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*The Men who Would be King?  
The Politics of Expansion in  
Early Seventeenth-Century Northern Tamilnadu*

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These people, called *badagàs*, though of the same colour and quality as the other peoples of India, are more valiant and powerful in war; because, as I have said, they are a wealthy people, and of great chivalry, and behave with greater dignity than the others, and they have all their cities and towns sheltered and encircled all around with walls of mud or of stone, with their bulwarks, rather like our fortresses, in which too they differ from the other peoples of India, who in general do not live together and encircled in this manner.

Alessandro Valignano, *Historia de la Compañía de Jesus* [1583]

The early 17th century has a somewhat curious place in historical writings on northern Tamilnadu. It appears, first of all, in standard works on the 'Vijayanagara Empire', whose last ruling dynasty the Aravidu rulers, found themselves resident in this broad area. Second, it

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*Abbreviations*

AR = Algemeen Rijksarchief, The Hague.

EFI = *The English Factories in India, 1618–1669*, 13 vols, ed. William Foster, Oxford, 1906–27.

FSVH = *Further Sources of Vijayanagara History*, 3 vols, ed. K. A. Nilakanta Sastri and N. Venkataramanayya, Madras, 1946.

SVH = *Sources of Vijayanagar History*, ed. S. Krishnaswami Ayyangar, Madras, 1919.

VV = *Vēlugoṭivāri Vaṁśāvali*, ed. N. Venkataramanayya, Buletin no. 6, Department of History, University of Madras, 1939.

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appears in studies on European trade in the region, for the politics of southern Andhra and northern Tamilnadu constitute the backdrop to the founding of Madras, and of Dutch trade in the port of Pulicat (Palaverkadu). However, with the possible exception of N. Venkataramanayya, no scholar has devoted much time or attention to the political processes (as distinct from the *events*) of the period, and most writers are content to list battles and engagements, and to note the succession of *rājās* at Chandragiri. Even Henrique Heras's *The Aravidu Dynasty of Vijayanagara* is less than satisfactory in its treatment of this area in the period under consideration.<sup>1</sup>

The present essay seeks to focus on, and to explain, certain specific aspects of the political processes evident in this period, with particular emphasis on the problem of state formation. We will be examining what might be seen as a negative—complete with latent but still undeveloped features—to the full-fledged positive images of the central Nayaka states of Madurai, Tanjavur and Senji. None of these three relatively successful Nayaka states began as such; each evolved out of far more limited beginnings involving the rise to power of localized, immigrant Telugu warrior lineages in the context of the overarching Vijayanagara super-state. By the last quarter of the 16th century, each of these polities was more or less in place (Senji less so than the others), although the complete elaboration of the characteristic Nayaka ethos and ideology may have required a further period of growth.<sup>2</sup> But throughout this period, including the first half of the 17th century, these Nayaka polities were by no means the only candidates for power in the Tamil and southern Andhra regions. Similar lineages of powerful Telugu warrior families—the *badagās* so eloquently described by Valignano—centred in the Rayalasima or the northern Tamil country, inhabited the interstices of the political order, which they fought to reconstitute in the light of their own interests and hunger for power; their surviving sources show us, in effect, the existence of additional proto-Nayaka states in the process of formation and expansion. We will concentrate, in particular, on three such families—the Matla, Velugoti and Damarla lineages—and, above all, on one celebrated figure,

<sup>1</sup> Cf. A. Krishnaswami, *The Tamil Country under Vijayanagar* (Annamalainagar, 1964), pp. 243–360; also H. Heras, *The Aravidu Dynasty of Vijayanagara* (Madras, 1927); C. Hayavadana Rao, *Mysore Gazetteer*, vol. II, pt III (Bangalore, 1930), pp. 2172–406.

<sup>2</sup> This problem is discussed by Phil Wagoner in the introduction to his forthcoming translation of the *Rāyavācakamu*, a retrospective account of the early 16th century at Vijayanagara, from the vantage point of late 16th-century Madurai. On Madurai, also see Nicholas B. Dirks, *The Hollow Crown: Ethnohistory of an Indian Kingdom* (Cambridge, 1987), pp. 75–93, 96–106.

Velugoti Yachama, whose career may fairly be said to encapsulate the complex processes by which these proto-Nayaka formations sought, and failed to achieve, a more substantial and enduring place within the 17th century south Indian state system. It is a somewhat complicated story which, given the proliferating and constantly shifting constellations of power within this heavily contested region, requires a certain concentration and attentiveness to detail on the part of the reader; but it is an important story, worthy of the effort involved, since it offers us the opportunity to penetrate the internal frontier of the declining Vijayanagara system and to observe political processes in motion, on the ground, before they acquired the overlay of a formal courtly ideology and projected self-vision (such as we find in the bulk of the sources from Madurai and Tanjavur). If we wish to understand the motivating forces of the early 17th century, the perspective of the established Nayaka courts can offer us, at best, but half the picture.

Implicit in this formulation is a series of analytical questions: What are the minimal conditions for statehood in this period? Are there structural features present which conduce to or, alternately, preclude state formation? What constitutes political legitimacy and authority for these people, and what is the role of the decaying Vijayanagara ruler in relation to this issue? How can we distinguish the constructural thematics and ideology articulated by the court, including the smaller-scale imitations of courtly rhetoric among the proto-Nayaka literati, from the actual workings of the political system? Can we characterize the transition from one level to the next, or explain the successful emergence of a functioning state (and, conversely, the failure of other attempts at statehood)? What, indeed, are the relations between the various levels in this system? And finally: how are we to define the peculiar problematics of the northern Tamil region, where Yachama and his rivals struggled to achieve their families' goals?

In our attempt to address these questions, the sources we use are largely those produced by the literati of the period, in Telugu and Sanskrit. These texts are akin to those employed by Nicholas Dirks in a recent analysis of the Nayaka state of Madurai, and its offshoot Pudukkottai. Dirks has pointed to the importance of such texts in order 'to select and interpret the relevant "bits of the past" in the "incomprehensible mass" of data about the history of South Indian kingship'; it is worth noting in addition the delicate interplay between the literary production of these texts and the historical events *and* processes they seek to portray.<sup>3</sup> The *biruda-kāvyas* and other literary effusions of the

<sup>3</sup> Dirks, *The Hollow Crown*, p. 107; for a more detailed exposition of the problems

period are at one and the same time informed by social and political realities, and instruments that may have been used to affect the moral and political order. Although there are various types of literary texts within the corpus, with areas of commonality as well as of divergence, one thing appears common to all of them: the past, in all its particulars, mattered to the authors, and carried meaning for them. It is useful to stress then that these texts are far more than conventionalized narratives, peopled by cardboard heroes, who merely re-enact familiar roles.

## I

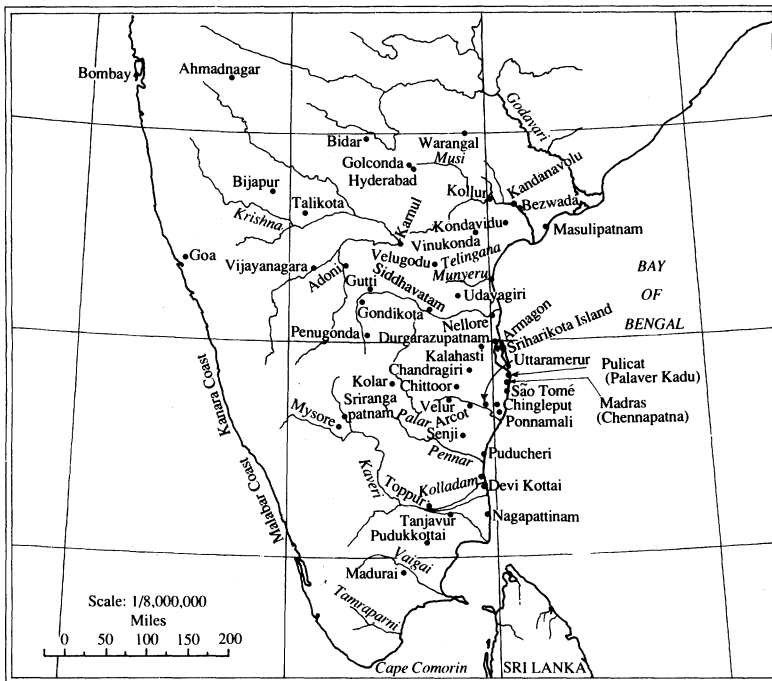
The Aravidu rulers, who from 1571 formally laid claim to the heritage of Vijayanagara, were themselves of Telugu origin. The earliest mentions of them in positions of prominence show them in alliance with Vira Narasimha (1505–09) of Vijayanagara, in campaigns in the Raichur *doāb*; consequent upon this, we learn of recognition being bestowed on their control of Kandनावolu and Adoni (see Map 1).<sup>4</sup> By the close of the reign of Krishnadeva Raya (1509–29), this position had been cemented by the marriage of Aravidu Ramaraja to the Vijayanagara Raya's daughter, and from the late 1520s on, the Aravidu lineage began to exercise a disproportionate influence on Vijayanagara court politics. The rule of Achyutadeva Raya (1530–42) is thus marked by precarious alliances between him and other *pālēgādu* lineages of the southern Andhra region, in order to secure his position against Aravidu claims; simultaneously, Aravidu Ramaraja comes to exercise growing control over the Palaverkadu region, of which he is termed *mahāmaṇḍaleśvara* by the 1540s.<sup>5</sup> Following the death of Achyutadeva in 1542, the Aravidu lineage came to control the court at Vijayanagara in all but name. Although the new Raya, Sadasiva, was of the Tuluva line, it is apparent that Aravidu Ramaraja was the real power behind the throne. Portuguese ambassadors to the court dealt with him rather than Sadasiva;<sup>6</sup> campaigns to the southeast were left in his charge; in brief,

discussed below, see V. Narayana Rao and David Shulman, 'History, Biography and Poetry at the Tanjavur Nayaka Court' (in press).

<sup>4</sup> *FSVH*, III, pp. 70–1, 83–4. The village of Aravidu from which the family derives its name is in Cumbum *tāluka* of Karnul district.

<sup>5</sup> *FSVH*, I, pp. 250–1; *Tirumala-Tirupati Devasthanam Inscriptions*, vol. V, no. 154, pp. 406–8; also Diogo do Couto, *Da Ásia, Década Sétima* (reprint Libson, 1975), pp. 53–61.

<sup>6</sup> Letters from Tristão de Paiva, ambassador to Vijayanagara, dated February 1548, in Elaine Sanceau (ed.), *Colecção de São Lourenço*, vol. III (Lisbon, 1983, pp. 432–5, 436–8.



with the possible exception of Aravidu Venkatapatiraya (1586–1614), Ramaraja remains the most prepossessing and powerful figure of his line.

We may imagine that the formal accession of the Aravidu line to the heritage of the Vijayanagara Rayas in the decade following on the battle of Talikota (1565) did not go unchallenged. Certainly, inscriptional evidence from the 1570s and early 1580s suggests a struggle within the Aravidu lineage itself, as well as a progressive limitation of the area over which they enjoyed control.<sup>7</sup> An open frontier was established to the northeast, where *pālēgāḍu* lineages were seemingly left to fend for themselves. Some of these accepted Qutb Shahi sovereignty, while others—including some who had earlier entered into a subsidiary equation with the Tuluva kings—now shifted allegiance to the Aravidu rulers.

All of this was achieved only at the cost of considerable flux and confusion. The Aravidu rulers had initially set up court at Penugonda, where the last Raya of the Tuluva line—Sadasiva—had spent his last years as well; finally, in about 1592, Venkatapati Raya began to reside

<sup>7</sup> Krishnaswami, *Tamil Country*, pp. 270–2; Rao, *Mysore Gazetteer*, pp. 2158–67.

at Chandragiri, in the Tirupati hills. With the Kanara coast now effectively autonomous, and the Mysore region increasingly so, this meant that the focus of the Aravidu line came to be Andhra and Tamilnadu, and particularly southern Andhra and northern Tamilnadu. It appears evident that Venkatapati Raya had during his reign, in part through conscious decision and in part on account of circumstances, abandoned hope of controlling the western sections of the region that had once fallen under Vijayanagara rule. The displacement of the Aravidu representative at Srirangapatnam by Raja Udaiyar of Mysore thus went unchallenged by the Chandragiri court, which was more concerned with the area stretching from the Pennar to the Kolladam, including the central Coromandel plain.<sup>8</sup>

The northern frontier of the region under Venkatapati's control was, we have already noted, under threat in the 1580s and 1590s. The area between the rivers Pennar and Krishna remained subject to contest through the reign in Golconda of Muhammad Quli Qutb Shah (1580–1612); in the early 1590s, a large Golconda force under the *Mir Jumla* Amin-ul-mulk is known to have captured first Nandyal, and then the fortresses of Gutti, Karnul and Gandikota. Among the *pālēgāllu* of the area who agreed to pay tribute to the Sultan of Golconda were distant members of the Aravidu clan, as well as sections of the Velugodu family. However, following on a brief period of negotiations, Venkatapati's allies regrouped themselves; and with the aid of the Nayaka of Tanjavur, Venkata succeeded in recovering first Gutti, and finally after a protracted campaign, Gandikota and other fortresses.<sup>9</sup> As a consequence of this recovery, only Kondavidu to the south of the Krishna remained under Golconda control, all other fortresses having been regained.

This success seems to have encouraged Venkatapati to use the same broad alliance of Telugu forces in other contexts. The Matla clan, the Velugoti lineage, and to a lesser extent Immadi Jaggadeva Rao are mentioned repeatedly in the last years of the 16th century and early 17th century, in campaigns first in Kolar, and later in the area around Siddhavatam.<sup>10</sup> Of the Matla clan, Matla Ellama, as also his son

<sup>8</sup> Rao, *ibid.*, pp. 2179–80, denies this, apparently unaware of Portuguese and other documentation to the contrary; cf. Fernão Guerreiro, *Relação Anual das Coisas que Fizeram os Padres da Companhia de Jesus*, 3 vols (Coimbra, 1930–42), ed. Artur Viegas, vol. I, pp. 316–16; vol. II, p. 145.

<sup>9</sup> *FSVH*, I, pp. 311–18; H. K. Sherwani, *History of the Qutb Shahi Dynasty* (New Delhi, 1974), pp. 279–84.

<sup>10</sup> *FSVH*, I, pp. 311–21; the sources for the discussion are the *Vēlugoṭivāriṇaṃśacaritra* (*FSVH*, III, pp. 259–61), and the *Kaifiyat of Cīṭṭiveli* (*FSVH*, III, pp. 267–70).



Ananta, had emerged as dominant warrior-leaders in 1600, and are seen to expand their control over a broader area, at the time designated Siddhavatam-*sīma*. However, the ambitions of the Matla clan had been appeased (or had subsided) by the early 17th century, with this expansion undertaken by them, while Jaggadeva Rao for his part grew increasingly preoccupied with the Udaiyar threat in the vicinity of Chennapatna, where a large proportion of his resources were concentrated.<sup>11</sup> It is in this context that the Velugoti clan assumes a great significance.

In his detailed study of the *Vēlugoṭivāri Vamśāvali*, a collection of texts concerning the extended Velugoti Naidu clan, N. Venkataramanayya has traced with care the genealogy of the major figures who may be encountered in this period.<sup>12</sup> The Velugoti (or Velugodu) family was in fact an offshoot of the older Recherla clan, and the first chief of the 'junior' branch to be encountered is Velugoti Pedda Raya, a late 15th-century warrior of Telingana, who appears loosely subordinated to the Gajapati ruler Kapilesvara. However, with the early 16th-century expeditions of Krishnadeva Raya in the eastern Andra region, Gani Timma (grandson of Pedda Raya) came to be subordinated to the Vijayanagara rulers, and from this period, large sections of the Velugoti clan shifted allegiance to the new power in the area. In Achyutadeva Raya's reign, Gani Timma's section of the family supported the Tuluva line against Aravidu Ramaraja, although by the 1560s, a reconciliation had been effected between the two Telugu clans. Yara Timma Naidu (son of Gani Timma) is mentioned repeatedly in descriptions of Ramaraja's campaigns in the region against Qutb Shahi forces.<sup>13</sup>

As has been mentioned earlier, it is in the reign of Venkatapati—and especially in the 1590s—that the Velugoti clan assumes a crucial position in warfare and politics. One of its prominent members, Velugoti Chenna, participated in the successful campaigns of the 1590s between the Pennar and Krishna. But the figure of greater significance—both for his own sake and on account of his direct descendants—is Velugoti Kasturi Rangappa Naidu. Kasturi Rangappa appears in almost every major chronicle detailing the campaigns of the 1590s; this is certainly true of the wars against Golconda, and continues to hold when one turns to Venkatapati's

<sup>11</sup> *Kaifiyat of Cittiaveli*, pp. 190–201, 209–12 (*FSVH*, III, pp. 267–70, 281–2); on Jaggadeva Rao, see C. H. Rao, *Mysore Gazetteer*, II, pp. 2437–8.

<sup>12</sup> *IV*, Introduction, 'Genealogical Table of the Velugodu Chiefs'.

<sup>13</sup> *IV*, pp. 44–56.



attempts to subjugate Mummadi Chikkaraya of Kolar.<sup>14</sup> It is ironical, therefore, that the same sources suggest that the Velugoti clan was simultaneously losing ground in this period in the areas around Velugodu itself, and were being eased out of their 'home ground'. In this, their principal rivals were the Matla clan, for it is known that as early as 1579, Kasturi Rangappa had fought a major engagement with Matla Timma over control of the region around the *pālēyam* of Siddhavatam. Although this particular engagement represented a success for the Velugoti Naidus, their gains were reversed in the next two decades. Venkatapati himself tended to favour control over the region by Matla Ellama and his son, and this quite possibly reflects the real balance of military power between the clans in the region. It is noteworthy that in the campaigns of the 1590s against Kondaraju Tirupatiraju of Siddhavatam, Venkatapati used not the Velugodu clan but the aid of Matla auxiliaries.<sup>15</sup> At the conclusion of this campaign in the late 1590s, Venkata expressly recognized Matla claims over the region, bestowing as prebend the whole of Pulugula-*nādu* on Matla Ellama and his descendants, Ananta and Tiruvengalanatha.<sup>16</sup>

There is thus reason to believe that the branch of the Velugoti family descended from Rayappa (or Pedda Raya) via Yacha and Kasturi Rangappa was in a difficult position in the early years of the 17th century in respect of its 'native' territory, around the *pālēyams* of Velugodu and Venkatagiri. However, the near-continuous campaigns of Venkata's reign had the effect of opening up new frontiers, and there was one in particular that appeared promising. Thus, from about 1600, the Velugoti clan's major new figure, Velugoti Yachama Naidu, is found to be active in a new region, that lying between Chandragiri and the Kolladam.

It has been observed already that the primary endeavour under Venkatapati Raya was to shift the centre of gravity of the area over which he had substantial control eastward, more and more into Andhra and Tamil country. The campaigns against Qutb Shahi forces represent an attempt to extend control northwards along the Coromandel plain: the limit that is reached by 1595 is the river Krishna. However, there was a paradox involved in the very process of expansion, for Venkatapati had to ally himself for this purpose to powerful Telugu warrior lineages—frequently related by descent or marriage to

<sup>14</sup> *FSVH*, I, pp. 318–19.

<sup>15</sup> *Kaifyat of Cittiaveli*, pp. 190–201 (*FSVH*, III, pp. 269–70).

<sup>16</sup> *Kaifyat, ibid.*, pp. 202–9 (*FSVH*, III, pp. 271–3); also Siddhavatam Inscription, A.D. 1605, in *SVH*, pp. 248–9.

his own Aravidu clan; at the end of the campaign, he was equally forced to relinquish effective control over large areas to these very allies, maintaining at best a tributary relationship over them. This was a tactic that the Raya seems to have reconciled himself to, and even become adept at in the course of the first fifteen years of his reign. Following 1600, when he turned his attention to the Tamil country, it was precisely this tried and tested method—or sub-contracting the business of expansion—which he espoused.

By the close of the 16th century, the Tamil country was already extensively peopled by Telugu migrants—warriors, traders and cultivators.<sup>17</sup> Of the major warrior lineages, one was resident at Madurai, and descended from Nagama Nayaka and his son Visvanatha, of somewhat obscure origins, but closely associated it would appear with Vira Narasimha, the founder of the Tuluva dynasty of Vijayanagara.<sup>18</sup> Another line, descended from Sevappa Nayaka—in turn a distant relative by marriage of Achyutadeva Raya—ruled over Tanjavur and the greater part of the Kaveri delta.<sup>19</sup> Between this latter region and Chandragiri, which lay at the northern fringe of the Tamil region, was an area of somewhat greater ambiguity. Initially dominated in the 16th century by a clan of Kannada warriors resident at Padaividu, the region had come by the last quarter of the 16th century to support a third major Telugu Nayaka lineage, this one resident at the formidable hill-fort of Senji. Tracing their descent to early 16th-century Telugu migrants to the region, notably a certain Vaiyappa and his son Tubaki Krishnappa, the credibility of the Senji Nayakas was established only with Kondama (or Gangama) Nayaka (1578–94), who built large sections of Senji fort, and left to his successor Mutthu Krishnappa a fairly extensive region of control in *Tonḍaimaṇḍalam* (or Tundira as it is termed in 17th-century Tanjavur texts).<sup>20</sup>

However, the Senji Nayakas faced problems of quite a different order from those faced by their counterparts at Tanjavur and Mandurai. For one, the area they controlled was far less productive agriculturally than the Tanjavur region or the Vaigai and Tamraparni valleys; for another,

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Burton Stein, *Peasant State and Society in Medieval South India* (Delhi, 1980); David Ludden, *Peasant History in South India* (Princeton, 1985).

<sup>18</sup> For details, see R. Sathyanatha Aiyar, *History of the Nayaks of Madura* (Madras, 1924), pp. 27–39.

<sup>19</sup> Krishnaswami, *Tamil Country*, pp. 256–9; also the treatment in V. Vridhdagirisian, *The Nayaks of Tanjore* (Annamalainagar, 1942).

<sup>20</sup> On Senji, see Krishnaswami, *ibid.*, pp. 246–56, which is more satisfactory than the earlier discussion in C. S. Srinivasachari, *History of Gingee and Its Rulers* (Annamalainagar, 1943), pp. 65–101.

they were dependent to a large extent on tribute drawn from strongly entrenched chieftains of localities, including the picaresque Solaga (chief of Devikottai at the mouth of the Kolladam), and the *rājā* of Velur, Lingama.<sup>21</sup>

It is noticeable that, in contrast to the Nayaka of Tanjavur, who had relatively clearly defined relations with Venkatapati, the equation between Senji and Chandragiri was uneasy at best. In part, this was due to the unhappy but unavoidable fact of physical proximity, for it is clear that one of the reasons why the territory of the Senji Nayakas remained poorly defined is because the Aravidu clan wished it so.

It seems, in fact, to have been the intention of Venkatapati to move against Senji already in the 1590s, for rumblings that portend this can be heard in the Jesuit records of the period. However, the Chandragiri *rājās* were themselves dependent, as we have seen, on banding together semi-independent Telugu lineages before prosecuting any campaigns of substance or effect. In the early 17th century, a footloose and militarily powerful lineage existed, which was clearly appropriate for the kind of southward expansion on Senji territory that the Chandragiri rulers intended. Thus, the ambitions of Velugoti Yachama Naidu could be indulged in the context.

## II

Velugoti Yachama, the son of Kasturi Rangappa, has been described by N. Venkataramanayya as 'perhaps the most distinguished warrior that the Velugoti family produced'.<sup>22</sup> He is certainly the dominant figure both of the *Vaṁśāvali* mentioned earlier, and of the *Vēlugoṭivārivaṁśacaritra*. The Velugoti bards themselves describe him in the following terms, comparable in their extravagance to the descriptions of the Nayaka rulers themselves:

He sat on the glorious Recherla throne—  
he was incomparable in the power of his arms,  
protector to those who sought refuge with him,  
committed to compassion;  
in his country, all enemies had been scattered;

<sup>21</sup> Srinivasachari, *ibid.*, pp. 101–7; for Solaga, also see Samuel Purchas, *Hakluytus Posthumus or Purchas his Pilgrimes*, vol. X (reprint Glasgow, 1905), pp. 209–10 (Jesuit Observations of India); also the excerpts from the *Sāhityaratnākara* and *Raghunāthābhyaṇḍaya*, in *SVH*, pp. 271–2, 286–9.

<sup>22</sup> *VV*, p. 56.

he was lordly as Bharata, Ranti, Suhotra, Bhargava, Nabhaga, Rama,  
 Ambarisa, and other kings;  
 his horses turned the ocean to mud with the dust kicked up by their flying  
 hooves;  
 the whole earth was perfumed by the camphor of his shimmering fame;  
 he removed the false arrogance of the Pandya king;  
 he was marked as a serpent to the evil *manne* kings;  
 he was a violent sun dispelling the darkness of poverty from those who came to  
 him with requests;  
 he was the moon to the ocean of the great family of Sarvajna Singa. . . .

Besides, as we shall see below, several other *prabandha* texts, notably those written by or attributed to the Damarla clan of Kalahasti are devoted to describing his life and times in great detail.

Yachama (or Pedda Yacha) first appears in descriptions of Velugoti Chenna's campaigns to capture Gutti and Kandनावolu from Qutb Shahi forces in the 1590s. Thereafter—and probably following on the death of his father Kasturi Rangappa, of whom nothing is known following 1596—we have seen that the Velugoti clan lost ground in the Chittoor area to the Matla lineage. This brought Yachama southwards, and for the rest of his career, it is in the Tamil country that one encounters him. In the early years of the 17th century (probably in 1600–01), Venkatapati granted Yachama the so-called Perumbedu-*sīma*—an area including Chingleput and Velur—as his prebend, with the clear intention of killing two birds with one stone. On the one hand, it enabled the Velugoti clan to settle at a distance from their earlier centre of activity; second, it struck against Lingama at Velur, and thus implicitly against the Senji Nayaka.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, by granting to Yachama what was in some sense not his to give, Venkatapati reasserted the essential importance of a classic tactic used to extend a frontier—although in the case at hand, what was in question was an 'internal frontier' of some kind.

The next few years then found Yachama embroiled in a protracted conflict, first with the relatively minor *pālēgāllu* of the Velur area, and later with Mutthu Krishnappa of Senji as well as the other two major Nayakas. Initially, though, the struggle involved Yachama—now operating out of Madurantakam—and Lingama at Velur. Lingama was descended from the warriors earlier resident at Padaividu who had dominated large sections of the Arcot region before the rise of the Senji Nayakas, and the first bone of contention between him and the Velugoti clan was the fort of Uttaramerur. In May 1601, Yachama,

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57; also *FSVH*, III, pp. 274–81.

who had taken Uttaramerur some months earlier, was confronted by an alliance of *pālēgāḷḷu* of the region. This alliance had been put together by Lingama on the advice of a certain Aradi Nagama Naidu, and was led by Nagama's brother-in-law, Davula Papa Naidu.

The somewhat bloody battle which ensued has been described in great detail by the Velugoti bards, and is counted by them among Yachama's major deeds. In their version, when Davula Papa was pawing the ground, eager for battle, he was advised by two of his allies, Damarla Kari Chenna (whom we shall encounter later in this essay in a more prominent role) and Naga Reddi, to avoid the engagement. The text describes an imagined monologue, attributed to the two advisers:

To survive a battle against Yechama Nedu is no light matter, o Davala Papi Nedu—  
 you have raised an army; now the most illustrious course would be to turn back, o Davala Papi Nedu;  
 no matter how great our armies, to face him in battle is, upon reflection, impossible; to attack him is like holding the Doomsday fire in the palm of our hand,  
 or like bearding a tiger in his lair,  
 like a ram battering against a mountain,  
 like waking a noble lion from his sleep—  
 what is the use of so many words? The best course is to make peace now, o Davala Papi Nedu.

This well-meant advice was ignored, if the *vaṃśāvali* may be credited and Davula Papa went ahead with the attack, so that Yachama 'pounced on him like a lion seeing an elephant in rut, like a fierce tiger on seeing antelopes, like Garuda upon the snakes, like a hawk (*sālva*) on other birds'. A long list of important Telugu warriors killed or captured is available from this account. These include several members of the Davula clan, and also at least a few warriors of the Damarla lineage.<sup>24</sup> This is of some significance because—as we shall see below—the Damarla clan later came to be closely allied with the Velugoti chiefs, and in many ways picked up the threads where Yachama had left off.

In the two or three years following the Uttaramerur engagement, Venkatapati pressed hard to exercise increased dominance over the Tamil country Nayakas. Besides using Yachama to this end, he temporarily brought Matla Ananta into the region, and also entered into alliance with Damarla Chenna—one of those captured by Yachama at Uttaramerur, and who seems to have shifted positions in

<sup>24</sup> *FSVH*, III, pp. 275–7. For a general account of Uttaramerur, also see François Gros and R. Nagaswamy, *Uttaramērūr: Légendes, Histoire, Monuments* (Pondicherry, 1970).

alliance thereafter. Lingama, who continued to exercise a certain power of the Velur area, was again defeated, this time at Minnal, and a loose conglomeration of clans including Matla Ananta, his son Tiruvengalanatha, as well as Damarla Chenna, are known to have entered Tanjavur territory, besides briefly raiding the northern sections of the area ruled over by Mutthu Krishnappa of Madurai. Following this, the last resistance from Lingama was snuffed out, and Velur itself taken by Damarla Chenna; Venkatapati now adopted a system of twin residences, the one at Chandragiri and the other at Velur.<sup>25</sup>

There thus emerged in the first decade of the 17th century a new configuration of power in northern Tamilnadu. If, on the one hand, Venkatapati exercised control over both Velur and Chandragiri, as well as in the coastal areas around the ports of São Tomé and Pulicat, the Velugoti lineage jostled for a position of power at the southern fringes of this region, in an uneasy but silent struggle with Mutthu Krishnappa Nayaka of Senji. After 1610 however, the power structure began to change somewhat, and this was on account of the growing dominance at Velur of the Gobburi family.

One hears little or nothing of the Gobburi family in the late 16th century. However, in the early 17th century, they emerge as significant figures, in particular Gobburi Obaraju, two of whose daughters—Bayamma and Kondamma—were wives of Venkatapati.<sup>26</sup> Obaraju dominated the area just north of Chandragiri, in contention with the Damarla clan of Kalahasti; also, in the early years of the decade 1610–20, he is seen to maintain a forceful military presence around Pulicat, where the control of customs and other revenues was vested by Venkatapati in Bayamma and Kondamma.<sup>27</sup> On Obaraju's death in 1612–13, the most prominent figure of the Gobburi clan who remains is his son, Gobburi Jaggaraju (or Jagga Raya), the brother-in-law twice-over of Venkatapati. These years were uneasy ones, for it was clear that Venkatapati was on his last legs, and would die at practically any time.<sup>28</sup> Already in 1612–13, while renegotiating control over Pulicat

<sup>25</sup> *FSVH*, I, pp. 323–4; Krishnaswami, *Tamil Country*, pp. 286–92. Also see the letters of the Jesuits Belchior Coutinho and Bartolomeo Fontebona, written from Velur in November 1607, and reproduced in Heras, *The Aravidu Dynasty*, pp. 599–605.

<sup>26</sup> *FSVH*, I, pp. 326–7; *SVH*, pp. 243–4 (citing the *Rāmarājīyam* of Venkayya).

<sup>27</sup> See W. H. Moreland (ed.), *Peter Floris—His Voyage to the East Indies on the 'Globe', 1611–1615* (London, 1934), pp. 10–13, 124–6; also J. E. Heeres (ed.), *Corpus Diplomaticum Neerlandico-Indicum*, deel I (The Hague, 1907), pp. 83–5.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. R. A. de Bulhão Pato (ed.), *Documentos Remetidos da Índia*, vol. I (Lisbon, 1880), p. 359.

(which they had temporarily lost to the Portuguese), the Dutch chief of the Coromandel factories, Wemmer van Berchem, had been obliged to placate Gobburi Jaggaraju with presents; this suggests that even before Venkata's death in late 1614, the Gobburi family was manoeuvring for a position of power.<sup>29</sup>

In the event, the months following the death of Venkatapati in October 1614 saw this jockeying for power turn into armed conflict. The succession of Sriranga, Venkatapati's nephew, to the throne, was contested by the Gobburi family, in particular because Bayamma had a son of her own, although it was widely rumoured that he was a foundling and not her real offspring.<sup>30</sup> Gobburi Jaggaraju, assisted initially by the Matla clan, captured Sriranga and held him prisoner, eventually having him murdered together with his immediate family and several of his adherents. Velugoti Yachama, who seized the opportunity to play kingmaker, had initially supported Sriranga, and after his death entered into conflict with the Gobburi family with the purpose of placing Aravidu Ramadeva, son of Sriranga, on the Chandragiri throne. A protracted campaign ensued, ranging over the southern Andhra region, and large parts of coastal Tamilnadu.<sup>31</sup> Initially, Yachama could bring to bear only the military power of his own Velugoti clan, and of the Damarla chiefs—one of whom Chennappa, probably after Uttaramerur, came to be married to Yachama's sister. However, at a crucial point in the struggle, Matla Tiruvengalanatha switched sides, and began to support the Velugoti force over his former Gobburi allies.<sup>32</sup>

The structure of alliances became more extended and complex with the passage of time. The Gobburi family succeeded in gaining the support of the Nayaka of Senji (not surprisingly, given their common opposition to Velugoti ambitions), as also of the Nayaka of Madurai, while Yachama found an ally in Raghunatha Nayaka of Tanjavur. Finally, late in 1616, an engagement was fought at Toppur on the northern bank of the Kaveri; Gobburi Jaggaraju himself was killed, as were numerous others, and in the aftermath of this battle, Yachama consolidated his gains by carving himself a large slice of Senji territory.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>29</sup> See L. C. D. van Dijk, *Zes Jaren uit het leven van Wemmer van Berchem* (Amsterdam, 1858), pp. 24–7.

<sup>30</sup> *FSVH*, I, pp. 326–8; Robert Sewell, *A Forgotten Empire: Vijayanagar* (reprint New Delhi, 1962), pp. 213–23.

<sup>31</sup> *FSVH*, I, pp. 330–2; *FSVH*, III, pp. 294–6.

<sup>32</sup> *FSVH*, I, pp. 350–1; Krishnaswami, *Tamil Country*, pp. 327–8.

<sup>33</sup> For a description of events at Toppur, see *FSVH*, III, pp. 294–5; also the account in the *Raghunāthābhyaḍaya*, *SVH*, pp. 289–91.



This struggle with the Gobburi clan is seen by the Velugoti bards themselves as one of the two highpoints of Yachama's career (the other being the Uttaramerur engagement), and indeed in many literary sources as *the* principal event. The *Velugoṭivāri Vamśāvali* thus states:

The day Gobburi Jaggaraju drove the *daḷavāy* crazy and took over his office; the day he cut down Ite Aubulesudu in the fortress at Velur; the day he appropriated for himself the Raya's rich treasury; the day he remorselessly ordered the Raya slain, together with his sons, friends, and wives—already on that day he perished at your hands, even though he managed to go on breathing for two more years, by running away,  
O Rangaya Yecha Bhupa, of graceful deeds, you who have purified the Velugoti family, wise in thought and word.  
You killed Jagga Nrpati and helped him cast off his evil self. . . .

Moreover, at least one 17th-century poet, Pasumarti Kodandapati, goes so far as to declare that Yacha 'made the land to the east of Velur between the Krishna and the Kaveri into a Velama land', while still other contemporary writers note that following on Toppur, 'the entire Recherla *gotra* is established in splendour; the descendants of Sarvajna Singama Nedu are honoured, and the Velamas have rid their hearts of sorrow'.

It is not a little ironical, then, that the events following Toppur almost wholly reversed the earlier trend. If one follows the fortunes of the Velugoti clan from the late 1580s, from their earliest conflicts with the Matla chiefs and campaigns against the Qutb Shahi forces, to the move of Yachama and his brothers to Tamil country, a clear process is visible of the setting up of a proto-Nayaka state. In this logical sequence of events, Toppur should have been followed by one of two events: either the displacement of the Senji line by the Velugoti chiefs, or the creation in the area between Chandragiri and Senji of a Nayaka state, controlled by the Velugoti line. However, by 1620, neither the one nor the other had occurred. The spread of the Velugoti family did ensure control over several important *pālēyams*: Velugoti Timma, the cousin of Yacha, held the region around Durgarazupatnam, and was moving to include the island of Sriharikota in his domains; Velugoti Singama, Yacha's brother, held Chingleput. Further south, Velugoti Kasturi Rangappa, son of Yachama, was in possession of several major *pālēyams* around Puducheri.<sup>34</sup> Yet all of this added up, in the final analysis, to very little.

In the first place, following on Toppur, the Gobburi family reasserted itself, and Gobburi Etiraju—brother of Jaggaraju—shored up

<sup>34</sup> *VV*, pp. 57–9; *FSVH*, I, pp. 335–6.

his position by marrying his daughter to Ramadeva.<sup>35</sup> This reversal is typical of the shifting alliances of the period, and is hard to explain if one takes too seriously the contemporary portrayal of Jaggaraju as a latter-day Duryodhana and *svāmidrohī* (traitor), and the Gobburi clan as Kauravas. This set of images, assiduously developed by the *vaṁśāvalī* writers of the Velugoti family, and seized upon by modern-day historians, who speak of Jaggaraju's 'betrayal' in horror-struck tones, is clearly out of tune with the Aravidu family's own perceptions. A more plausible portrayal is that Ramadeva, once crowned, perceived the major threat to Aravidu dominance as the kingmaker himself—Velugoti Yachama. Equally, Raghunatha of Tanjavur succeeded in portraying himself retrospectively as the major supporter of Ramadeva in the context of Toppur. Thus, whereas the internal Velugoti sources suggest that Yachama was 'served' in his campaigns against the Gobburi family by his own brothers, by Damarla Chenna, and by Raghunatha Nayaka of Tanjavur, the Tanjavur sources reverse this alignment, making Yachama the auxiliary of Raghunatha. Indeed the *Sāhityaratnākara* has it that a spy informed Raghunatha that Yachama had 'by some stratagem' rescued Aravidu Ramadeva from Jaggaraju, and was 'now begging you [Raghunatha], the one refuge for all who come to you, for friendship, *as he has been defeated by enemy kings*' (emphasis added). That this literary inversion may have had its counterpart in the real events following Toppur is suggested by the widespread belief that after Toppur, Raghunatha performed the *paṭ-ṭābhṣeka* of Ramadeva at Kumbhakonam.<sup>36</sup> Further north, Mutthu Krishnappa of Senji—possibly encouraged by this new turn of events—also reasserted himself, and with the aid of Gobburi Etiraju and Ramadeva, succeeded in regaining by the early 1620s territories that had been lost on earlier occasions to Yachama.<sup>37</sup>

In some sense therefore, the Velugoti clan was trapped by its own overly conspicuous success. The frustration and inability to carve out for themselves a clear place in the political geography of the Tamil country is nowhere more evident than in Yachama's attempt in the years from 1622 to 1624 to take Pulicat from the Dutch, in which endeavour he was repeatedly obstructed, first by Tiruvengalaiya,

<sup>35</sup> *FSVH*, I, p. 335.

<sup>36</sup> *SVH*, pp. 273–4. The Ramaswami *koyil* at Kumbhakonam, one of the outstanding surviving Nayaka-period temples, was probably built in honour of this event. Images of the kingmaker, Raghunatha, and his wives, as well as Vaishnava and Rama icons adorn the outer *maṇḍapa*. The temple deity is Rama, namesake of the young emperor.

<sup>37</sup> *FSVH*, I, pp. 336–7.

*dalavāy* of Senji, and later by Gobburi Etiraju.<sup>38</sup> After about 1625, there are no further references to Yachama either in English and Dutch material, or in Telugu sources, so that there is reason to suspect that he died in about that year. From this period, the family enters into eclipse, a process that had begun we have already noted in the aftermath of Toppur. Yachama's cousin Velugoti Timma retained control over the area around Armagon until the early 1640s, despite being under serious threat from Ramadeva's forces in the late 1620s; however, Kasturi Rangappa's control over Puducheri proved more tenuous.<sup>39</sup> In the 1640s and thereafter, there is the odd mention of other members of the clan: Yachama's brother, Singama, surfaces in the late 1640s at the siege of Udayagiri by Golconda forces, and much later, towards the close of the 1650s, Kumara Yacha (son of Yachama) is mentioned among those now subordinate to the Sultanate of Golconda.<sup>40</sup> Thus, the momentum that the Velugoti clan had seemingly gathered in the first decade and a half of the 17th century was gradually dissipated, and their larger ambitions remained unfulfilled.

### III

From the 1630s, and following on the death of Aravidu Ramadeva, another clan closely related to the Velugoti line emerges in a position of considerable prominence in the central Coromandel plain. This is the Damarla lineage, initially based at Kalahasti, but also in other *pālēyams* of that region. This clan intermarried on numerous occasions with the Velugoti line; Yachama himself was the product of one such union, between Velugoti Kasturi Ranga, and Venkatamma, daughter of Damarla Vengala, while one of Yachama's sisters, Akkamma, came to be married to Damarla Chenna in later years.<sup>41</sup> It is possible that this alliance may help to explain a reversal that occurs in the early years of the 17th century; whereas at Uttaramerur, Chenna opposed the Velugoti clan, later he came to be closely allied to it.

It is evident that once the Velugoti clan had lost its military

<sup>38</sup> AR, Overgekomen Brieven en Papieren (henceforth OB), VOC. 1087, fls. 179–211v (Dagh-Register Pulicat); also *EFI* [1622–23], pp. 133–4.

<sup>39</sup> On Kasturi Rangappa at Puducheri, see *EFI* [1624–29], pp. 16, 19, 41; on Velugoti Timma, *EFI* [1624–29], pp. 117, 120–3, 128, 133–4, 146–7, 346–7, and *EFI* [1634–36], pp. 47–8.

<sup>40</sup> *VV*, pp. 59–60; Rao, *Mysore Gazetteer*, pp. 2273–6.

<sup>41</sup> *Bahulāśvacaritra*, of Damarla Vengalabhupala, in *SVH*, pp. 304–5; Rao, *Mysore Gazetteer*, p. 2276.

momentum and appeared to be a spent force, which is to say in the late 1620s and early 1630s, the Damarla line sought by a variety of means to capitalize on this situation. Given Yachama Naidu's considerable personal prestige, and central position in rumour and myth, the Damarla clan clearly sought to identify themselves as successors to his heritage. Thus, Damarla Vengalabhupala, brother of Damarla Chenna, used the Telugu poem *Bahulāśvacaritra* as a vehicle to this end, dedicating it to Yacha, and seeking to paper over earlier differences that had existed between the two clans.<sup>42</sup> A description of Yachama in this text runs as follows:

Munificent donor, like a whole row of wish-granting trees; Indra in a series of battles marked with his violent, unparalleled courage; blessed with sons [or: blessed by Siva, or Visnu]—the fingers of his arms, as long as serpents, were stretched out to grasp [the hand] of Lady Earth. Ferocious victories were his characteristic sign. Gifts of horses and elephants came to him even from the Nijama Shah, Aidula Shah and Kutupana Shah. . . .

The poem devotes a great deal of attention to Yacha's activities in the period 1600 to 1605, as also between 1614 and the Toppur battle, as a consequence of which his fame 'filled the ten quarters of space and radiant as sandal on the breasts of women with eyes like the *cakora*', reached Delhi, Cuttack, Agra, Mecca and Shiraz. And finally, the poem then seeks to juxtapose Vengalabhupala's own brother, Chenna, with Velugoti Yachama, in a device that calls for little further comment.

The growing importance of the Damarla clan coincides with the accession to the Chandragiri throne of Venkata, a distant cousin of Ramadeva, and a grandson of Aliya Ramaraja. However, the succession was contested, and a struggle ensued between Venkata and another claimant to the throne, Aravidu Timmaraja, uncle of Ramadeva. After an initial phase, in which Venkata's cause seemed more or less lost and he was forced to take refuge in Anegondi, he emerged resurgent; with the aid of the Senji Nayaka and Chinanna Chetti—a Balija Naidu of great importance in central Coromandel politics in the period—he succeeded in turning the tables on Timmaraja.<sup>43</sup> This was a long drawn-out process, though, ending only with Timmaraja's death in 1635, in an ambush.

In the second half of the 1630s, under Venkata's reign, the Damarla clan emerges dominant in northern Tamilnadu. The two major figures

<sup>42</sup> *SVH*, pp. 304–7.

<sup>43</sup> *AR*, OB, VOC. 1119, fl. 1130; also *Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo*, Lisbon, Documentos Remetidos da India, Livro 26, fl. 162; Livro 32, fl. 9.

are the sons of Damarla Chennappa, Venkatadri and Ayyappa (or Akkappa), whom European records describe as brothers-in-law of Venkata.<sup>44</sup> Ayyappa himself operated out of the *pālēyam* at Ponnamali, while Venkatadri played a role of far greater importance, being described by the English as 'the great Naique', or the 'Lord General of Carnatica', and even on occasion the 'Grand Vazier' of Venkata.<sup>45</sup> The exalted position of Ayyappa is also evident from frequent references to him in the Dutch records, and on at least one occasion he is referred to as the 'close adviser' (*naesten raedt*) of the king.<sup>46</sup>

The role of these two brothers in granting to the English the control of Madras in 1639 has ably been set out by numerous writers, in particular H. D. Love.<sup>47</sup> What is noteworthy from our point of view is that their authority in that region was in point of fact a relatively recent phenomenon at the time they permitted Francis Day the right to build Fort St George; this may help us in understanding the relative alacrity with which they made this strong concession. Their growing power and authority in the region can be contrasted to the near-disappearance by this time of the Velugoti line from elite politics, and also serves to highlight the gradual edging out of the Gobburi clan in the reign of Venkata. The principal opposition to the Damarla chiefs' growing stature came therefore from neither of these quarters. Instead it derived from within the Aravidu line itself, from Sriranga, nephew of Venkata, as well as from other powerful figures of the area—Tubaki Krishnappa, regent and *éminence grise* at Senji, and Chinanna Chetti, whose career has been detailed elsewhere.<sup>48</sup> From Dutch, Portuguese and English references to events at the Chandragiri court in the late 1630s, one can even conclude that Sriranga's decision in 1637 to seek Bijapuri support may have been aimed as much against the Damarla brothers as against Venkata.<sup>49</sup>

In the event, following Venkata's death in 1642, and Sriranga's accession to the Chandragiri throne, one of his first acts was to imprison

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Henry D. Love, *Vestiges of Old Madras*, 2 vols (London, 1913), vol. I, p. 14; for the family's genealogy, also see *Bahulāśvacaritra*, and *Usāpariṇayamu*, the latter work by Damarla Ankabhupala, in *SVH*, pp. 304–8.

<sup>45</sup> *EFI* [1642–45], pp. 79–80; also see the discussion in Love, *Vestiges*, I, pp. 53–4.

<sup>46</sup> AR, OB, VOC. 1122, fls. 665–6, and OB, VOC. 1127, fls. 228–9.

<sup>47</sup> See note 44 *supra*.

<sup>48</sup> Sanjay Subrahmanyam, 'The "Pulicat Enterprise": Luso–Dutch Conflict in South-Eastern India, 1610–1640', *South Asia* (N.S.) IX, 2 (1986); also J. J. Brenning, 'Chief Merchants and the European Enclaves of 17th century Coromandel', *Modern Asian Studies* XI, 3 (1977), pp. 327–40.

<sup>49</sup> For a chronicle of events in this period, see A. Saulière, 'The Revolt of the Southern Nayakas', *The Journal of Indian History* 42 (1964), pp. 89–105.

and subsequently to expel from the region Damarla Venkatadri. There followed a brief period, too, when Sriranga, with the aid of Chinanna and his nephew Koneri, attempted to defend his northern frontiers against Bijapur and Golconda forces. However, from about 1643, these armies gained momentum, and eventually succeeded by 1649 in overrunning what had been the Chandragiri kingdom as well as the Nayaka of Senji's territories.<sup>50</sup> Sriranga returned in the 1650s to lead a few upsurges in the region, but it was to no avail.<sup>51</sup> The major figures of the early 1640s accommodated themselves reluctantly to the new circumstances: Chinanna Chetti arrived at an accommodation with Murad Ali Baig, the Bijapur general, while Tubaki Krishnappa subordinated himself to Muhammad Sayyid, the Golconda *Nawab*.<sup>52</sup> Some of the Velugoti clan are known too to have accepted the Golconda umbrella, as indeed did Damarla Venkatadri and Ayyappa.

However, according to English records, Ayyappa soon began to chafe under this relationship, and is seen in the late 1650s and 1660s to be pushing for a territorial base in interior Tamilnadu. This eventually led him, together with Sriranga, into a conflict with Udaiyar forces, and it is generally believed that he was killed in a battle against the Mysoreans at Erode, in around 1670.<sup>53</sup>

#### IV

An analysis of genealogical information, of *vaṃśāvalis* and Telugu verses, when taken together with European documentation from the late 16th and 17th century, permits one to perceive certain processes of significance in the politics of northern Tamilnadu in the period 1590 to 1640. The traditional picture of this period has been one of endemic warfare, and an almost impenetrable confusion; as we have seen, there was certainly warfare in plenty, but the confusion is largely superficial. The area extending from Chandragiri southwards, almost as far as the Kolladam, was a sort of contested zone in this period for several reasons. First, the Senji Nayakas—unlike their counterparts at Madurai or Tanjavur—lacked stability to a great extent, and were unable to project their court as a nodal point, or a centre with great

<sup>50</sup> Sherwani, *Qutb Shahi Dynasty*, pp. 448–50; *FSVH*, I, pp. 346–62.

<sup>51</sup> *EFI* [1651–54], pp. xxxiii, 97–8; *EFI* [1655–60], pp. 93–9; also *FSVH*, I, pp. 362–7.

<sup>52</sup> *EFI* [1651–54], p. 240; *EFI* [1655–60], pp. 95–6, 174–7. Finally, on Chinanna, *AR*, OB, VOC. 1172, fl. 291v.

<sup>53</sup> Krishnaswami, *Tamil Country*, pp. 365–7.

vitality. This is seen as much militarily as in other spheres; the paucity of court literature or indeed of a courtly tradition at Senji contrasts strongly with Nayaka-period Tanjavur. We may attribute this at least in part to the fact that Tundira had no clear heritage to hark back to, unlike the rulers of Tanjavur (who could appeal to the Cholas), or those of Madurai (who looked to a Pandya tradition). Equally, the peculiar characteristics of the northern Tamil area must be stressed, particularly the fact that it comprised a far less stable agrarian base than either Tanjavur or the Pandya country. That two kingdoms—Chandragiri and Senji—were able to derive their sustenance from this catchment area was the result of at least two factors: first, the expansion of agriculture, including the production of cotton and to a limited extent indigo, in this area in the 16th and early 17th centuries, and second, the expansion of manufacturing production and seaborne commerce over the same period.<sup>54</sup> It is important to stress, though, that notwithstanding these facilitating changes, the area still comprised a far less stable *core* for a political structure than either of the two 'traditional' political foci further south.

This was further exacerbated by the fact that there never developed a stable equilibrium between Senji and the domain of the Aravidu lineage, or even a partly viable definition of *meum* and *teum*. This was a zone then that invited ambitious and footloose warrior lineages, who had been edged out either by Qutb Shahi encroachments, or by the shifting structure of power among the *pālēgāllu* of the Karnul–Chittoor–Nellore region. The relative similarity of this landscape to that of their native Rayalasima could only have made the area that much more attractive. The logical umbrella under which such lineages could construct a base was that of the Chandragiri *rājās*: in fact, in each case that we have examined, the lineages in question—the Velugoti clan, the Gobburu family and the Damarla clan—seek to legitimize through participation in Chandragiri court politics a simultaneous and semi-autonomous process in which they are engaged, of building a quasi-state on the ground. One can see in each of these lineages proto-Nayaka figures, whom circumstances, the lack of momentum, and the catalytic role of the Aravidu line itself, prevented from carrying through their endeavour. The Chandragiri kingdom thus embodied a curious logic, wherein it had in part to undermine its supporters in order to secure its own survival in the medium term.

Eventually, with Adil Shahi and Qutb Shahi forces coming to assert

<sup>54</sup> For a more extensive discussion of these issues, see Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *The Political Economy of Commerce: Southern India, 1500–1650* (Cambridge, 1989).



their military control over the area in the late 1640s, the possibilities that were left open to these figures were strictly limited. Most have perforce to accept subordinate positions within the new dispensation; by the late 1660s, the bulk of these lineages have disappeared from positions of prominence, and the vestiges of the clans fall back on a limited territorial ambition.

It is an interesting question to ask whether the nature of political conflict in this period as well as the ambitions of such clans as these was in any way fuelled by the success of the Aravidu chiefs, who were of similar origins and whose roots can be traced back to much the same region. It is important in such a context not to lay too much stress on concepts such as 'usurpation' and 'treason', for it was obviously recognized in the epoch that seen in these terms, the Aravidu line's own claims were dubious. The question of legitimacy, always a difficult one, had been made that much more so by Aravidu claims to the heritage of the Tuluva dynasty through what was essentially a marriage alliance—of Krishnadeva Raya's daughter to Aliya Ramaraja. The key role of marriage alliances—as opposed to stressing merely descent—is in many ways symptomatic of the relatively loose structure, and vertical mobility of the period.<sup>55</sup> As we have seen, both the Gobburi and Damarla families exercised influence over the Aravidu line in part through marriage alliances; a particularly important place seems to have been occupied by brothers-in-law, and the Damarla claim to the reflected glory of Velugoti Yachama was based on precisely such a marital link.

In sum, then, the creation of a Nayaka state depended on the success enjoyed by a warrior lineage on two axes of functioning. On the one hand, horizontal legitimacy had to be assured by carving out a territory and successfully defending it against rival claimants. On the other hand, given the fact that the essence of the Nayaka state consisted of making a *limited* claim, it was important to gain vertical legitimacy from the titular overlords—in the case at hand the Aravidu lineage. Herein lay the problem, for the Chandragiri *rājās* of the Aravidu clan were at

<sup>55</sup> Some parallels exist, therefore, between this and other elite formations based on kinship; see, for example, K. Leyser, 'The German Aristocracy from the 9th to the early 12th century: A Historical and Cultural Sketch', *Past and Present* 41 (December 1968), pp. 25–53, and more particularly, Leyser, 'Maternal Kin in Early Medieval Germany: A Reply', *Past and Present* 49 (1970), pp. 126–34. For the contrast between this period and earlier Telugu political structures, for instance under the Kakatiyas [c. 1175 to 1320], see Cynthia Talbot, 'Master and Servant: Bonds of Allegiance in Medieval Andhra', paper presented at the *Sixteenth Annual Conference on South Asia*, Madison, Wisconsin, 8 November 1986.

one and the same time superior to and rivals of such clans as the Velugoti and Damarla lineages. The failure of the proto-Nayaka figures described above, including Velugoti Yachama, rested in great measure then on timing. In the mid-16th century, when the successful Nayaka states were formed, a sufficient social and political distance existed between the Nayaka lineages and the Tuluva dynasty to permit a process by which consolidation on the horizontal axis could be legitimized *ex post facto* on the vertical axis. In contrast, the Velugoti clan, as well as other claimants to Nayaka status, could not afford such a luxury in the context of the 17th century, when overlords had become competitors as well.

But the existence and interaction of these two functional axes, including their mutually supportive feedback mechanisms, cannot exhaust the problem of the Velugoti clan's frustrated career. There were other deeper currents flowing through the 17th-century Nayaka polities; the very amplitude of the Velugoti family history, and the impulse towards documentation and self-assertion that this history reflects, allows us to sense the passing of one paradigm, and the gradual and tentative emergence of another. Historically, state formation in medieval south India had involved, in addition to the issues of power and control articulated along the axes we have mentioned, a third vector relating to processes of potential self-transformation and self-transcendence. In the Tamil south, this vector had been connected with institutional mechanisms of endowment, mostly to Brahmins and temples, with the attendant assimilation of *varṇa* ideology in its normative forms. There are various ways in which this aspect of statehood could come into play: in many cases, one can observe a real historical shift away from the merely 'heroic' patterns of proto-state kingship—the stage of constant, rather small-scale internecine warfare such as we see throughout the Velugoti materials—towards the more complex and diffuse royal images and functions of the mature political system. This is not the place to attempt a more differentiated picture of this process in its specific embodiments; what can, however, be suggested is that in the shatter-zone of early 17th-century northern Tamilnadu, this shift failed to take place. The dominant ethos of the Velugoti chroniclers is still entirely 'heroic' (after the model of the Telugu folk-epics such as the *Palnāṭi virula katha* and the *Kaṭamarāju katha*), and there is still little evidence of a powerful Brahmin presence or of substantial interaction in any form with temple complexes.

In this context, it is striking that the Velugoti genealogy begins with a singular myth of eponymy: a Reddi farmer discovers, while plough-

ing, a treasure in his field, but a disembodied voice announces to him that he can only claim it after offering a human sacrifice (*narabali*); the farmer's untouchable Mala servant, Recha (or Echa), volunteers to be sacrificed in this cause, on the condition that the Reddi family bear *his* name (hence the Recherla Reddis, from whom the Velugoti clan claims descent), and that rituals performed in the Reddi household be symbolically linked with the Malas. Following this sacrifice, and a heroic encounter with a *vetāla* demon, the Recherla ancestor comes to the notice of the Kakatiya king Ganapati, who then propels the family into wider regional politics. This story, which recurs in various Velama sources, deserves careful analysis; here we may note simply that for the Velugoti bards, the long-dead Kakatiyas could for certain purposes be a more salient and useful symbolic support than the contemporary Aravidus. So much for the vertical axis; in terms of horizontal claims, the story points to the peasant warriors' ideology of physical control of land (with its hidden wealth), and of necessary, in some sense legitimating, violence. The real contrast lies here with the origin myth of the Tanjavur Nayakas, who claimed high status almost *purely* by virtue of intermarrying with the Vijayanagara royal family—a marriage arranged by these Nayakas' founding figure, the famous Brahmin minister and *guru* Govinda Dikshita, who fills the pages of the early Tanjavur courtly poems. Tanjavur, building directly on medieval precedents, looked to this emblematic figure, and, initially at least, to the Mannargudi temple, to underwrite their expansion into statehood (albeit of a new type). The Velugoti family, their expansion on the ground largely blocked for the structural reasons we have cited, seem to have looked elsewhere, even in Yachama's generation—above all to the coast, with its emerging commercial possibilities involving relatively mobile resources in an expanding economy. This movement, unfolding still on the level of painfully crystallizing proto-statehood, led away from the older, once-prestigious models of south Indian kingship, and even the established states of Madurai and Tanjavur were attracted, in their own ways, to the new paradigm. A new option had begun to open up within the Nayaka system—an option of commercially rooted power and political structure, which would eventually provide the model and idiom of Company rule in this part of the subcontinent.