shoring up the kingdom’s military defenses.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION TAMILAKAMUM TINAIYUM TEDI

In my conclusion, I venture an analysis of the ethics (and perils) of postcolonial translation. I investigate here my (the translator's) quandaries in mediating colonial/postcolonial experience for different interpretive communities in South Asia, Europe, and North America. I ask what it means to make Tamil texts available to Tamil and non-Tamil audiences in altered, though overlapping, power/knowledge frameworks at home and abroad. My conclusion is divided into three sections. I first lay out the intersecting theoretical debates surrounding cultural representation and language in postcolonial and translation studies. Next, I analyze a key passage from *Civakamiyin Capatam* that demonstrates how issues of representation/translation outlined in existing scholarship affect actual critical methodology and practice in the analysis of the Tamil novel. Finally, I project directions and trends for postcolonial literary research and translation based on this study.

Those academics in English and comparative studies associated in a scholarly capacity with the so-called developing world or global south are today seen as crucial purveyors of ideas and rhetorics from these cultures in their respective areas of study, striking vital notes of difference. It is important to consider the implications of this shift/sea-change in literary studies, especially when these perspectives of the colonial or

postcolonial other tended to appear in the Euro-American academic imaginary almost solely as accounts by dominant culture's representatives, both in the metropole and the ex-colony.

As already discussed, this orientation and focus, first towards colonial writing in English, then towards Indian English writing in literary studies, has produced allegations of bias towards English-based writers and a concurrent neglect of vernacular texts in metropolitan and postcolonial academies. Even though the English bias has been acknowledged in postcolonial theory since the eighties, representations of the colonial encounter continue to be typically analyzed in the work of such European writers as Joseph Conrad, E.M. Forster, and Rudyard Kipling in English literary studies, and questions of postcolonial identity have become the literary province of a generation of elite English-educated natives such as V.S. Naipaul and Salman Rushdie.

While such study is invaluable in American, British, and postcolonial studies, most English and comparative studies departments now requiring new hires among their faculty as well as students to be familiar with postcolonial and transnational theoretical perspectives in their areas and periods of study, it also means that scholarship continues to privilege colonial contact, ways in which the colonizer's and the colonized's worldview were dramatically affected by colonial rule, policy, culture, and institutional practices. Writers and critics have only now begun the slow process of addressing this bias by introducing academic communities to nonwestern writing in translation.

When novels such as *Civakamiyin Capatam* and *Ponniyin Celvan* were translated into English in the late nineties, the audiences for these English translations included ethnic Tamils and other Indian readers living in the region who were unfamiliar with

Kalki's work in the original. Aside from pan-regional audiences within India, ardent fans who originally read Kalki's works in serialized installments and seek to relive that experience now share their enthusiasm for Kalki's historical romances with younger non-Tamil speaking generations. Last but not least, the English translations of Kalki's work have enormous appeal for diasporic communities who are a significant presence in Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Africa, the UK, and the US.

In this chapter, I capitalize the word Translation to signal this term's use in the wider sense of the moves made by native informants mediating the mores and values of a particular culture to audiences worldwide. The lower-case variant, "translation," refers to the actual act of transposition of words and sentences from one (source) language to another (target language). The two modes of translation are by no means mutually exclusive, and in fact powerfully overlap. However, I make this distinction in order to fully consider the kinds of challenges faced by postcolonial writers and critics always-already constrained by ideologies of culture, gender, and language in their attempt to define issues of representation and difference within the post-colony and without. What I seek to emphasize here is Translation/translation's complementarity. That is, the formal work of lower-case translation always requires the processes of Translation as well. Translation/translation thus includes a careful contemplation of the affective states wrought by particular idiomatic usages, phrases, and words that have very particular cultural meanings and resonances for audiences experiencing the texts in the source language, a welter of what seem like unTranslatable associations and pulls that pose a difficult challenge for the translator. As Vinay Dharwadker writes:

The translator is expected to render textual meanings and qualities literally, to successfully transpose the syntax, design, structure or form of the original from one language to another and to achieve a communicative intersection between the two sets of languages or discourses. At the same time the translation has to strike a balance between the interests of the original author and those of the translator (or between faithful representation and faithless appropriation), to fulfil the multiple expectations of its imagined readers, and to construct parallels between the two cultures and the two traditions or histories being brought together. (115)

Dharwadker starts out with considerations of form and idiom that dictate the translator's task at the sentence and phrase level, moves to questions of authorial and translatorial interest, and ends with audience expectations. In a postcolonial context, as Dharwadker well knows, these questions of idiom, author, and audience are fraught. Which "appropriations" prove "faithless"? What kinds of productive parallels are possible between languages, histories, and cultures violently yoked by means of colonialism, especially when the translator's target language is English? These are extremely difficult questions that every responsible translator working with South Asian texts must negotiate.

For instance, poems written during the colonial period by such literary stalwarts as Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), Aurobindo (1872-1950), and Sarojini Naidu (1879-1949), some in translation and some in English, had a lyrical and transcendental quality that readily lent them to critical interpretation and approbation in the west, so that these poets and their oeuvres could be discussed alongside the Romantic canon. Tagore's own translation of his *Gitanjali*—a collection of primarily devotional verse "discovered" in the west by W.B. Yeats—made him the recipient of the literature Nobel in 1932.

Tagore's *Gitanjali* is a series of outpourings by the human devotee expressing his loyalty

to and love for the Hindu god Krishna. In an example of the kinds of cosmopolitan rhetoric surrounding the reception of Tagore's collection, Harald Hjärne, the Chair of the Nobel Committee in 1913, said in his presentation speech:

This very seeking of his to discover the true relation between faith and thought makes Tagore stand out as a poet of rich endowment, characterized by his great profundity of thought, but most of all by his warmth of feeling and by the moving power of his figurative language. Seldom indeed in the realm of imaginative literature are attained so great a range and diversity of note and of colour, capable of expressing with equal harmony and grace the emotions of every mood from the longing of the soul after eternity to the joyous merriment prompted by the innocent child at play. (December 10, 1913)

However, the anglicist moves and heavily romanticized style/tone of the translation led to criticisms that Tagore was pandering in his translation to western audiences. Also, with Indian nationalists, and Tagore can most definitely be considered foremost among these, there was a seeking of a distinctive Indianness, an assertion of authenticity through an invocation of religious past—unassailably Indian in ethos and culture—that occurred through the use of vernacular languages and the appropriation of the cosmopolitan, i.e., English. These allegations continue into the present with postcolonial writers the target, as the Rushdie and Chaudhri examples in my introduction demonstrate. The charge of rendering the syntax and structure of the original in another tongue becomes political in contexts of linguistic/ideological hegemony.

It becomes crucial in light of the critical relationships between English and India's vernacular languages to interrogate the predominance of English as the main link language for literary criticism and fiction produced in South Asian languages. As Aijaz Ahmad points out, one direct legacy of Orientalist scholarship is that:

[I]t is in English, more than any other language that the largest archive of translations has been assembled so far; if present trends continue, English will become in effect, the language in which the knowledge of ‘Indian’ literature is produced. The difficulty is that it is the language least suitable for this role – not because it was inserted into India in tandem with colonialism, but entirely because it is among all the Indian languages, the most removed, in its structure and ambience, from all the other Indian languages, hence least able to bridge the gap between the original and translated text. This disability is proportionately greater the closer the original text is to the oral, the performative, the customary, the domestic, the unsaid... (*In Theory* 250)

While Ahmad’s pronouncement seems rather harsh in its dismissal of English, his reservations about the performance capacity of the language must be taken into consideration, not at the ideological but the formal level, where English simply does not have the kinship, in terms of “structure and ambience” of the other vernacular or regional languages that developed together in the subcontinent, with common antecedents and histories that go back centuries before English usage came to be as result of colonialism. However, Ahmad himself acknowledges the pervasiveness of English in the multilingual transaction in the subcontinent. Scholars and translators must work towards the day that such hegemonies are displaced. It seems at the present juncture that Ahmad would have us work with what we have, pointing out the limits of English translation during the act. I have striven to provide footnotes and glosses that explain the shortfalls in my translations throughout the dissertation, so that, rather than lending any kind of authority to my text, they point to the inability to represent certain constructions to English readers.

When reflecting on the problems and pains of literary translation, Gayatri Spivak’s formulation of “reader-as-translator” in “Questioned on Translation: Adrift” is a useful starting point. Describing the translator as a “cultural broker”, she writes:

I think all reading is translation, that mistake or errancy is part of the game of reading...It could be that when we forget this, and read to identify, at worst to see our own face in the mirror of the text, we lose respect for the other as placeholder for the origin(al). So of course one keeps the faith. Do I believe in “fidelity to the original,” you ask yes, yes, not because it’s possible, but because one must try...And I won’t teach anything if I can’t strain towards that fidelity. (14)

When I first read Spivak’s essay during the early stages of this project, I interpreted her goal to be a careful examination of the workings of Translation, showing how the experience of reading itself involves complex processes of interpretation, diagnosis, and judgment. That is, Spivak’s formulation of reader-as-translator seemed to rely on the fairly obvious assertion that the act of reading involves informed responses to the text by flesh-and-blood readers whose meaning-making strategies are, in fact, a type of translation.

It was only when I started doing the work of Translation/translation myself for the dissertation that I began to comprehend how this deceptively simply passage construes the troubled relationship between the translator and text. First, Spivak deliberately draws attention to the slippages in meaning-making that occur while reading, unseating notions of translation as an exact science, a type of one-on-one correspondence to be achieved between words, sentences, and narratives in the original and target language. In her account, reading becomes a game (not work, as I originally construed it from the passage), and this metaphor predicts both the spirit of adventure involved in Translation/translation and the kind of gamble undertaken by the reader during the act.

With this metaphor of the game, Spivak also implies the arbitrariness of the rules that govern the games involved in textual reception—games in the Wittgensteinian sense,

certainly, but Kipling's metaphor of colonialism itself as the Great Game in *Kim* also comes to mind—while pointing to their constructedness. Her formulation suggests that every substitution/selection/combination of words that occurs in the mind of the reader during the act of translation reflects the gap between the text and the reader's impressions of it. Finally, rather than simply reiterating the poststructuralist notion that language involves the endless play of signifiers, Spivak stresses the importance of an "impossible fidelity to the original," a trying that is not an owning, homogenizing, or turning into the "same" on the part of the translator, but a translation that involves genuine respect towards and consideration of the "other," original text.

In the same essay that outlines the problems of translation, however, Spivak also stresses the importance of translating and making available texts in nonwestern languages, asking: "What stands out comparatively in my experience of translating Derrida and [Bengali activist writer Mahasweta] Devi?' That I was never allowed to translate Derrida again, *whereas the call to translate Devi becomes more and more urgent*" (my emphasis, 14-15). Spivak reminds the postcolonial scholar that language hierarchies persist in the age of global capital, and that it is crucial—despite the non-western translator's, and language's, relative lack of privilege—to level the playing-field by actively resisting the imperatives of cultural imperialism in this regard. Spivak's pronouncement has stayed with me, giving me a sense of urgency and purpose in the translation games I play and work I do.

In any discussion of postcolonial literature, language/s and culture, therefore, Translation, with its attendant implications of native informancy and intervention in the postcolonial world, is a vexed enterprise, precisely because of its imbrication in the

linguistic hierarchies produced by colonialism. Similarly, no longer imaginable as the easy conveyance of ideas and images from one language to another, lower-case translation also implies betrayal and bafflement, foreclosure and failure. It must involve the acknowledgment of ineradicable difference. In the case of my own scholarly/familial translations of Kalki's work, I have striven for formalist exactitude and fidelity to the original through careful footnoting, transliteration, and glossing, a bittersweet legacy of European Orientalism. However, in reality (which I do not claim to be unmediated through language!), the act of Translation/translation is often violent, always-already a thwarting of writerly and readerly agendas.

In *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, Said shows how the secular critic engages in "worldly" politics and the "texts" that produce and are produced by them. Said situates the secular critic between the processes of "filiation" in which critics are bound to a place of origin through such allegiances as birth, nationality, profession, and lived-experience. However, critics also acquire new allegiances "by social and political conviction, economic and historical circumstances, voluntary effort and willed deliberation" (24-25). Said situates the secular critic "between the power of the dominant culture, on the one hand, and the impersonal system of disciplines and methods (*savoir*), on the other" (220). That is, the critic continually mediates between "culture and system"—a liminal space that Said spotlights through Foucault's power/knowledge equation and the Derridean notion of *différance*, a space afforded through language. According to Said, the global critic thus oversees the continual interaction of discursive systems and the power structures that shape broader cultural struggles. It is important to think about the translator's role in terms of Said's argument here. How does the translator mediate

between culture and system in the postcolonial world? In what ways do dominant culture's wills dictate and institutional policies, processes, and practices affect the space in which the translator does her work?

In the politically charged context of postcolonial analysis, it becomes relevant for me to supply a little background about my own experiences of translation both in the broader sense of being a reader and the narrower functions of transposing words and phrases from one language to another prior to the dissertation. Like many other children growing in multilingual India, I had engaged with Translation/translation between Hindi, Tamil, Telugu, Urdu, and English since I was a child, interpreting the workings of one language in another in verbal and written communication, and editing and revising my parents' copy for English magazines and newspapers in India from age twelve. A certain amount of what linguists would call code-switching occurred during these transactions, during which one slipped from Tamil to English and then back again, often mid-sentence, to locate the precise meaning of the story draft under discussion and revision.

I realized early on that writing was an exchange between multiple dialects (written, spoken, heard, felt, official, and unsanctioned), an ordering of events through language into a narrative or script which audiences could recognize and accept. Both my parents were journalists, and often their work involved not only making accessible the jargon of a particular world—the Indian performing and visual arts, cricket, world cinema, global commerce, technology, literature, contemporary painting—to mainstream audiences but also transposing interviews and viewpoints into English from the many Indian languages spoken by the subjects of their stories. These multilingual sleights-of-hand very often went unmarked, with both audiences and writers in India tacitly

assuming—indeed, taking for granted—this kind of linguistic reciprocity in professional and personal acts of communication in the subcontinent. For instance, when my mother interviewed classical musicians such as sitar player Vilayat Khan or flautist Hariprasad Chaurasia, she would conduct the entire exchange in Urdu or Hindi, but translated the entire interchange into English for the published version of the interview. When my father wrote articles on cricket, he spoke with professional cricket players in Hindi, Urdu, Tamil, or English. Both interviewer and interviewee would often code-switch between two or more of these languages as they engaged in conversation, the substance of which my father would then render in English.

An example of the psychic, socio-cultural, and ideological ironies produced by colonialism, I have been proficient in English ever since I can remember, and have read, written, and spoken Hindi since elementary school. The impression I have of English as my primary language holds despite the fact that Tamil was the first language I spoke, heard, and learned. This exclusive exposure to Tamil in the home till the age of three was the result of a conscious decision made by my parents who feared that if I was not immersed early on, I would never learn my native tongue. Still, I felt I had little or no critical literacy in Tamil at the collegiate level, and it is true that I never did take a formal college course in Tamil language or literature, or study any subject through the medium of Tamil.

As a result of this unpreparedness, as I tended to think of it, one of my greatest fears about this dissertation project was that, though quite familiar with formal and informal Tamil, written, spoken, and sung, I felt I did not have the skills to communicate its nuances, let alone explicate entire Tamil texts, in English. However, this training in

Tamil and translation studies was a challenge I felt I had to undertake, in light of the repeated calls on the part of postcolonial scholars for work in this direction. As a fellow South Asia scholar once forcefully advised, I have learned to consider my multilingual competencies in a more enabling light, seeing myself as a native speaker who is on the cusp of linguistic felicity and alienation, a position that has made me more careful and attentive to considerations of form and idiom in both Tamil and English.

In naming this conclusion “Tamilakamum Tinaiyum Tedi” (in search of tamilakam—which can be translated as the Tamil land, but also the Tamil self—and tinai—place, the designations of place corresponding to different stages of romantic love). I drew upon the poetic heritage of tinai, place metaphorized through the connection and complex fusion of inner/outer realms in ancient Tamil literature, and the idea of tamilakam, the notion of a sovereign Tamil identity/land ingrained in the Tamil cultural imaginary. I imagined this title phrase as the opportunity to explore the *emotive* processes and affective states by which Tamil speakers, readers, and writers fashion Tamil identity past, present, and future. Tinai establishes the visceral connections between the land and its people, and the notion of tamilakam inspires both pride and fellow-feeling in the Tamil community.

But my own translation of these two key concepts feels—and I use the verb “feels” deliberately—inadequate, unable, as it were, to conjure up the host of sentiments that accompany seminal notions in Tamil poetics and politics, not to mention the powerful ancient, medieval, and modern rhetorics associated with them. For instance, the word tamilakam represents a cluster of patriotic associations and affiliations that include the Tamil self, identity, region, nation, home, land, and individuality. Tinai has special,

place-specific and religious associations with the topography of the sub-tropical Tamil coast and the forests and desert areas of the southern peninsula, associations known and deeply felt by Tamil audiences all over the world.

For Kalki and his readers, words such as *tamilakam* and *tinai* have rich and profound resonances that immediately conjure a distinctive Tamil identity in terms of language, aesthetics, and history, as well as their shared experience as Tamils, their pride in and love of their land and culture. My title and my conclusion seek to reflect the processes of drafting, forcible elimination, and striking-through involved in Translation/translation—carefully considering denotative and connotative contexts of words and phrases—into another language. It attempts to highlight the psychic and ideological wrenchings that Translation produces as well as the nitty-gritty workings of translation.

Some of the more complex moments of Translation/translation I encountered in Kalki's *Civakamiyin Capatam* include a pivotal scene from Civakami's captivity in Part 3, Chapter 50, where the heroine is given the option of safe passage from the Chalukya capital Vatapi to the Pallava capital Kanci by Pulakesin's brother, the reformed and world-weary Buddhist monk Nakanandi who—thoroughly disgusted with his brother's treatment of Pallava prisoners of war and Civakami—wishes to make amends for the suffering she has been through. Up until the point she is offered this choice, Civakami has alternated between gratefulness that the monk saved her father's life when she was taken prisoner (she was unsure of his fate until the monk assures her that Ayanar is safe and sound in his Pallava woodland abode) and astonishment that he is not the villain she

thinks he is. However, the minute Nakanandi suggests putting an end to her captivity, she is transformed. She says to him:

Adigale!¹ Listen! Do you know when I will leave this Vatapi city? One day, the one you mocked for being a coward, the brave Mamallar, will arrive here with his army. Like a lion leaping into a den of jackals, he will tear the Chalukya army into pieces. He will send the despicable Pulikesi, who made me dance in street junctions, straight to the world of Yama.² Rivers of blood will flow through the streets in which the women and men of Tamilakam were paraded in chains. The corpses of Vatapi's citizens who savagely beat them [the Pallava prisoners-of-war] with staffs will hang from street corners. The houses and buildings, temple towers and monuments of this Chalukya capital city will be set ablaze and fall to ashes. This city will become a graveyard. Only after I see this sight with my own eyes will I leave this place. After he defeats the Chalukya hordes, the victorious Mamallar will seek me out and lead me away from here with his own hands. Only then will I depart. I will not go at your behest. And not even if you send me away in a royal palanquin or elephant will I go now. (721-22).

Civakami's outpouring represents Kalki's female protagonist character at her most impassioned and vengeful. Earlier in the novel, she has demonstrated in turn her impetuous, prideful, whimsical, amorous, and sharply perceptive sides in interactions with her father, King Mahendra, Narasimha, Pulakesin, and Nakanandi. The fact that Civakami retains her spirit and fire after a series of humiliations is significant; Kalki is clearly signaling the kinds of resistance the brave women of the Tamils are capable of during captivity and estrangement from their men, a condition wrought by colonialism and conquest, but he is also making synecdochic connections between the captured Tamil woman and the colonized Tamil land.

Civakami's speech also invokes mythological and legendary figures recognizable to regional and national audiences. One such figure is Kannaki, the heroine of Ilanko's *Cilappatikaram* (as discussed in the previous chapter). Another is the figure of a humiliated, then vengeful, Draupadi from the religious epic *Mahabharata*. In a celebrated scene central to the Hindu religious imaginary and familiar to pan-Indian audiences, Draupadi, or Pancali as she is also known in the Tamil region, is publicly disrobed in the court of the Kauravas. Her hapless husbands, the Pandava brothers, who lose her in a rigged game of dice, look on helplessly as she is dragged out onto the palace court and insulted by the brothers belonging to the enemy Kaurava clan. She swears terrible revenge on Dusasana (one of the Kaurava princes) for his role in her humiliation. According to the original story, Draupadi is saved from this temporal assault by her inner purity and devotion to Krsna, not through human intervention (her sari is unraveled by Dusasana, but proves miraculously neverending). In nationalist poet Cuppiramaniya Parati's retelling of this pivotal moment in the Mahabharata in the epic poem *Pancali Capatam* (Pancali's Vow, 1912), the figure of Draupadi becomes coeval with an enslaved Mother India.

In the passage above, Kalki also invokes the image of Sita, the heroine of the Ramayana, abducted and held hostage in the enemy Ravana's Lanka, who refuses to leave until her husband Rama defeats Ravana in battle and restores her honor. As Robert Goldman suggests, Sita becomes a powerful image of the pure and chaste woman of her homeland Ayodhya, while Lanka stands as the symbol of humanity's lustful degradation and sensual pleasures (106-107). In Kalki's novel, Civakami's humiliation and her fiery rhetoric thus signal the predicament and innate glory of the colonized nation, robbed of

freedom, dignity, and autonomy, somehow preserving its/her pride through inner steadfastness and courage.

However, both Sita and Draupadi, enormously influential figures in Indian culture are problematic figures for feminists in India today, because of the ways in which their allegedly emancipatory representation and rhetorics are used in service of nationalist and Hindu-fundamentalist patriarchies.³ Similarly, the actual translation of Civakami's rhetoric into English seems fairly straightforward; nowhere does Kalki here indulge in esoteric allusions or plays on words. In fact, Civakami's diction is powerful, direct, and devastatingly simple during the above declaration. However, the passage poses serious misgivings for me in terms of Translation and critical reading. During her diatribe, and throughout Kalki's novel, Civakami is cloistered away from women and other persons of her age. Her resistance to her own enslavement in this passage ultimately only leads to a consolidation of status quo and the narratives of birth, class, and rank firmly in place in the Hindu patriarchal order. The fate of the dancing girl who dared to love the king must end in tragedy. Despite temptation to read this outburst of Civakami's—a moment that explicitly invokes the novel's title—as a telling moment of subversion and resistance, Civakami's vow, one of the most celebrated fictionalized moments in Kalki's oeuvre, is a powerful indicator of the ways in which patriarchy co-opts the woman's voice and vision, and her containment within the existing social order.

In attempting to read resistance in Civakami's voice, it is also troubling to note her participation—though spoken and not materially enacted—in the violent and subjugating moves that are the province of colonialism. In particular, her willingness to sacrifice innocent lives in the cause of her wounded pride generates questions about her

motivations and intentions. Such voicing of dissent and victimhood in the novel, and the desire for resistant reading in postcolonial and feminist studies that is a crowning motive for my translation, both seem faithless in this context. Kalki's representation of Civakami is ultimately constrained by the discourses of anticolonial and Tamil nationalism, and the power of his characterization for readers today stands testament to this nationalism's enduring presence in the subcontinent. Any recuperation of Civakami's voice must take such positioning into account. Also, it is imperative to acknowledge that the translator's representation is also similarly constrained by and constitutive of the nationalist and postcolonial dominant ideologies; my desire to locate resistance in the marginal subject requires the acknowledgment of the framing of that subject position, as well my own, in institutional discourses that contain and shape her rhetorical interpolations.

With its complex negotiations of global and local, *Civakamiyin Capatam* refashions mythologies of origin, place, and home, to create a narrative of cultural, social, and political intervention. It reflects the manner in which Kalki's novels provided an ideological-spiritual bulwark—distinctively Tamil—against which a new brahman-dominated regional middle-class could imagine its own identity and values. His success in capturing a wide-ranging Tamil readership reflects the complete identification of Kalki's readers with his redactions of history rooted in the ideal of a hoary and culturally diffuse Tamil past. Valorizing and arguably brahmanizing the traditions of the past, this version of empire became a standard against which Kalki and his Tamil audiences could measure their society's achievement.

Finally, if one were to attempt a program for postcolonial/South Asian literary studies based on the vernacular novel, what kinds of alternative genealogies could we attempt and what challenges and rewards would the study of texts based on these alternative genealogies yield? If Kalki's work were to prove a provisional starting point for a future study, a comparative analysis of his work against that of other historical romance writers and Hindu revivalists in the colonial period—Bankim Chandra from Bengal and Munshi Kanaïyalal from Gujarat immediately come to mind—would be extremely beneficial in understanding pan-regional and region-specific developments in anti-colonial nationalism and the homogenization of Hinduism in this period. For historical studies and studies of the public sphere and print culture, Kalki's journalistic career and writings—his discursive efforts in the formation of the Tamil political, cultural, and literary imaginary—could be studied alongside other public intellectuals such as Banaras's Bharatendu Harishchandra, Hindi writer Premchand, and Kannada writer Masti Venkatesa Iyengar. In the Tamil region, the popularization of magazine readership and the concurrent growth of the little magazine in the Tamil public sphere could be one area of analysis. The spurt in publications that identified as little magazines, such as *Manikkoti* and their association with a literary high modernism in reaction to the popular magazines' indigenism is another exciting area of study. It would be interesting to mark the different approaches to and invocations of Gandhian nationalism in the Tamil literary scene.

In this regard, Kalki's political and socially themed short stories could be studied alongside those of his contemporary Putumaipittan (1906-1948), the Saiva vellala writer who was a prolific short story and nonfiction writer and the most outspoken critic of the

propagandist and populist turn of Kalki's work. Putumaipittan's realism—which he called *yadaartam*, after which the word quickly became the new label for Tamil realism—developed in strong contrast and reaction to populist fiction such as Kalki's which hearkened back to a Hindu, particularly Saiva, religious past. Instead his work contained stark commentaries on caste injustice and the harsh realities of living in urban India. Evolving a new idiom for Tamil, Putumaipittan, like Kalki, was impatient with *tamitamil* (Tamil separate language) movement, dismissing claims to Tamil purity on account of Tamil's separateness from Sanskrit. He was more interested in evolving a contemporary idiom that marched with the times.

One story by Putumaipittan, 1934's "A New Nandan," powerfully illustrates both the parallels and tensions between the two writers' work. The name of Nandan or Nandanar is associated with a twelfth-century text, the *Periyapurānam*, and refers to a Saivite devotee and Nayanar poet who was canonized despite the fact of his low birth. In the colonial and postcolonial period, Nandan "became a powerful symbol of the possibility of an end to caste restrictions and the availability of sacred spaces to all people" (Holmstrom 241). Putumaipittan's story traces the fate of a family supposedly descended from the legendary Nandan. In it, two (at least initially) idealistic young men defy the caste system. One, a brahmin descendant of a priest who persecuted the other's father, joins the Gandhian freedom movement and actively promotes the desegregation of Hindu temples. The other converts to Christianity, but, disenchanted by the persistence of caste structures among the Tamil Christian orthodoxy, joins Periyar's Tamil *suyamariyatei* (self-respect) movement. Neither achieves much success in changing attitudes in either brahmin or paraiya (untouchable/Dalit) communities. The story ends in their

tragic deaths, occurring as the result of a collision with a train which they hope brings Gandhi to their town, Adanur. The narrator asks, “Three people’s blood mingled that day. It continues to mingle. Who can we call the new Nandan?” (41). Ending the story on this note and with the death of brahmin and dalit characters, Putumaipittan complicates the oppressor-oppressed binary for his Tamil reader, questioning the orthodoxies of caste in his society.

Kalki’s “The Rebirth of Srikantan,” a short story treating the issue of child marriage, reveals a similar cynicism, with the young brahmin hero strenuously promoting Hindu social reforms and the abolition of the caste system finally flees town to marry a young girl who is under the legal marriage age. While Kalki and Putumaipittan imagined their writing tasks and audiences differently, one labeled propagandist and the other a serious/high modernist literary writer, some of the same themes and issue are scattered through their works. It would be rewarding in terms of comparative analysis to see how their fictionalized constructions of Tamil world and self both intersect and clash with one another.

In a not-so-final note of postcolonial resistance and questioning, I turn to the feminist short-story writer Ambai who chooses in the main to write in Tamil, treating contemporary feminist themes for Tamil readers of the present-day. Revisioning literary and nationalist histories (and the brahminical legacy entailed in both) in a short story titled “The Squirrel,” Ambai describes the mind-state of a woman researcher who comes upon old issues of Tamil magazines and books in the dusty old third floor stacks of a government-funded library, thrown down to her by a male Telugu librarian who scoffs at her interest. The first-person narrator describes the rain of books:

They fell with a thud. Volumes of Penmadhi Bodhini and Jaganmohini [women's magazines in Tamil], followed by lots of others. The sight of them crashing through the roof, splitting open, even this grew familiar... What had appeared on the third floor were not mere books; they were whole generations throbbing with life. Stately matrons wrapped in nine-yard saris [a sign of brahminical conservatism], wearing shoes and carrying rackets, playing badminton with the white women. How best can young women please their husbands? So many sermons on the subject, preaching untiringly. Addressing her as "my girl," trying to sound kind, they preached the dharma that women should follow. ... A brahmin priest, stubbornly refusing to perform the last rites for a girl because she is an unshaven widow. Knee-length tresses shorn as she lies dead. The devadasis dedicated to temples, dancing to exhaustion, singing, "I cannot bear the arrow of love." Gandhi addressing women spinning at the charka. Uma Rani of the journal *Tyagabhumi* declaring, "I am not a slave." ... Tamarai Kanni Ammaiyar—the lotus-eyed one—saying, "Let us give up our lives for Tamil." ... They are all here. I am also here. Sometimes they are like wisps of smoke, weightless, shaved, a heaviness in my heart... It is only when the squirrel taps his tail twice and raises dust that my senses return. It is leaning on Kalki with Ammu Swaminadhan on the cover. It has finished eating the glue. (trans. Holmstrom, 212)

Ambai suggests both the weight of the patriarchal past and its neglect through this vividly described scene. Invoking the very period of nationalist resistance and women's movements to which Kalki's life and work belongs, Ambai reflects on ways in which women were alternately became objects, participants, and victims in Tamil anticolonial patriarchy's formulations of resistance. In her account, the women within the pages of the magazines and books come to life, arrested-in-motion during the most powerful and popular evocations of the "feminine" in Tamil literature and culture.

It is no accident that both Kalki's Civakami (the protagonist of a historical romance), invoked as the dancing devadasi whose labors go unappreciated, and his Uma

Rani (the heroine of Kalki's *Tyaga Bhumi* who declares that she will subjugate herself to no man and becomes a participant in the Indian freedom struggle) appear as complex figures of complicity and resistance emerging from the cascading volumes of Tamil books in Ambai's story. As Ambai's richly complicated description suggests, it is the legacy of these women characters—their images as fleeting as they are a lingering presence—that the Tamil brahmin writer and researcher must remember and bear, as both a “heaviness in the heart” and ‘weightless wisps of smoke.’ Her reader must become aware of a doubled decolonizing of the mind, to play on Ngugi Wa’ Thiongo’s phrase, a rejection of both western imperialist and indigenous fantasies of place, race, gender and self. In Ambai’s story, the narrator and the reader experience the dawning realization that the women characters’ love and labor, so crucial to anticolonial polemic, labor, agency, and action, go unrecognized in postcolonial patriarchies.

With these tentative chartings and beginnings towards a genealogy of Indian literature, I ask that we also include richer imaginings of the nation, gender, self, and literary work in our theory, criticism, and pedagogies, imaginings that do not always equate the global with the west and the local with the east. Calling for a more multivalent approach to literary studies in and of the subcontinent, G. N Devy suggests:

In India, in any given university, several literatures are taught as living literature ... Indian teachers of English literature and world literature adhere to the critical norms relevant to English literature and world literature. Those who teach Sanskrit literature adhere to Sanskrit poetics. Teachers of regional literature have their own set of critical beliefs... There are fragmented communications and exchanges, distrust and fear, tension and strife in the intellectual transactions of this community. (128)

Devy's prescient and astute diagnosis applies not only to the Indian teaching community but also to postcolonial studies and English studies as they are taught in different parts of the world today, with both fields in a state of what can be, and sometimes is, richly *transformative* and *productive* crisis.

Any analysis of postcolonial writing in India and other ex- and neo-colonial contexts in the world involves the analysis of dynamic and fluid spatio-temporal exigencies and imaginings—past, present, and future; north and south; language and culture; local and global—that individual subjects negotiate in their search for identity. In Putumaipittan's words, "The writer of historical novels takes ancient people who have been nothing more than cold copper plates and fallen ivory towers, gives them flesh, blood and feelings, and makes them converse with us. The translator is exactly alike in intention. He attempts to reveal the living, throbbing human nature which lies behind what may appear to be a strange and unusual language and dress" (translated by Laksmi Holmstrom, 218).

I especially enjoy the irony of using Putumaipittan's words to describe the author's, and the translator's task, given the fact of his contentious relationship with Kalki. I also imagine that Putumaipittan read and secretly appreciated Kalki's work before his (Putumaipittan's) own literary maturation, even though he desecrated Kalki's work publicly. Perhaps such reading was a closet pleasure for Putumaipittan in the same way as pulp fiction and popular television is for literary scholars anywhere in the world. Whatever be the case, Putumaipittan's description of the work of the translator is an enabling one. Though he would be the first to acknowledge cultural hegemonies and linguistic hierarchies/difference, as his sharp criticism of the Tamil literary and political

establishment indicates, ultimately Putumaipittan shares Kalki's, Dharwader's, and Spivak's vision of bringing cultures and regions to an appreciation of one another. In postcolonial feminist terms, such a coming together involves envisioning a solidarity rather than a sisterhood, in Chandra Mohanty's phrase.⁴

I would argue the same vision of "solidarity" is required in considering postcolonial texts from disparate regions and cultures. Also, while positing such a solidarity as a plausible goal for the translator, a recognition of the homogenizing impulses of the translation in English is also crucial. An ethical translator must, when she can, make the move to articulate the awareness of its own complicity. The task of the postcolonial critic and translator to continually question and thoroughly historicize narratives of origin, self, and nation that stem from the constructions of race, nation, and culture afforded by the very processes of translation that make the act possible.

NOTES

¹ A respectful form of address for a person of the cloth.

² The god of death and the underworld in Hindu cosmogony.

³ See Rajeswari Sunder Rajan's "The Story of Draupadi's Disrobing: Meanings for our Times" (2001) and Madhu Kishwar's "Yes to Sita, No to Ram: The Continuing Hold of Sita on Popular Imagination in India" (2001).

⁴ In "Under Western Eyes," Mohanty prescribes the usage of the term solidarity in order to avoid western feminism's elisions of race and class in considering the way in which women are related to one another.

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