

IN PRAISE OF SHAHUL HAMID: HISTORICIZING AN ISLAMIC TAMIL  
HAGIOGRAPHICAL TRADITION, 1650-1950

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*Dedicated to the memory of*

*Jānaki Pāṭṭi*

*1913-2006*

*A saint in her own right*

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Historians, unlike anthropologists, rarely acknowledge the role of all the ‘extra-textual’ facilitators and interlocutors of their research, creating the impression in the minds of students that historical research is mostly, even exclusively, ‘archival work’. But my experience in the proverbial ‘field’ brought home to me, acutely, that research and scholarship are deeply collaborative processes. And perhaps the most generous contributors to this dissertation were all the people I met and interacted with during my research year. With profuse apologies to all the people I may have left out, I wish to acknowledge here the kindness, warmth, and generosity of Kombai Anwar, Indira Subramanian, and Roshan Nair in Chennai, Liaqhat Ali Kaleemullah in Pondicherry, M.G.K. Nizamuddeen, M.G.K. Sirajuddeen and Thajuddin Sahab in Nagore, Sayabu Maraicar, Naseema Bhanu, and Abdul Rasheed in Karaikkal, and the late Thoppil Muhammad Meeran and his family in Tirunelveli, Nanda P. Wanasundera, Nilam Hamead, and Muhammad Anas in Sri Lanka, Salma Nausutian Khoo and Abdur-Razzaq Lubis in Penang, Lennart Bes, Swati Sen Gupta, and Sanjukta Sunderason in the Netherlands, and finally, Hugh Waddington and Ankita Sud in London. I shall never forget your warmth, kindness, and generous hospitality.

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## ABSTRACT

### IN PRAISE OF SHAHUL HAMID: HISTORICIZING AN ISLAMIC TAMIL HAGIOGRAPHICAL TRADITION, 1650-1950

Samira Junaid

Daud Ali and Daves Soneji

This dissertation analyzes the emergence and development of an Islamic Tamil venerative tradition surrounding the figure of Shahul Hamid and the site of the Nagore dargah, the most important Sufi shrine in South India, over the course of the sixteenth to twentieth centuries. Based on an examination of history of Islamic Tamil literary production, it identifies the growing prominence of Shahul Hamid within the pantheon of figures venerated by the Muslims of South India. However, with the meagre attention having been paid by scholars of Tamil literature and historians being wont to engage with their seemingly fantastical content, the popularity and significance of this literary hagiographical corpus remains unexamined. Indeed, second only to the Prophet Muhammad and ‘chief among the sufis’, Abdul Qadir Jilani, Shahul Hamīd thus enjoys the distinction of being chief among the Sufis of South India. His life and works, re-constructed in the form of stories of miraculous deeds, or *karāmāt*, attributed to him, thus, came to be the subject of numerous literary works composed in virtually the entire array of ‘major’ and ‘minor’ genres of Tamil verse, song and prose. Using a portmanteau perspective informed by such scholarly ‘sub-fields’ as literary history, intellectual history, Islamic cosmology, and Sufi soteriology, I attempt to read these texts, simultaneously, as historically situated, literary works, that play an important role in the articulation of Sufi’s spiritual power and authority, his *baraka* and *wilāya*. What these texts offer, thus, is a window into complex and multilayered cultural construction of Sufi’s spiritual, social and political stature, that confounds expectations of a legitimization narrative seeking to ‘localize’ Islam in an ‘alien’ Tamil context.

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## CHAPTER 1

### Introduction: Historiography, Sources, and Method

Located on the Coromandel Coast, in the small and at first sight rather unremarkable town of Nagore, sits the largest and most prominent Sufi shrine complex of South India. Referred to quite simply as the ‘Nākūr tarkā’ (Tamilization of ‘Nagore *dargah*’), here lies buried – it is believed – the sixteenth-century Sufi *walī* or saint, Shahul Hamid. Born in the distant town of Manikpur (located in present-day Pratapgarh district of Uttar Pradesh), how this North Indian *saiyyad*, believed to have been initiated into the Shattari tariqa by none other Muhammad Ghaus of Gwalior, came to become ‘Nākūr Āṇṭavar’ is a story that has been told several times by the Tamil Muslim hagiographers of South India. Yet little attention has been given to these narratives, indeed there has been no attempt as yet to try and understand how and why this émigré mystic came to be the most venerated Sufi of Tamil-speaking South India. While historians, anthropologists, as well as scholars of religion have not failed to take note of the prominence of both the Nagore dargah as well as the tradition of veneration that surrounds the shrine and the Sufi walī buried there, there has been no attempt yet to try and understand this phenomenon in a manner that is attentive either to the historical context of the rise of the shrine or indeed to the rich historical literary tradition that developed around it and the figure of Shahul Hamid. This dissertation, as a preliminary step to understanding the ‘venture’ of Islam in Tamil South India, seeks to put together a historical assessment of the material factors supporting the emergence of the Nagore dargah as well as the literary venerative practices that both document its subsequent development and sustain it. In so doing, it



seeks not only tell the story of Shahul Hamid and the Nagore dargah, but also draw attention to methodological and theoretical challenges we face when we attempt to write history using such a willful ‘source’ as the hagiography.

While the issues in play are discussed in more depth later in this chapter, the fundamental problem that this dissertation has tried to grapple with is how to write the history of as socially well-attested an institution as a Sufi shrine from the early modern period, in the absence of the kind of archival sources that historians are most comfortable with when it comes to making claims of historicity. Indeed, there is rather striking silence in sources pertaining to the Coromandel in the late sixteenth century regarding either the presence of a figure by the name Shahul Hamid or the existence of a cult of veneration surround him and his tomb-shrine in and around Nagore. Indeed, at least one historian has been forced to wonder about the historicity of the Sufi shaikh and whether or not he may have been the figment of a Tamil Muslim venerative imagination. While we are no closer today to finding out the ‘archaeological’ truth of the existence of Shahul Hamid, we do know now know that by the middle of the seventeenth century, less than century since his purported passing, both he and his shrine had become recipients of significant forms of elite patronage and the subject of elite literary modes of veneration.

The earliest historical record attesting the fame Nagore thus comes to us in the form of an inscription recording the construction of a ‘*manōrā*’ or minaret in 1645 by the Rāvuttar (Muslim) ‘agents’ of Vijaya Raghava Nayaka, the erstwhile Nayaka (Hindu) king of Tanjore. It was only soon after this that Shahul Hamid made his debut in an Islamic Tamil literary text. In 1648, the poet ‘Kanakavirāyar’ Ceyku Nayinār Kān of Kayalpattinam included Shahul Hamid within the structured hierarchy of Muslim

‘founding figures’ typically praised in a *kāppiyam*’s invocatory section, in his *Kanakāpiṣṭka Mālai*. Such is the context of Shahul Hamid’s first appearance in the written record, that slight and sparse though the mention itself may seem, it strongly suggests that by the middle of the seventeenth century the tradition of veneration surrounding Shahul Hamid had gained greater prominence than all the other existing Sufi shaikhs and shrines in the region; he was the first ‘local’ Sufi to find mention in elite Islamic Tamil literary compositions. And, this prominence would continue to grow further and be maintained, as further elite patronage contributed to the physical expansion of the dargah complex and Shahul Hamid became more and more central to the world of Islamic Tamil literature, second only to the Prophet Muhammad and Muhammad Abdul Qadir Jilani, founder of the eponymous Qadiriya sufi order with which Shahul Hamid has come to be associated.

The majority of this dissertation relies, thus, on the literary hagiographical practices and traditions that developed – and continue to develop – around the figure of Shahul Hamid and the site of the Nagore dargah, over the course of the period starting from the middle of seventeenth century and going on till middle of the twentieth century. Notorious for their fantastical claim-making, hagiographies are texts that find themselves in the rather interesting position of being on the one hand very popular and widely produced, circulated, and consumed, and on the other considered by the scholars of history, religion, and literature as constituting at best something unreliable, inauthentic, and uninteresting. They thus form, as I found in the case of Shahul Hamid and the Nagore dargah, an incomparably rich and socially significant archive that has been able to draw no systematic attention from scholars of any of these fields. As is to be expected, the

density of materials available and accessible from this rather long period is variable and increases substantially as we come into the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with the popularization of print. The works themselves are composed in a number of different genres, ‘high’ and ‘low’, not usually studied together as part of one composite tradition. The most compelling reason for us to do so here, in addition to the share thematic focus of these works, is the fact many of these genres shared the same poets – the ‘high’ and ‘low’ stylistic differences do not map on to equivalent social correlates. What these texts offer us is a complex and changing archive of the social construction and representation of a Sufi’s spiritual authority, as rendered by South India’s Tamil Muslim poets using particular literary forms and practices of the region in very specific and deliberate ways.

The present chapter is intended as an introduction to the discussions that follow. Here I do four things: provide a brief overview of Shahul Hamid’s life as it has come down to us in hagiographical narratives, review extant scholarship that offers a commentary -- directly and indirectly -- on the history of Islam in Tamil-speaking South India, discuss the kinds of sources this dissertation relies and the methods I have used to make sense of them, and, finally, offer brief descriptions of the discussions and arguments that animate each of the four chapters that follow and the overall contribution this dissertation hopes to make to our understanding of the history of the Nagore dargah, and to ‘Tamil Islam’ more broadly speaking. So, to begin with, the story of Shahul Hamid, as it has come down to us today via his many hagiographers.

Shahul Hamid was born, according to one authoritative account, on the 10th day of Rabi al-Awwal, the third month of the Islamic lunar calendar in the *Hijri* year 910, or

21 August 1504, in the North Indian town of Manikpur (Tam. Mānikkapūr), usually described as being in the vicinity of Ayodhya. Both, his father Hasan Quddoos and mother Fatima Bibi, are described as *sayyids* who traced their descent to the Prophet Muhammad. The importance of this aspect of Shahul Hamid's history can perhaps be gauged from the fact almost all hagiographical narratives about him begin by laying out, in detail, his *shajarah* or family tree. Also included in this context is an emphasis on his familial descent (and kinship, therefore) with Abdul Qadir Jilāni and *silsilah* or chain of authority connecting him with Muhammad Ghaus, the Gwalior-based Shattari sufi who was Shahul Hamid's *shaykh* or preceptor. If his descent was one factor that contributed to Shahul Hamid's nobility, the signs of sainthood began to manifest, according to the hagiographical tradition, right from his conception. When Fatima was pregnant, she was visited by the Prophet Khidr (Tam. Kalīru) in a dream state and informed that her child had been chosen by Allah to be a *qutb*. In her sixth month of pregnancy, early one morning, having accidentally knocked over a pail of water that she had drawn for the purposes of performing ablutions before prayers, Fatima was stunned to find another pail full of water waiting in its place. The miracles continued after his birth, of course. On one occasion, when nobody in Manikpur was able to sight the new moon, baby Shahul Hamid refused his mother's milk in order to indicate the start of Ramadan.

Shahul Hamid's spent his early years were in Manikpur itself, where he received the kind of Islamic education was the norm and custom at the time for a sayyid like him, and of course, at this he was prodigiously talented. At the age of eighteen, desirous of acquiring further knowledge with a Sufi shaykh, on the advice of his father he left for Gwalior, home to Muhammad Ghaus, well known Shattari sufi. Along the way, using his

miraculous powers, he was able to convert a band of 404 highway robbers into his followers, and arrived along with them to the outskirts of Gwalior. His teacher, it is remembered, having had a premonition about the arrival of an especially gifted student, sent out a company of his own students to receive Shahul Hamid and escort him back to his hospice, thereby overturning the key custom of the student seeking the teacher. Here Shahul Hamid stayed for the next ten years, receiving a training in his master's *tariqa*. One day, while in Gwalior, Shahul Hamid had a dream in which he was accompanied by the Prophet Khidr through the seven levels of heaven, along the way meeting the angels and djinns, all the ancient prophets, his ancestor Abdul Qadir Jilani, the Prophet's companions and the Prophet himself, before encountering the throne of Allah itself. There God is said to have made his majesty manifest to Shahul Hamid, informing him of his mission as a *qutb* of the age. Known as the *mukāṣafa*, 'the lifting of veils', this experience seems to have acted as a catalyst for the next phase of Shahul Hamid's life. Refusing the hand of his teacher's daughter in marriage, Shahul Hamid sought his shaykh's leave to undertake the *hajj* pilgrimage.

Thus, in year 28 of his life began a new stage of his life, that of pilgrimage and itinerancy. Before he left the country, though, another important miracle took place. Having visited Ajmer and the dargah of Muinuddin Chishti, Shahul Hamid had made his way to Lahore, the final resting place of famous 11<sup>th</sup> century Sufi Ali Hujwiri. There he was visited by a childless *sayyid* couple, yearning to have children. Shahul Hamid agreed to help, but on the condition that they would have relinquish their claim over first child thus born and let him seek his spiritual father whenever he expressed the wish to do so. The couple agreed, and the following morning Nuruddin the husband took some betel

leaf that been chewed by Shahul Hamid and gave it to his wife to ingest, following which she stayed in seclusion for 40 days. Bibi Zohra, the wife, became pregnant as promised. Meanwhile, Shahul Hamid had commenced his *hajj* pilgrimage. Lasting a total of twelve years, his foreign travels comprised of more than just a visit to the holy cities of Mecca and Medina, he is remembered as having gone to Anatolia, all the way up to Jerusalem, to Baghdad and Karbala, as well Khorasan, among other places, spending up to 40 days in meditative seclusion at each of these sites. Along the way once again he had many miraculous experiences, most significant among which – from the point of the hagiographers at least – was being joined by his adoptive Yusuf. Having attained the age of seven, the young boy is recounted as having one day approached his birth parents and enquired about the identity of his true father, just Shahul Hamid had predicted would happen. At this time, following the instructions given to them, Nuruddin and Zohra Bibi gave to the young boy the *miswak* that had been left behind by the Sufi shaikh, which would guide him in his journey to find his father. With his father's *miswak* to guide him, the young boy of seven boarded a ship and set sail for Mecca, where Shahul Hamid already anticipated his arrival.

Reunited with him, Shahul Hamid and his band of followers now set sail towards India, first arriving at Ponnani on the Malabar coast, then sailing to the Maldives, from whence they went to the island of Sri Lanka and Shahul Hamid climbed to the top of Adam's Peak. From here began his journey to the Tamil country, arriving first at Kayalpatnam. The period of itinerancy was still not over, as the *walī* and his entourage now traveled overland to Kilakarai, Natham, Trichy, Tanjore, Tiruvarur, Kuttānallur, and Potikai malai. At each of these places too, Shahul Hamid is credited with a variety of

different kinds of miracles, the most famous of being of course curing the king of Tanjore from the effects of life-threatening black magic, discussed in greater detail in chapter 3. Finally, then, at the age of forty he arrived in Nagore, where he settles down with his son and followers. Here he remains for the remainder of his life, before passing away at the age of 68, on the 10th day of Jumada al-Akhira in *Hijri* 978, or 9th November 1570. Of course, the story of Shahul Hamid does not really end there. For, after his passing, Yusuf, now a married man, having promised to his father that he would not leave Nagore, came to settle there, with six sons and two daughters. Gradually, the small shrine built around his father's grave by Yusuf, and first patronized by the fisherman of Nagore, came to grow in size and became the recipient of monumental endowments, as shown by the five uniquely shaped *manōras* or minarets that give to the Nagore dargah its distinguishing physical features. Miracles too continued to take place, and it is a testament to their importance, both to the memory of the Sufi shaikh and to the power of his shrine, that they were sought to be included in later hagiographies, keeping up to date, as it were, his *curriculum vitae*.

### **Review of Scholarship**

To a not insignificant degree, my interest in 'Tamil Islam' and the methods that I have come to deploy in my research into the history of the Nagore have been shaped in response to the extant body of scholarship that grapples with the 'question of Islam' in South India. While it is true that the history of Islam in South India is a neglected area of research, this does not mean that the subject hasn't attracted any scholarly attention. In fact, what is interesting about the available scholarship on this field is that it is the

outcome of a kind of second-hand or tertiary interest from scholars, from a variety of different disciplines, in Islam. What I mean by that is that to a striking degree, indeed almost all, of the scholarship on ‘Tamil Islam’ is the work of scholars whose principal interest is not Islam (or even ‘Tamil Islam’) but, say, the political history of South India, or Tamil literary traditions, or Christian conversion practices. In such scholarship, it is not surprising that ‘Tamil Islam’ or ‘Tamil Muslims’ become topics of interest only in relation to a (more) significant other, and not on their own terms. This is not to say that a comparative perspective is not useful, but it is only in the recent past, with the greater familiarization with Islamic Tamil literature that has been possible through the labors of several Tamil Muslim scholars that ‘Tamil Islam’ has started to emerge as a subject that merits attention on its own terms. In what follows therefore, I focus on highlighting the predilections and problems of the extant body of scholarship on Tamil Islam, which has not only been produced by scholars from different disciplinary backgrounds, but also over a long period of time.

Even though modern historians of South India always mention Islam’s comparatively early arrival on the shores of South India and do not fail to reiterate its mercantile and consequently apolitical, peaceful character as contrasted with the military nature of the Islam’s incursions in the North, yet, when considering ‘the impact of Islam’ on the region’s political, social, and cultural history, the focus of their attention has been precisely on the same kinds of military incursions. Subsequent to the publication of Robert Sewell’s *A Forgotten Empire* in 1900,<sup>1</sup> the notion that the late medieval polity of Vijayanagara acted as a ‘Hindu bulwark against Muhammadan conquests’ came to

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<sup>1</sup> Sewell, *A Forgotten Empire (Vijayanagar): A Contribution to the History of India* (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co., 1900)



occupy a virtually axiomatic position in South Indian historiography. Even as later nationalist scholars differed in their estimates of the extent to which the South succumbed to the ‘dreaded invaders’ from the north, the rhetoric of a religio-civilizational clash did not subside and took on the added nationalist overtones of a ‘patriotic’ struggle between ‘native’ Hindu kings and ‘foreign’ Muslim invaders. We see this in the writings of Tamil historian S. Krishnaswami Aiyangar, who begins his 1921 work, *South India and Her Muhammadan Invaders*,<sup>2</sup> with a eulogy to the erstwhile Maharaja of Mysore (and patron of Aiyangar’s work) Krishnarajendra Wodeyar, described as ‘the occupant of the throne of the patriotic sovereign Vīra Ballāla III, who devoted his life to the cause of Hinduism and made it possible for the South Indian Hindus to be the Hindus they are today.’<sup>3</sup>

Writing a generation later in post-Independence India, we see the same kind of rhetorical overtones animate the writings of Nilakanta Sastri, in his *A History of South India from Prehistoric Times to the Fall of Vijayanagar* (1955).<sup>4</sup> In Sastri’s work, in part due to its all-encompassing remit, we find a categorical attempt engage with the question of the impact of Islam on the religious life in South India and in so doing to frame the clash between the ‘Hindu’ South and the ‘Muslim’ North in terms that extended beyond the sectarian identities of the rulers to include the social and cultural mores of the people at large. We find Sastri trying to make two somewhat contrasting arguments: on the one hand he is keen to highlight the depredations suffered by Hindus at the hands of the Muslim invaders, but on the other he wishes to downplay the impact that Islam had on

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<sup>2</sup> Aiyangar, *South India and Her Muhammadan Invaders* (London: Oxford University Press, 1921).

<sup>3</sup> Aiyangar, *South India*, v. Vīra Ballāla III (r. 1292-1342) was the last king of the Hoysala dynasty, who had died in battle fighting against the Sultanate of Madura.

<sup>4</sup> Sastri, *A History of South India from Prehistoric Times to the Fall of Vijayanagar* (Madras: Oxford University Press, 1955).

Hindu religious life in South India. Thus, in his explicit discussion of Islam's influence on Tamil religion, part of a section titled 'Religion and Philosophy', although Sastri begins by saying that 'it is very difficult to say how far Islam influenced Hindu religious thought and practice in the South', he goes on to simply assert that the 'traits of the Hindu revival' that 'have all been held to be in some way or other the result of Islamic influence...may well be explained from the internal history of Hinduism itself', adding simply that 'there is no direct evidence of the active influence of Islam on their growth.'<sup>5</sup> Yet, when discussing 'the movement for the liberation of the Deccan from the Muslims' that began, according to Sastri, almost immediately after the Delhi Sultanate had gained a foothold in that region, he writes:

The people had never willingly accepted Muslim rule. At this time, moreover, they and their leaders were under the influence of a strong revival of Saivism and in no mood to submit passively to the profanation and destruction of their temples and to the corruption and overthrow of their long-established usages. *In its single-minded devotion to Siva, its fanatical intolerance of the followers of any other creed, whom it stigmatized as bhāvis (infidels), and in its ideal of perfect equality among the bhaktas, the new Saivism was a worthy rival of Islam...*<sup>6</sup>

Even though Sastri is careful to suggest that the region was already under the sway of a revivalist brand of Tamil Saivism, the specific qualities he identifies as making it a 'worthy rival of Islam' bear such an incredible likeness to Orientalist constructions of a militantly monotheistic Islam as to certainly cast a shadow of doubt over his claim that these so-called transformations had occurred without any 'influence' of Islam.

One of the problems resulting from such a 'clash of civilizations' type reading of the Sultanate-led military invasions and conquests of the fourteenth-century, and even thereafter, is that historians have struggled to make sense of the instances when 'Hindu'

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<sup>5</sup> Sastri, *A History of South India*, 429.

<sup>6</sup> Aiyangar, *South India*, 226-27, italics added.

and ‘Muslim’ kings seemed to be on the same side. Thus, for instance, when a Hindu king actively seeks an alliance with the Muslim invaders -- as in the case of Sundara Pandya and Alauddin Khalji – it is thus understood as being no more than a temporary exigency, an act of political compulsion.<sup>7</sup> Lasting ties between a Hindu chief and a Muslim overlord, as in the case of Ramadeva I of Devagiri and Alauddin Khalji, are attributed to the former’s admirable if blind sense of personal loyalty.<sup>8</sup> And in such dramatic transformations as an alleged ‘conversion’ to Islam, as in the case of Harihara and Bukka, the founders of Vijayanagara, historians’ interpretations have ranged between the assertion that the ‘conversion’ wasn’t thorough going, could not have happened,<sup>9</sup> and wasn’t actually a ‘religious’ transformation at all.<sup>10</sup>

On the question of conceptualizing the impact of ‘Islam’ on the ‘Hindu’ political culture of South India, following Marshall Hodgson,<sup>11</sup> Philip Wagoner too suggests that an analytical distinction must be made between the realms of religion proper and political culture within the civilizational matrix of the wider Muslim world.<sup>12</sup> According to Wagoner, such an analytical separation enable us to understand, for instance, why the Hindu kings of Vijayanagara would choose to adorn themselves with titles like *Hindurāyasuratrāṇa*, which translates to ‘Sultan among Hindu kings’, or cloth their bodies in very public settings in costumes that belonged to the Arab world. For Wagoner,

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<sup>7</sup> Aiyangar, *South India*, 96.

<sup>8</sup> Sastri, *A History of South India*, 219.

<sup>9</sup> Hermann Kulke, ‘Maharajas, Mahants and Historians. Reflections on the Historiography of Early Vijayanagara and Sringeri,’ in Anna Libera Dallapiccola and Stephanie Zingel-Ave Lallement, eds, *Vijayanagara-City and Empire: New Currents of Research* (Stuttgart: Steiner Verlag Wiesbaden GmbH, 1985), 125, cited in Philip Wagoner, “Sultan among Hindu Kings”: Dress, Titles, and the Islamicization of Hindu Culture at Vijayanagara, *The Journal of Asian Studies* 55.4 (Nov., 1996): 873.

<sup>10</sup> Wagoner, “Sultan among Hindu Kings”, 873-874.

<sup>11</sup> Marshall Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization, Vol. 1: The Classical Age of Islam* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1974), 57-60.

<sup>12</sup> Wagoner, “Sultan among Hindu Kings”, 873-874.

neither practice indexed anything ‘religious’ per se, rather, it publicly signaled the ability and willingness of a fifteenth-century Hindu state’s kings to participate in the wider Islamicate political culture, with which Vijayanagara shared physical borders as well as trading connections. Even as this marks a step forward in terms of scholarly commitment to understanding the interpenetration of Islamic/ate ideas and practices into Indic or ‘Hindu’ political societies, and while the Islamic/Islamicate distinction may be useful as a heuristic tool, it is harder to explain how such a distinction would have been effected and sustained historically.<sup>13</sup> If one reason for inadequate attention paid to the Muslim polities of South India is the deeply engrained view of the region as being characteristically, if not essentially, ‘Hindu’, historians who do work on Sultanate and Mughal era polities have also not been motivated to include the south within their conceptualization of an Islamicate South Asia. Periods of ‘Muslim’ rule in the Tamil-speaking South India have thus remain largely unexplored. This is true not just of such early states as the Sultanate of Madura, for which sources are relatively sparse, but also of later periods, once Aurangzeb had extended Mughal authority over the Deccan, and later still, when Hyderabad and Arcot emerged as successor states with *peshkashi* rights over areas further south.<sup>14</sup> The one exception to this state of lasting neglect has been the figure of Tipu Sultan, Muslim ruler of Mysore between 1782-1799, whose heroic albeit ultimately unsuccessful stand against the armies of the East India Company first earned him the

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<sup>13</sup> Moreover, it needs to be pointed out here that Hodgson’s conceptualization of a difference between religious and cultural realms of practice was meant principally to explain the abundance of seemingly non-Islamic practices among Muslims. Hodgson does talk about the participation of non-Muslims in an ‘Islamicate’ culture, but only as co-members of a particular type of society, for which he coins the further neologism: ‘Islamdom’. The self-conscious if not strategic use of ‘Islamicate’ political practices by an otherwise Hindu king operating in a Hindu society does not quite fit the schema that Hodgson had originally conceived, whatever the problems presented by that conceptualization itself.

<sup>14</sup> M.A. Nayeem, ‘Mughal Documents relating to the Peshkash of the Zamindars of South India, 1694-1752 A.D.’, *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 12 (1975): 425-432.

latter's grudging respect, and later the attention of historians, who have understood him variously as patriot, modernizer, zealot, and, more recently, a parvenu 'Sultan' seeking legitimacy among Hindu kings.<sup>15</sup> Another area of South Indian historiography in which Muslims do emerge as important figures is maritime commerce. With the development of the field of 'Indian Ocean studies', historians began to pay greater attention to peninsular South India, whose long eastern and western coastline played a very important role in connecting the Bay of Bengal littoral system with that of the Arabian Sea, in addition to making possible the movement of goods out of and into the subcontinental hinterlands. Turning specifically to the coastline abutting the Tamil country, the Coromandel and Pearl Fishery Coast as they are known, the work of Sinnappah Arasaratnam<sup>16</sup> Sanjay Subrahmanyam,<sup>17</sup> and more recently Raja Mohamed,<sup>18</sup> has shed some light on the Muslim maritime communities that were settled in the multiple small and middling port towns along the length of the Tamil coastline and the roles played by them in both coastal

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<sup>15</sup> Kate Brittlebank, *Tipu Sultan's Search for Legitimacy: Islam and Kingship in a Hindu Domain* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997).

<sup>16</sup> Arasaratnam wrote extensively on the subject, but his key work is the monograph *Merchants, companies and commerce on the Coromandel coast, 1650-1740* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1986), an examination of the impact of the expansion of European trading companies, especially the Dutch VOC, along the southeastern coast of India. Other important articles include: 'A note on Periathamby Marikkar - a 17th Century Commercial Magnate', *Tamil Culture* 11(1), 1964: 51-7; 'The Dutch East India Company and Its Coromandel Trade 1700-1740', *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde, Deel* 123.3 (1967): 325-346; 'Some Notes on the Dutch in Malacca and the Indo-Malayan Trade 1641-1670', *Journal of Southeast Asian History* 10.3, International Trade and Politics in Southeast Asia 1500-1800 (Dec., 1969): 480-490; and 'Trade and Political Dominion in South India, 1750-1790: Changing British-Indian Relationships', *Modern Asian Studies* 13.1 (1979): 19-40.

<sup>17</sup> The key work here is Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *The Political Economy of Commerce: Southern India 1500-1650* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1990). Also important are two later essays that attempt to incorporate the role of maritime commerce in the changing political economy of the region in the eighteenth century, when British paramountcy was being established. See Subrahmanyam, 'The Politics of Fiscal Decline: A Reconsideration of Maratha Tanjavur, 1676-1799', *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* 32.2 (1995), 177-217, and Sanjay Subrahmanyam and Muzaffar Alam, 'Exploring the Hinterland: Trade and Politics in the Arcot Nizam (1700-1732)', in Rudrangshu Mukherjee and Lakshmi Subramanian, eds, *Politics and Trade in the Indian Ocean World: Essays in Honour of Ashin Das Gupta* (Delhi: OUP, 1998), 113-164.

<sup>18</sup> J. Raja Mohamed, *Maritime History of the Coromandel Muslims: A Socio-Historical Study on the Tamil Muslims 1750-1900* (Chennai: Directory of Museums, Govt. Museum, 2004).

and oceanic sailing and shipping. Valuable though these studies are, based almost entirely on European archives that were the creation of actors and agencies that were to a large degree in competition with the Muslim mercantile communities, the picture we get from them is incomplete.<sup>19</sup> Unfortunately, hitherto no sources have been found that allow us to adequately reconstruct even the social organization of these mercantile communities. In this state of sparse knowledge, an important contribution to our understanding of the profile and portfolio of these mercantile Muslims has come via historical studies of Southeast Asia, where trade and politics were much more intimately connected and for which reason the authority of prominent Tamil Muslim merchants could be seen extending inland, beyond the realm of commerce.<sup>20</sup>

Studies of Tamil Muslim society have mostly been the work of anthropologists and sociologists, who began to engage with these questions in the 1970s. A number of scholars, prominent among them Kenneth McPherson,<sup>21</sup> Mattison Mines,<sup>22</sup> M.M.

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<sup>19</sup> See, for instance, Arasaratnam and later Subrahmanyam's discussions about how Dutch sources recount the role of 'Perithambi' Maraikkāyar in the politics and commerce of seventeenth century Ramnad and the Fishery Coast. Arasaratnam, 'A note on Periathamby Marikkar'; David Shulman and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, 'Prince of Poets and Ports: Citakkati, the Maraikkayars and Ramnad, ca. 1690-1710,' in Anna Liberica Dallapiccola and Stephanie Zingel-Ave Lallement, eds, *Islam and Indian Regions*, Vol. 1 (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1993), 497-535.

<sup>20</sup> Barbara Andaya, 'The Indian "Saudagar Raja" in Traditional Malay Courts', *Journal of the Malaysian Branch Royal Asiatic Society* 51.1 (1978), 12-35.

<sup>21</sup> McPherson, 'The Social Background and Politics of the Muslims of Tamil Nad,' *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 6.4 (1989), 381-402.

<sup>22</sup> Mines, 'Social stratification among Muslim Tamil in Tamil Nadu, South India', in I. Ahmad, ed., *Caste and Social Stratification among the Muslims* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1973); 'Urbanization, Family Structure and the Muslim Merchants of Tamil Nadu,' in Imtiaz Ahmad, ed., *Family, Kinship and Marriage among Muslims in India* (Delhi: Manohar, 1976), 297-317; 'Islamization and Muslim Ethnicity in South India,' in I. Ahmad, ed., *Ritual and Religion Among Muslims in India* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1981), 65-89.

Mauroof,<sup>23</sup> Frank Fanselow,<sup>24</sup> Susan Bayly,<sup>25</sup> and Dennis McGilvray,<sup>26</sup> wrote articles on various aspects of Tamil Muslim society, focusing especially on social organization and stratification, and the relationship between language and ethnicity when mediated by religion. Although the questions and arguments put forth by these scholars do differ in specifics, operational in their work is a shared underlying conception of ‘Islam in local contexts’. Thus, not only are striking differences in socio-religious practice understood as being the most characteristic aspect of Muslim societies found in such locales as West Africa, Southeast Asia, and South India – far away from Islam’s Arab ‘heartlands’, these differences, too, are understood to be a product of the natural resilience offered by these autochthonous societies to an essentially foreign religion. Such a conceptualization, of per force ‘local’ iterations of an essentially ‘translocal’ Islam, is already visible in Aziz Ahmad’s 1964 work, *Studies in Islamic Culture in the Indian Environment*. Over the years, then, Islam itself has come to be defined by a kind of axial contradiction -- between its rhetorical claims to universality and pragmatic accommodation to the locality,<sup>27</sup> or between its ‘purist’ and ‘syncretic’ forms.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Mauroof, ‘A sociology of Muslims in southern India and Sri Lanka,’ in M.A.M. Shukri, ed., *Muslims of Sri Lanka: Avenues to Antiquity* (Beruwala, Sri Lanka: Jamiah Naleemia Institute, 1986), 319-36.

<sup>24</sup> Fanselow, ‘Muslim Society in Tamil Nadu (India): An Historical Perspective’, *Journal Institute of Muslim Minority Affairs* 10.1 (1989), 264-289; ‘The Disinvention of Caste among Tamil Muslims,’ in C.J. Fuller, ed., *Caste Today* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996), 202-226.

<sup>25</sup> Bayly, ‘Islam in Southern India: “Purist” or “Syncretic”?’ in C.A. Bayly and D.H.A. Kolff, eds, *Two Colonial Empires* (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1986), 35-73; *Saints, Goddesses, and Kings: Muslims and Christians in South Indian Society 1700-1900* (Cambridge: CUP, 1989).

<sup>26</sup> McGilvray, ‘Arabs, Moors and Muslims: Sri Lankan Muslim Ethnicity in Regional Perspective,’ *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 32.2 (1998): 433-83.

<sup>27</sup> ‘Hindu and Muslim religions, civilizations and ways of life,’ he writes in the preface, ‘coexisted together well over a thousand years, undergoing alternating or simultaneous processes of mutual attraction and repulsion. Neither the attraction nor the repulsion constitutes the whole story, which is woven in an infinite pattern of points and counter-points.’ The two parts of Aziz Ahmad’s work were thus titled ‘Muslim India in relation to the Islamic world’ and ‘Muslim India in relation to Hindu India’. Ahmad, *Studies in Islamic Culture in the Indian Environment* (Oxford University Press, 1964), xi.

<sup>28</sup> Bayly, ‘Islam in Southern India’.

The clearest articulation of such a conceptualization, for the case of ‘Tamil Islam’, can be found in the influential work of Susan Bayly, titled *Saints, Goddesses, and Kings: Muslims and Christians in South Indian Society 1700-1900*, published in 1989. Notwithstanding its age, it continues to be the most cited work on Islam in South India, and rarely is it noted that the work was intended as a comparative study of the careers of two ‘conversion religions’ in South India, namely Christianity and Islam.<sup>29</sup> Following a structuralist and revisionist approach, Bayly’s book combines the approaches and insights of a variety of scholars, including, Ernest Gellner’s sociological functionalism (with respect to Islamic societies), Clifford Geertz’s interpretive or symbolic anthropology (to understand South Indian religion as culture), Aidan Southall’s ‘segmentary’ states (via Burton Stein, to understand pre-colonial South Indian polities), and the arguments made by Richard Eaton regarding ‘Islamization’ and the role of martial (*ghazi*) Sufis in the Deccan. For Bayly, Islam’s character in the dry upland areas of early modern Tamil Nadu was shaped equally by three forces: a society that was ‘tribal’ and not yet fully incorporated into a Brahmanical order, a political landscape where real power rested with parvenu ‘segmentary’ warlords, and a religious landscape animated by blood thirsty gods and goddesses – not the high Brahmanical gods of the agrarian centers. It was through the agencies of non-institutional ‘fringe’ figures – often warrior-turned-martyr saints -- argues Bayly, that Islam came to be successfully propagated in this region, as these figures found acceptance among the people for their resemblance with the region’s

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<sup>29</sup> Thus, whereas in the case of Christian conversions, Bayly cites the work of Marshall Sahlins in the Sandwich Islands and Jean Comaroff among the Tshidi people of South Africa/Botswana, to highlight how the ‘natives’ exercised agency in the face of their often colonial encounters with missionaries, in the usually precolonial Muslim context ‘the meaning of conversion’ is understood as having little to do with the conscious negotiation or avowal of religious dogma or doxa, and instead comprising only of a rather latitudinarian idea of orthopraxy.



martial gods and goddesses, with the ‘little kings’ for the access their provided to ‘sacred power (with whose sectarian affiliations they were not much concerned), and within the world of Tamil religion, for ‘conversion’ to Islam was understood as not entailing a complete break in consciousness, only the adoption of certain key practices. A complex and synthetic work, whose staying power is a testament to Bayly’s commitment to nuance, the broader methodological choices and theoretical assumptions it is based on, however, have been critiqued since, and make some of the key arguments of her work untenable. For instance, the reliance on notions like a minimalist ‘Islamic orthopraxy’ and gradualist process of ‘Islamization’ as opposed to more thorough-going or drastic models of ‘conversion’ to Islam, which entail the idea of a perfunctory or temporary adoption of the religion. Or, the sociological overdetermination of religious forms, which produce an ‘urban’ Islam, which is seen as being markedly dissimilar to ‘rural’ or ‘tribal’ Islam. Or the idea of sociocultural essences, pertaining in this instance to the understanding of power, which, following Emile Durkheim, is viewed as being fundamentally sacral and something that temporal authorities need to source from and have legitimized by divinities and their shrine but which does need to concern itself with sectarian specificities or difference. While Bayly’s work now seems obviously dated and in need of updating, it should be pointed out that some of these critiques were available even at the time when the work was published, but they do not find any acknowledgement in Bayly’s writing, nor have they made an impact on the authoritative position it enjoys in the field.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> The most important of these is no doubt, Talal Asad, ‘The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam’, *Occasional Paper Series*, Centre for Arab Studies, Washington, DC, 1986. Although he concerns himself essentially with the discipline of Indology, but with the awareness that this has important fallouts for other disciplines working on modern and premodern India, we may also include here Ronald Inden, ‘Orientalist

It may be noted here that the groups that form the subjects for these anthropological and sociological studies of Tamil Muslim society — such as the Labbais, Ravuttars, and Maraikkāyars, to name the most prominent -- were first identified as such by colonial ethnographer-administrators surveying the region in the late nineteenth century. Frequently, scholars will even cite the Census as the source of these categories, with little interest in trying to critically investigate either their historical accuracy or their political valence given their imbrication in colonial administrative needs.<sup>31</sup> What they also ignore is the racialized, late-nineteenth century understanding of Islam's spread in Indian society that those ethnographic surveys articulated.<sup>32</sup> Thus, the Census of 1901, which Susan Bayly cites in her study of 'Islam in Southern India', begins its discussion of the 'only some 6 per cent' Muslims identified in Madras Presidency by laying out a racialized tripartite understanding of how they had come to become Muslim: a) 'those who are immigrants from other provinces and countries, or pure blooded descendants of these immigrants', b) 'those who are the offspring of immigrant men by Hindu women of this country', and c) 'those who are full-blooded natives of the Presidency who have been converted to Islam'. If an idea of racial purity and mixing underwrites the Census' further discussion of the principal traits of the Madras Muslims in terms of 'contrasts between Musalman and Hindu customs' and the 'influence of Hinduism on Musalman custom', a similar preoccupation can be seen Bayly's interest in the tension between 'purist' and

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Constructions of India,' *Modern Asian Studies* 20.6 (1986): 401-446. Of course, Edward Said's *Orientalism* was published the same year as Eaton's *Sufis of Bijapur*, in 1978, but we find no reference to any of these scholars or their writings in Bayly's study.

<sup>31</sup> Bayly, 'Islam in Southern India'.

<sup>32</sup> Peter Hardy, 'Modern European and Muslim Explanations of Conversion to Islam in South Asia: A Preliminary Survey of the Literature,' *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* 2 (1977): 177-206.

‘syncretic’ behaviors of Tamil Muslims.<sup>33</sup> Although we no longer find explicit reference to race in modern scholarship, but because of the degree to which the analytical categories of culture or ethnicity that animate anthropological and sociological discourses seem equally immutable, they have served to uphold the late colonial dyadic understanding of South Indian Islam as being pulled in two opposing directions – universal/local, purist/syncretic, Islam/Tamil.<sup>34</sup>

A similar preoccupation can be seen animating the work of a handful of scholars who have studied Tamil literary works composed by the Muslim poets of South India. The subject of Tamil Islamic literature has attracted the attention of such prominent scholars as David Shulman, Paula Richman, and Vasudha Narayanan. Each of these scholars have, in article-length studies, have engaged closely with a small selection of Islamic Tamil literary works with a particular interest in understanding how Tamil Muslim poets made use of genres that had been developed and perfected in a non-Islamic milieu, and the extent to which the latter shaped and altered the Islamic worldview being put forward by these texts. Before we look at their writings, however, brief comment on the status of Islamic Tamil literature within the wider field of Tamil literary history. While non-Muslim scholars of Tamil literary history – both in South India and abroad -- have acknowledged the avid participation of Tamil Muslim poets in the world of Tamil literature, they have been mostly content to cite the names of few authors and works, and have made little attempt at understanding either its historical development or surveying its depth and variety.<sup>35</sup> That work has been done mostly by Tamil Muslim literary

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<sup>33</sup> Bayly, ‘Islam in Southern India,’ 37, and notes 10 and 11.

<sup>34</sup> Mines, ‘Islamisation and Muslim Ethnicity in South India,’ *Man*, New Series 10.3 (1975): 404-419.

<sup>35</sup> See, for instance, Kamil Zvelebil, *A History of Indian Literature: Tamil Literature* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1974), 162. For good review of the problems and limits of the ways in which most scholars

scholars and historians, and not always in a manner that is either systematic or critical; frequently the emphasis is on underscoring the ‘greatness’ of a given work or poet. That said, it is crucial to acknowledge the contribution of one particular Tamil Muslim scholar, Jaffna-born Ma. Mukammatu Uvais, who is in many ways responsible to for giving birth to ‘Islamic Tamil literature’ as a scholarly field,<sup>36</sup> and whose four-volume encyclopedic study, *Islamiyat Tamil Ilakkiya Varalaru* (‘Islamic Tamil Literary History’), though not without its problems, is absolutely indispensable for anyone wishing to make a foray into this field.<sup>37</sup>

Turning then to the English-language scholarship on the subject, in two essays, written roughly ten years apart, David Shulman discusses two rather different genres of Tamil Islamic works, the ‘*Tamīmañcāri Mālai*’, an undated work of ‘880 head rhyming couplets interspersed with brief passages in prose’ that tells the well-known pan-Islamic story of Tamīm al-Darī, and the ‘*Cītakkāti Nonṭināṭakam*’, a work that makes use of a ‘picaresque’ regional literary idiom and form in to praise Abd al-Qadir ‘Periya Tambi’ Maraikkāyar of Ramnad. For the former work, which Shulman acknowledges was ‘very close to the region’s folk epics’, Shulman clarifies that while ‘the text was part of a learned tradition *nourished* by folk elements... [it] is certainly not *derived* from the oral tradition of the area’; for whereas ‘the Hindu folks epics frame purely local themes by an imported, all-Indian framework ... the Tamil Muslim work used an indigenous genre to

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have sought to fit Islamic works into a prefigured Tamil literary history, see Torsten Tscacher, ‘Drowning in the Ocean of Tamil: Islamic Texts and the Historiography of Tamil Literature,’ in Hans Harder, ed., *Literature and Nationalist Ideology: Writing Histories of Modern Indian Languages* (New Delhi: Social Science Press, 2010), 51-83.

<sup>36</sup> Born in 1922, his earliest known published work, titled *Muslim Contribution to Tamil Literature*, was published in Kandy, Sri Lanka, in 1953, and he wrote close to two dozen works, of varying lengths, between then and his passing in 1996.

<sup>37</sup> Ma. Mukammatu Uvais and Pī. Mu. Ajmalkān, *Islāmiyat Tamil ilakkiya varalāru* (Maturai: Patipputturai, Maturai Kāmarācar Palkalaik Kaḷakam, 1986).

develop imported materials'.<sup>38</sup> In subtle but important contrast, however, about *nonṭināṭakam* he observes 'Clearly, this is the cultivated idiom of a community rooted in its specific cultural ambience and self-conscious enough to produce works of art expressive of that specificity.'<sup>39</sup>

Presenting a slight contrast to Shulman is Paula Richman's study of the '*Napikaḷ Nāyakam Piḷḷaitamiḷ*', a work in praise of the Prophet Muhammad composed by the nineteenth century poet Seyyitu Anappiyā Pulavar using the highly stylized and conventionalized Tamil *piḷḷaitamiḷ* genre.<sup>40</sup> Comparing Anappiyā's work to a non-Islamic *piḷḷaitamiḷ*, specifically Pakalikūṭṭan's *Tiruccentūr Piḷḷaitamiḷ*, a sixteenth-century work written in praise of the deity Murukan and held to be 'one of the first extant piḷḷaitamiḷs to a male Hindu deity or saint', Richman highlights the ways in which the former eschews specific aspects of the *piḷḷaitamiḷ* to ensure that the Prophet was not depicted in ways that contradicted normative conventions. Thus, given Islam's strict belief that Allah is a formless, aniconic god, Muslim poets – including Anapiyyā – typically make the Prophet Muhammad or a Sufi saint the subject of their *piḷḷaitamiḷs*. Especially interesting is the way in which they negotiated their way around the erotic overtones of the conventional *bhakti*-influenced *piḷḷaitamiḷs*; Anapiyyā completely eschewed such a depiction, replacing it with a more pious rendering of Muhammad as a victorious hero. For Richman, in a region where 'linguistic choice often shapes literary choice', if on the

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<sup>38</sup> David Shulman, 'Muslim Popular Literature in Tamil: The Tamīmaṇcāri Mālai', in Yohannan Friedmann (ed.), *Islam in Asia, Vol. 1: South Asia* (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1984), 179. Emphasis added.

<sup>39</sup> David Shulman and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, 'Prince of Poets and Ports: Citakkati, the Maraikkayars and Ramnad, ca. 1690-1710', in Anna Libera Dallapiccola and Stephanie Zingelave Lallemand (eds), *Islam and Indian Regions* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1993), 527.

<sup>40</sup> Paula Richman, 'Veneration of the Prophet Muhammad in an Islamic *Piḷḷaitamiḷ*', *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 113.1 (1993: 57-74).

one hand ‘the tradition of *pillaittamiḷ* writing shapes the depiction and praise of the Prophet Muhammad’, simultaneously ‘particular Islamic concerns shape the appropriation of the *pillaittamiḷ* structure in distinctive ways.’<sup>41</sup>

While Richman thus gives the poets and authors of Islamic Tamil literature a lot of room in the way they tailored the use of Tamil literary genres and conventions, Vasudha Narayanan puts a great deal more emphasis on the shaping power of genre in her consideration of the *Cirāppurāṇam*, the most well know and highly regarded of Islamic Tamil literary works.<sup>42</sup> Narayanan argues that the very name of text, which combines the Arabic word *sirah* (biography of the Prophet) with the Tamil word *purāṇam* (derived from the Skt. *purāṇa*, a narrative genre) ‘gives us a hint of what is to follow: the presentation of “foreign” religion in a genre predominantly used by Hindus – a genre shaping a vocabulary of praise and devotion shared with Muslims’.<sup>43</sup> While she too is careful not to read the use of ‘Hindu’ terms as acts of Islamic appropriation, she suggests the opposite, namely ‘the appropriation of the Prophet into the Tamil world, shared by Muslims and Hindus alike’, which she argues ‘is accomplished through the generic use of convention and language’.<sup>44</sup> Unlike Shulman, moreover, she argues that ‘borrowing’ of terms and concepts from Tamil’s other religious lexicons gave shape to a ‘distinctive Tamil appreciation of Islamic theology’ as it provided the fundamentals of the framework in which Muhammad’s life had been narrativized and made sense of. Stated

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<sup>41</sup> Richman, ‘Veneration of the Prophet Muhammad’, 57.

<sup>42</sup> Vasudha Narayanan, ‘Religious Vocabulary and Regional Identity: A Study of the Tamil *Cirappuranam*’, in David Gilmartin and Bruce B. Law, eds, *Beyond Turk and Hindu: Rethinking Religious Identities in Islamicate South Asia* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2000), 74-97.

<sup>43</sup> Narayanan, ‘Religious Vocabulary,’ 79.

<sup>44</sup> Narayanan, ‘Religious Vocabulary,’ 88.

briefly, literary conventions shaped the Tamil Muslim ‘religious vocabulary’ and gave Tamil Islam a ‘regional identity’.

While clearly each of these scholars have a different take on the question of the degree to which Tamil literary conventions shaped instances of Islamic Tamil literature, what brings them all together is the understanding that what these works reflect is the overall nature of Islam in Tamil-speaking south India. In their attempt to accord space to the discussion of Islamic works in Tamil within the field of the study of Tamil literature, these scholars end up privileging the ‘Tamilness’ of these works. In so far as these works are deemed to be expressive of Islam in the region, their ‘Tamilness’ also becomes the defining characteristic of Islam itself. Yet, it remains unclear what this essential ‘Tamilness’ is, for at different points we see the scholars emphasize the influence of ‘Tamil’ literary conventions and genres, the ‘Tamil’ language and lexicon, *and* the ‘Tamil’ religious landscape.<sup>45</sup> What is left undefined is the relationship between a linguistic and literary culture on the one hand, and the religious concepts they express on the other, as well as the kinds of transmutations ideas undergo when expressed, translated, into new languages – all of which are key problems for these scholars. Also unaddressed are questions pertaining the social life of these texts, their production, consumption and circulation, which would help us understand how these works were in fact situated with respect to their societies that they deemed to represent. Arguably, these are some of the questions that need to be taken up for discussion before we reach any conclusions on the relationship between Islamic Tamil literature and ‘Tamil Islam’.

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<sup>45</sup> In fact, at various points the reader gets the impression that in so far ‘Islam’ as a religion appears to be standing outside what is ‘Tamil’, the latter does not merely stand for a language, a culture, or a people, but in fact refers indirectly to the region’s most prominent religious culture, Hinduism.

Before concluding this discussion of the peculiarities and problems defining the approach taken by most scholars of Tamil literature when contending with Islamic iterations of the same, it may be useful to take note of the new directions that have emerged in this area with the entrance of scholars interested in exploring the Islamic world's 'vernacular' literary traditions. Thus, we have Ronit Ricci's *Islam Translated: Literature, Conversion, and the Arabic Cosmopolis of South and Southeast Asia* (2011), which looks at the historical modes in which Islamic texts, ideas, and literary forms circulated within and across a polyglot region, as a way to understand the mutual imbrication of processes literary transmission and translation, and those of religious conversion. Specifically, paying attention to the ways in which the *Book of One Thousand Questions* found re-articulations in both Javanese, Malay, and Tamil, Ricci draws our attention to the important role played by Arabic as a link language that served to connect these vernaculars and incorporate the resulting works into a wider 'Arabic cosmopolis'. More squarely focused on Tamil Muslims is the work of Torsten Tschacher, who has written a number of essays that prompt us conceptualize Islamic Tamil literature as a coherent 'literary culture', 'emerging from a particular historical instantiation of Muslim community.' The thrust in both of these scholars' arguments, as we can see, is to try and think of Islamic Tamil literature not simply as an instance of Tamil Muslim poets 'contributing' to Tamil literature, but equally as participating, self-consciously, in wider, polyglot Islamic ecumene as Muslims and not necessarily as *Tamil* Muslims.

### **Sources, Methods, and Theoretical Frameworks**



As the foregoing makes clear, our understanding of Islam, both in the context of South India but also elsewhere, is shaped perhaps equally by our disciplinary locations, the sources on which we rely, and the theoretical frameworks that we seek either to challenge or bring to bear on the subject of our study. In this section, I address precisely these aspects of the dissertation. I focus especially on the impact of the absence of an ‘archive’, on the issues thrown up by trying to stay within the disciplinary boundaries of history-writing while working with hagiographical texts, and on the difficulty of finding a concept of ‘Islam’ that is flexible enough to bear the weight of scholarly scrutiny, from different disciplinary and theoretical perspectives, without disintegrating into a plurality of mutually distinct ‘Islams’ – like, say, ‘Tamil Islam’, ‘Bombay Islam’, ‘Bengal Islam’, and more. I use this opportunity to highlight, as well, what I think are the key contributions this dissertation makes, both to our understanding of the Nagore dargah and our conceptions of ‘Tamil Islam,’ but also to our understanding of Sufism in South Asia more broadly speaking.

### *Sources*

As mentioned earlier, for scholars who may be interested in Shahul Hamid’s life, especially the last twenty-eight years that he is believed to have spent in Nagore, or even the early history of the *dargah*, all the available sources are remarkably silent. The earliest datable textual record that we have knowledge of today is an inscription from the site itself. Dating to 1645, it records the construction of a minaret by an ‘agent’ of the erstwhile king of Tanjore, Vijayaraghava Nayaka (r. 1634-1673). What this means is that by this time the shrine had already come to occupy a fair degree of social significance --

and given its location in a port town also an economic and political standing -- certainly enough to attract royal patronage. This was the first of five such minarets, the last and the tallest one having been built during the reign of Maratha king of Tanjore, Pratapasimha (r. 1739-1763). These inscriptions, then, form one part of the ‘archive’ that this dissertation relies on, to reconstruct in particular a history of the physical expansion of the shrine complex and the ways in which that entailed the participation of not just the region’s monarchs but also members of the mercantile and commercial groups operating in the wider Bay of Bengal littoral. Other kinds of literary textual materials in which Shahul Hamid finds mention too emerge on the scene in roughly the same period. Indeed, it is interesting to note that, the present evidence suggests that he came to be incorporated into the pantheon of Islamic figures celebrated by the region’s Tamil Muslim poets only after the shrine had already become a recipient of royal *Hindu* patronage. This body of literature, broadly referred as ‘Islamic Tamil literature’, then, forms the bulk of the ‘archive’ that this dissertation relies upon and makes use of.

What is ‘Islamic Tamil Literature’? This is a label that has been used to describe *all* the literature produced in Tamil by the Muslim poets of Tamil-speaking South India, by both Tamil and, following them, Anglophone scholars. While we do not have the space here to provide an adequate description of this vast body of literature, a few important points may be noted. Although the earliest known Tamil composition that contains references to Muslims dates to the 12th century, we begin to get a more steady stream of Islamic Tamil literary compositions – works that have managed to survive down to the present day – from the latter half of the sixteenth century, with Vannapparimala Pulavar’s *Āyira Macalā* (c.1572). While the participation of Muslims in

the Tamil literary sphere was noted early on, in discussions of Tamil literary history we find that most scholars who have undertaken a survey of this field have had very little awareness of the extent of this participation. Thus, even in works as recent and comprehensive in their remit as Kamil Zvelebil's *Tamil Literature* (1974), we find that the scholar's awareness of the field extends only to a small handful of texts and genres, with no first-hand engagement with any of those works. Although we have to wait till 1986 for the first volume of M. M. Uvais's *Islāmiyat Tamil Ilakkiya Varalāru* to appear, efforts in the direction of researching, retrieving, reprinting works composed by Tamil Muslim *pulavars* had been commenced in earnest in the 1953, with Uvais' English language publication, *Muslim Contribution to Tamil Literature*. It is through the efforts of Tamil Muslim scholars like Uvais, S. Muhamad Husayn Nainar, Ceyyitu Mukammatu 'Hacan', and several others, as well as the World Islamic Tamil Literary Conference (first held in Trichy, in 1973), that scholars today can attempt not only to read and interpret individual texts, but as this dissertation tries to do, also attempt to historicize the emergence, growth and development of this rather large corpus of works. While the focus of attention of even the Tamil Muslim scholars has been either such 'great' works as *kāppiyams* ('epic' narratives) like the *Cīrāppurāṇam* or the oeuvre of great poets like Ceyku Apdul Kātiru Nayinār Leppai Ālim Pulavar – author of the first Tamil hagiographical narrative on Shahul Hamid – it is widely acknowledged now that Tamil Muslim poets were neither rare nor were they shy of writing in a number of Tamil literary genres that are perhaps best known today as modes of expression for Saiva or Vaisnava sectarian themes. Last but not least, we must note that while this dissertation makes use

almost entirely of literary works that were composed in Tamil, Tamil Muslims also wrote in Arabic, and to a lesser extent in Persian – these works still await scholarly attention.

The present dissertation makes use of variety of such Islamic Tamil literary works. While the first chapter relies mostly on inscriptional evidence and some data gathered from the ‘archive’ created by the British colonial government, it also engages with introductory sections of some of the early Islamic Tamil *kāppiyams*, which, as already mentioned, constitute our earliest literary textual ‘sources’. It is only in the early nineteenth century that we get to see a fully-fledged Tamil literary hagiographical work about Shahul Hamid, in the form of the *Tirukkāraṇappurāṇam* by Ceyku Aptul Kāṭiru. While the late arrival of this work is remarkable and requires understanding, two things may be noted – first, the popularity of the Nagore dargah was probably at its height at this point, with ‘branch’ shrines emerging in Penang and Singapore to attest to the *walī*’s transnational appeal, and second, this was also a moment that was witnessing a dramatic resurgence of Tamil literary activity by the Muslims of the region; the *Tirukkāraṇappurāṇam* being one nine *kāppiyams* composed in a fifteen-year period in the early nineteenth century. The nineteenth century also witnessed the dramatic expansion of the Tamil printing publishing industry, as the colonial state eased restrictions around ‘native’ access to this technology. Tamil Muslims took to print early, leaving behind a rich ‘archive’ of texts -- also a product of the colonial investment in surveillance and record-keeping – and it here that we start to find a steady flow of works pertaining to Nagore and Shahul Hamid. These works, which were composed in different literary (albeit ‘minor’) genres by a variety of well-known poets and published by reputable editors, do not sit comfortably with our understanding of printed hagiographies

as low brow, ‘popular’ literature that the educated elites disdained to produce or consume. Indeed, the importance of print archives cannot be overstated when trying to explore Islamic sociocultural and religious practices in South India, and this is perhaps best observed in Islam Tamil ‘songbooks’, which preserve a world of Tamil Muslim literary and religious cultural practice that as hitherto been completely ignored by scholars of Karnatak music, in its turn widely understood to be the quintessential mode of expressing a Tamil Hindu devotional aesthetic and experience.

### *Methods*

From the start, the decision to focus only on the Nagore *dargah* has been shaped in equal parts by an interest in trying to write a history of the region’s most important Sufi shrine and an attempt to use a ‘case study’ approach to trying to understand Islam, especially Sufism, in Tamil-speaking South India. A case study approach allows us to take a diachronic view of the shrine and track change over a long period, 300 years in this case. We are able to observe the changes and continuities in hagiographical forms, in the social profiles of their producers and consumers, and changes in their modes of circulation. Within the texts, we are able to track changes in the structure of narratives, changes in thematic emphases, substantial additions and subtractions – all of which prompt us to rethink, as well, our understanding of ‘hagiography’ as a ‘traditional’ cultural form. Instead of focusing on a single text, in the manner in which scholars of Tamil literature have typically engaged with Islamic Tamil literature, interpreting a given work as being essentially an ‘Islamic’ representative of a particular Tamil literary genre and comparing it to a non-Islamic, typically Hindu, example of the same, not only are we able to

compare and contrast texts pertaining to the Shahul Hamid tradition, we are also prompted also to read them against the backdrop of the larger Tamil Islamic hagiographical literary tradition surrounding other Islamic figures. Possible that the reader might find the focus on one Sufi saint and shrine too narrow. We need to survey the wider region's Sufi shrines, as well, and map out their interconnections so as to get a more comprehensive view of this social landscape. But even such a synchronic survey will be incomplete if we don't include overlaps and competing relations that animate what is in fact a multi-sectarian religious landscape. That kind of work is difficult to accomplish for the purpose of a dissertation and remains desiderata.

Before we discuss how these texts have been read and made sense of in this dissertation, it should be noted that in the polyglot literary world of late pre-colonial and colonial South India, when it came to writing in a regional vernacular, Tamil Muslim appear to have written exclusively in Tamil – we find no mention of any Telugu compositions, for instance, another vernacular with significant literary cache in the region. The other major language of composition for the Tamil-speaking Muslims of South India was in fact Arabic, which, as we shall see, also played an important role in the composition of certain Islamic Tamil texts as well, in the form *mūlanūls* or prior, source texts. A modified form of the Arabic script was also used to write the Tamil language – referred to as Arwi or Araputtamiḷ -- a practice we see among many 'vernacular' Muslim communities of the Indian Ocean littoral. We may contrast this predilection for Tamil among Tamil Muslim poets, usually of Qadiri Sufi affiliation, with the almost exclusive use made of Dakkhani (as opposed to Telugu or Kannada or any other regional vernacular) made by the Chishti sufi poets of the Deccan.

In trying to read these texts, then, I have been influenced greatly by the writings of intellectual historian Dominick LaCapra. In his essay on ‘Rethinking Intellectual History and Reading Texts,’<sup>46</sup> LaCapra draws our attention to two aspects of reading texts for the purpose of history writings, and while he is interested specifically in the field of intellectual history, his observations and suggestions, have wider applicability. The first issue he alerts us to is how ‘great’ texts, or ‘complex’ texts as he calls them, appear simultaneously to be under-read and over-determined, that is to say, ‘these texts are often objects of excessively reductive interpretation even when they are centers of analysis and concern.’ The culprit, so to speak, has been a predominantly – if not exclusively – documentary manner of treating texts, sifting and sorting through them for verifiable historical facts in an attempt to ‘contextualize’ and ‘historicize’ the text. Historians, LaCapra pointed out, have been reluctant to absorb the lessons of the linguistic turn, that even ‘the context’ reaches us in the form of further texts (completely imbricated in the structures that produce them) and that there is no reality ‘out there’, past or present, that a text can be understood as simply reflecting. At the same time, LaCapra does not succumb to the siren call of the illimitable plurality of meanings, rather, he insists on a historical mode of reading in which the ‘relation between the historian or the historical text and the “object” of study is understood to be ‘dialogical’; there is much that shapes the ways in which a historian is able to write the history that a given historical ‘source’ allows him to. The second idea that he emphasizes, and that I have made use of in my reading practices for this dissertation, is that for any given historical text, we can identify a host of ‘pertinent contexts,’ as opposed to reposing our faith in unearthing a definitive context.

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<sup>46</sup> Dominick LaCapra, ‘Rethinking Intellectual History and Reading Texts,’ *History and Theory* 19.3 (1980): 245-276.

Lacapra lists six familiar ‘pertinent contexts’ in which readers may try to situate texts can be situated – intentions, motivation, society, culture, the corpus, and structure -- and problematizes them for us in a most productive way. I have taken the liberty here to repeat, at perhaps tedious length, what I take to be the key points being emphasized by LaCapra in his discussion of these ‘pertinent contexts’.

Briefly then, regarding authorial intentions, he points out that ‘to believe that authorial intentions fully control the meaning or functioning of texts (for example, their serious or ironic quality) is to assume a predominantly normative position that is out of touch with important dimensions of language use and reader response.’ About the author’s motivations, similarly, he writes that ‘To believe that a relatively simple understanding of “real life” problems provides the causal or interpretative key to the meaning of the texts or to the interaction between life and texts is altogether implausible’.<sup>47</sup> On the relationship between a given text and historical social context from whence it arose, LaCapra’s arguments -- which build on Derrida’s observations -- are worth repeating in full. According to him,

The larger question raised in Derrida's analysis is that of relating long but intricate traditions...the specific period or time (including some delimited structural or epistemological definition of it), and the specific text. The attempt to delineate the mode of interaction among them requires an interpretation of the text in all its subtlety, and it indicates *the importance for historical understanding of a notion of repetition with variation over time*. In this respect, the relation among long tradition, specific time, and text cannot be determined through a notion of either simple continuity or discontinuity. Nor can the text be seen as a simple instantiation or illustration of either the long tradition or the specific time. Rather the problem becomes that of the way in which long tradition, specific time, and text repeat one another with variations, and the matter for elucidation becomes the degree of importance of these variations and how to construe it. The text is seen as the "place" where long tradition and specific time intersect, and it effects

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<sup>47</sup> LaCapra, ‘Rethinking Intellectual History,’ 257.



variations on both. But the text is not immobilized or presented as an autonomous node; it is situated in a fully relational network.<sup>48</sup>

Regarding the relationship between a text and the culture with which it is deemed to be associated, he alerts us that ‘it is not enough to establish influence or the existence of a shared "paradigm" through the enumeration of common presuppositions, questions, themes, or arguments. One must elucidate in a more precise and detailed way how the borrowed or the common actually functions in the texts in question.’<sup>49</sup> The question of a corpus ‘raises the problem of the relationship between a text and the texts of other writers as well as other texts of the same writer. For what is at issue in this problem is precisely the unity or identity of a corpus.’<sup>50</sup> And last but not least, structure, by which he means the relationship between texts and ‘modes of discourse, structures of interpretation, and conventions or rules’, that is, how they ‘actually function in texts or extended uses of language’. By assuming that the ‘relation is one of coverage on the part of the structures and instantiation on the part of the texts’, we end up with the positivistic position ‘that there are unproblematic realms of discourse that are illustrated by texts that fall within them.’ As LaCapra correctly points out, ‘This view is misleading as it relates to the status of analytic distinctions or structural oppositions and to the question of how these distinctions or oppositions function in texts.’<sup>51</sup>

LaCapra also complicates our understanding of what any given text *does*, by making an important analytical distinction between any given text’s referential ‘documentary’ aspects and its more constructive, ‘work-like’ aspects. While the former allows us to

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<sup>48</sup> LaCapra, ‘Rethinking Intellectual History,’ 260. Italics added.

<sup>49</sup> LaCapra, ‘Rethinking Intellectual History,’ 265.

<sup>50</sup> LaCapra, ‘Rethinking Intellectual History,’ 268.

<sup>51</sup> LaCapra, ‘Rethinking Intellectual History,’ 269.

‘situates the text in terms of factual or literal dimensions involving reference to empirical reality and conveying information about it’, the work-like aspect ‘supplements empirical reality by adding to, and subtracting from, it.’<sup>52</sup>

It thereby involves dimensions of the text not reducible to the documentary, prominently including the roles of commitment, interpretation, and imagination. The work-like is productive and reproductive, for it deconstructs and reconstructs the given, in a sense repeating it but also bringing into the world something that did not exist before in that significant variation, alteration, or transformation. With deceptive simplicity, one might say that while the documentary marks a difference, the work-like makes a difference - one that engages the reader in re-creative dialogue with the text and the problems it raises.<sup>53</sup>

This analytical insight made by LaCapra to caution us against reading and interpreting avowedly ‘work-like’ texts in reductive ‘documentary’ manner, allows us to segue into a discussion of the problem of trying to read ‘hagiographical’ texts in a historical way.

Despite its Christian lineage, the term ‘hagiography’ has come to be used as a shorthand to refer to the practices of ‘writing sainthood’ in a variety of religious traditions.<sup>54</sup> As we might suspect, the role of hagiography and the forms that hagiographical texts took, therefore, differed not just by the religion in question but also the specific historical cultural context in which they were produced. Indeed, the same can be said of the term ‘sainthood’ itself. In Islam, then, there is no institutionalized process by which ‘saints’ come to be canonized by the Church, wherein hagiographies play a very particular and important role. That being said, we do know of several genres of

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<sup>52</sup> LaCapra, ‘Rethinking Intellectual History,’ 250.

<sup>53</sup> LaCapra, ‘Rethinking Intellectual History,’ 250.

<sup>54</sup> The term is a compound of two Greek words, *hagios* (Latin, *sanctus*) which refers to an individual who has obtained such a high spiritual state that he serves as a model of sanctity for others, and *graphie*, or writing. Typically, refers both to the practice of ‘writing sainthood’ and= to the texts thus produced. See, Kirsten Wolf’s entry on ‘hagiography’ in Robert E. Bjork, ed., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Middle Ages* (London: Oxford University Press, 2010), <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780198662624.001.0001/acref-9780198662624-e-2642?rskey=w4zHHU&result=2594>

biographical writing in Arabic and Persian, such as the *manaqib*, (genealogies of holy people and histories of their merits and miracles), *tabaqat* (classical-age collective biographical dictionaries organized by region, time period, Sufi order, or lineage), *tazkirah* (collective biographies), and the *sirah* (biographies of Muhammad and Sufi shaikhs), which can be understood as being hagiographical and which have enjoyed tremendous popularity in the wider Islamic world, including South Asia. In the case of Tamil-speaking South India, when writing in the regional vernacular, Tamil Muslim poets opted to write in the multiple genres deployed by the region's other sectarian traditions to compose hagiographical praise poetry. Hence, we find, that the lives of Muhammad, Abdul Qadir Jilani, and Shahul Hamid come to us in the form of *purāṇams*, *mālais*, *antātis*, *pillaittamiḷs*, *patikams*, *kīrttanais*, *patams*, and *jāvaḷis*, and more.

Historians have been wont to mistrust hagiographies, not least because of the profusion of miraculous and fantastical acts and occurrences in which they seemed to traffic. Incidentally, in the Western world, the charge of forgery and fantabulism against hagiography was first leveled and sought to be contended with from within the world of the Christian Church, with the Jesuit Bollandists undertaking a massive project of 'critical hagiography' to investigate the claims to sainthood made for all pre-Reformation saints. Gradually, with the development of social history, historians began to revisit hagiographies and treat them as a valuable archive that allowed us a view of European agrarian society, from where most saints hailed, as well as the relationship -- sometimes conflictual -- between ecclesiastical authority and the laity that came into focus through the canonization process. Given the sheer numbers of such hagiographies produced and archived, Western historians have been able to deploy quantitative tools of analysis to

track long term changes in the relationship between saints, sainthood, and society. In the South Asian context, it is principally religious studies who have engaged with hagiography, both as text and tradition, using essentially a Weberian framework of analysis. The focus has thus been on the role of hagiographies in establishing and re-asserting the ‘charismatic’ authority that a ‘saint’ is understood to exercise.<sup>55</sup> This is applicable to both Islamic and non-Islamic hagiographical traditions, although the role of the texts thus produced in the life of the communities that author them do differ. Thus, while they frequently come play a part in the devotional liturgies in the non-Islamic sectarian contexts, we seldom see that happening to Islamic hagiographies.

Given Sufism’s centrality to studies of Islam in South Asia, it is not surprising that scholars have had to contend with the question of the problematic nature of hagiographies. Responses have been of various types, and while this is discussed in greater detail later in the dissertation, in chapter 3, it may be useful to note here the broad types of positions taken. Thus, in Simon Digby’s writings we see an attempt to contend with the miraculous by taking a cross-cultural comparative approach and drawing attention to the fact of Muslim hagiographers participating in a much older and ongoing cultural practice, while also contributing new elements to it. Precisely on the basis of the degree to which hagiographical materials contained narratives of miraculous cures and such, Carl Ernst sought to make a distinction between earlier, more authentic *malfuzat* (records of conversations with a Sufi master) and later ‘retrospective’ accounts, with their penchant for fabulation, which he understood as being spurious and unreliable sources for

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<sup>55</sup> See, for instance, Winand M. Callewaert and Rupert Snell, eds, *According to Tradition: Hagiographical Writing in India* (Weisbaden: Harassowitz, 1994) and Vasudha Dalmia, Angelika Malinar and Martin Christof Christof, eds, *Charisma and Canon: Essays on the Religious History of the Indian Subcontinent* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001).

study of Chishti Sufis as historical figures. More recently, scholars have sought to challenge the positivism underlying such a distinction. Thus, Raziuddin Aquil asks us to take more seriously the claims of often militant encounters between Muslim *sufis* and Hindu *jogis*, as well as frequent mention made of ‘conversion’ wrought by Sufis, even if, or perhaps especially because, they disrupt our view of Sufism as an essentially peaceful and syncretic mode of Islam, in contrast with its better known political and militant iterations. Observing the popularity and prominence of miracle-working Sufis in late nineteenth and early 20th century Bombay, Nile Green suggests that these figures may be understood as playing the essential role of cushioning a burgeoning, newly created urban proletariat from the dramatic social transformations being wrought by the age of ‘rational’ industrial modernity. There is, thus, no consensus as yet on how hagiographies ought to be read, contextualized, and treated as sources of social, religious, and intellectual history. What remains true, nonetheless, is their centrality to any understanding of Islam in the Indian subcontinent.<sup>56</sup>

This brings me finally to the question of how I have understood and conceptualized ‘Islam’ in this dissertation. ‘Indian Islam’ is frequently described as being ‘syncretic’, uniquely a product of the harmonious encounter between two civilizational entities – Islam and Hinduism. Notwithstanding the critiques that have been offered, which find the idea of ‘syncretism’ at best analytically unhelpful and at worst a historical, its use continues in both popular and scholarly discourse. A contrast is thus highlighted, between the rigid Islam of arid and tribal Arabia, and its more accommodative *avatar* in

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<sup>56</sup> Marcia Hermansen, ‘Religious Literature and the Inscription of Identity: The Sufi Tazkira Tradition in Muslim South Asia,’ *The Muslim World* 87.3-4 (July-October 1997): 315-329.

agrarian India; Indian Islam is different from Arab Islam. As we read beyond South Asia, and see the ways in which scholars of different disciplinary persuasions have sought to understand the ‘world’ of Islam, which is remarkable especially for its geographical spread, this idea of Islam having a very different character in different geographical regions begins to take on an axiomatic shape, especially for Muslim societies in Africa and Asia. The influence of Durkheimian sociology may be visible here. And with Clifford Geertz, who also wrote about the same regional contexts, while we see a shift from social explanation to cultural interpretation, the ‘problem’ at heart is the same – why does Islam look so different in Java and Morocco as to be virtually unrecognizable. But the fact is, if one may be so bold as to use that word, that they were not that mutually unrecognizable, as historians have shown drawing attention to both premodern and modern networks of circulation, of goods, people, texts, and ideas, associated with Islam. Yet, a post-structuralist suspicion of unities and grand narratives – which seem to be most threatening and pernicious when thinking about Islam -- has meant a proliferation of ‘mini’ Islams, each a unique outcome between the interaction of the universalist ideals of a ‘great tradition’ with the particular realities of a ‘little society.’ A frequent assumption made, as well, is that most Muslims do not understand and are not familiar with these ideals, which circulate in a rarefied realm of literate discourse to which they do not have access. As mentioned earlier, orthopraxy – rather than orthodoxy – is seen as being the hallmark of the ‘ordinary’ Muslim, herself the product, usually, of a process of ‘Islamization’ that is not, whatever it might be, absolute in its ‘success’. From an orthodox and intolerant Islam that would brook no dissent, we thus find ourselves struggling to find a fully Islamic Muslim.

In the posthumously published *What is Islam?*,<sup>57</sup> Shahab Ahmed draws our attention to precisely this paradox, of the veritable ubiquity of practices of the kind that are typically understood as non-Islamic, even *un-Islamic*. Usually, Ahmed points out, such practices are understood either as a leftover from the given society's pre-Islamic past or as an outcome of the influence exercised by proximate non-Muslim cultures. Ahmed, in stark contrast, sees them as forming a part of the normative (as opposed to orthodox) culture of what he calls the 'Balkan to Bengal' Muslim social complex. While his preferred example is that of the wine cup and the wine drinking Muslim, his argument regarding their specifically *Islamic* intelligibility being derived from an epistemological framework that Ahmed calls the 'Sufi-philosophical amalgam' has broader implications.<sup>58</sup> Made up of 'the Aristotelianism of Ibn Sīnā, the Neoplatonism of Suhrawardī, and the monism of Ibn 'Arabī,' it was this intellectual 'amalgam' and not Islamic law, according to Ahmed, that provided the most 'socially-pervasive and consequential thought-paradigm' to Islamic societies and gave meaning to what Muslims did *as Muslims*. While critiques have already been offered about the problem how to delimit Ahmed's rather catholic concept of Islam,<sup>59</sup> what I have found especially useful is his insistence on seeing Muslim practices as self-consciously Islamic and locating them within an Islamic (not Islamicate) intellectual discursive tradition. To the extent possible, I have tried to do the same when reading my Tamil hagiographical literary works written in praise of Shahul Hamid.

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<sup>57</sup> Shahab Ahmed, *What is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015).

<sup>58</sup> Ahmed, *What is Islam?*, p. 31, fn. 76.

<sup>59</sup> Alireza Doostdar, Review of *What is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic*, by Shahab Ahmed, *Shii Studies Review* 1 (2017): 265-282.

## Chapter Outline

The body of the dissertation consists of four chapters, whose contents I describe here briefly. The first of these, the second chapter of the dissertation, is titled ‘Kings, Merchants, and a Sufi Shrine: Shahul Hamid’s Intercession in Coromandel Commerce, 1650-1800’. Here, I examine the inter-connections between the career of the Nagore dargah -- especially its early history -- and the political economy of commerce in the Coromandel coast. Port towns like Nagore played a crucial role in connecting the courts and countryside of the Tamil hinterland with entrepôts located along the other side of the Bay of Bengal littoral, as well as further south along the coast. While Nagore’s significance as a port in this economy certainly predates the arrival of Shahul Hamid, allegedly, in the year 1562, its social and political character does undergo some important changes around this time, as various other ports to its north and south come to be controlled by European trading companies, with, as many historians have noted, a deleterious impact on the native, predominantly Muslim mercantile communities. Portuguese and Dutch control of Nagapattinam in particular, is seen as having contributed to a greater accumulation of Muslim merchants in Nagore, which came to be known as a mostly ‘native’ port. In the absence of sources that allow us to see exactly how Nagore’s ‘native’ port was managed, in this chapter I draw attention, firstly, to the shared vocabulary of patronage extended to the Nagore dargah by both the Tanjore kings and the region’s mercantile Muslims, and secondly, to the ways in which a Sufi is understood, in the early hagiographical references, as having facilitated the conduct of commerce through his various maritime miracles. The dargah may thus be seen as an



institution that mediated, both directly and indirectly, between the world of politics and commerce, occupying a role at once comparable and distinct from the ‘portfolio capitalist’ described by scholars of late pre-colonial South Asia. Whereas the latter disappeared under the changed regime of a colonial political economy, we find institutions like the Nagore dargah reinventing themselves and becoming even more central, now to flows of labor across the Bay of Bengal.

In the third chapter of the dissertation, attention is focused more squarely on the story of Shahul Hamid’s life. We get our first full account of Shahul Hamid’s life in 1812, in the form of an elaborate Tamil literary *kāppiyam* called the *Tirukkāraṇappurāṇam*. Composed by Ceyku Aptul Kāṭiṟu Nayiṇār Leppai Ālim Pulavar, a noted Tamil Muslim poet of the period, the *Tirukkāraṇappurāṇam* is no ordinary hagiography. Made up of 2,576 *viruttam* verses, comprising 56 chapters organized into 3 *kāṇṭams*, it retells the story of Shahul Hamid in the form of an epic narrative, or *kāppiyam*. Hitherto, this form had been deployed by Tamil Muslim poets only to write about the life of such pan-Islamic heroes as the Prophet Muhammad and Abdul Qadir Jilani. Now, for the first time, a Sufi with more regional fame had come to occupy that much vaunted place. How do we read the *Tirukkāraṇappurāṇam*? In this chapter, instead of reading this hagiographical and literary work in what LaCapra has called a ‘documentary’ way, with a view to either cull significant historical ‘facts’ from it or to situate it in a typically pre-given historical context (the late eighteenth century ‘transition’ to colonialism), I focus on the ‘work-like’ aspects of the text. This includes, but is not limited to, thinking about the significance of the *kāppiyam* form itself, not just on stylistic or formalist grounds, but also with respect to the inter-textual resonances it creates, and is

in reconstituted by, with other celebrated Tamil epics and hagiographies, both Islamic and non-Islamic. A different kind of inter-textuality, I argue, can be found operating even at the level of the textual content, too. Instead of thinking of stories that sound too familiar as tropes and/or fabrications, if we pay attention to the ways in which they mimic (but don't actually copy) each other, we can, in my opinion, see the ways in which Shahul Hamid's hagiographers retell his life in a way that situates him within a hierarchy of such other powerful figures as non-Muslim yogis, prior sufis, Muhammad, and the older prophets. Articulating that hierarchy and Shahul Hamid's place in it, I argue, is central goal of the *Tirukkāraṇappurāṇam*.

It is from the latter part of the nineteenth century that we get the bulk of our 'sources' about Shahul Hamid and the Nagore dargah, and these form the bases of the the dissertation's fourth chapter, titled, 'Nineteenth Century Tamil Print Culture and Nagore: "Elite" Hagiographies in Verse and Prose'. As mentioned earlier, with the colonial government easing restrictions around 'native' access to print technology in the 1830s, from the middle of the nineteenth century we find an increase in Tamil print activity. Tamil Muslims were keen participants in this process, and the Nagore *dargah* and Shahul Hamid, interestingly, emerged as popular subjects right from the beginning. One of the earliest Islamic Tamil books to thus be issued was the *Nākaiyantāti*, authored and printed by Ceyku Aptul Kāṭiru Leppai Ālim Pulavar, the author of the *Tirukkāraṇappurāṇam*. Prior to that only the celebrated *Cīrāppurāṇam* had been set to print, also by the same person. Hagiographical compositions about Shahul Hamid and/or Nagore, written in both major and minor genres by some of the best-known Tamil Muslim poets of the region continued to be published right through to the nineteenth century. Certainly, in the Tamil-

speaking Muslim context, in South India and beyond, hagiographical writings and texts did not index either a ‘popular’ religiosity or ‘non-elite’ class location, as has been observed by scholars of other nineteenth-century South Asian Muslim contexts. Indeed, the same poets effected the transition from Tamil poetry to prose, the form in which hagiographies came increasingly to be composed. Print did not immediately come to ‘fix’ the life story of Shahul Hamid, rather it allowed for more people to participate in its re-articulation and enabled the text’s physical proliferation and circulation. Gradually, over the course of the middle of the twentieth century we find the emergence of an authorized and authoritative form of the hagiography, much abridged, that now simply undergoes reprints.

While prose certainly did become the dominant form for retelling the life-story of Shahul Hamid, it was not the only form in which poets were writing about Sufi shaikh even as late as in the early 20th century -- they also wrote songs in praise of him. Preserved in a few archives of Tamil print culture are a number of ‘songbooks’, usually only a dozen or so pages in length, that provide us an invaluable glimpse into a hitherto completely ignored aspect of Tamil Muslim religious life. So complete is the identification today between Karnatak music and the South Indian Hindu Bhakti traditions, that it is perhaps difficult to imagine that Tamil Muslims, too, avidly participated in this sphere of literary and musical practice, well into the twentieth century. However, as we look through the contents of these Islamic Tamil ‘songbooks’, containing compositions in various song genres with explicit mention of such musical aspects as *raga* (melody) and *tala* (rhythm), dedicated to the praise and veneration of not just Shahul Hamid but also the Prophet Muhammad and Muhiyuddin Abdul Qadir Jilani, it

becomes clear that this was an important, indeed normative -- if today much neglected -- aspect of Tamil Muslim religio-cultural life. A practice that Tamil Muslims shared with the region's other religious traditions. In the final chapter of the dissertation, titled 'Songs for Shahul Hamid: South Indian Music in an Islamic Mode', I thus explore this little-known aspect of Islam in the Tamil country.

## CHAPTER 2

### Shahul Hamid's Intercession in Coromandel Commerce, 1650-1800

Most modern-day visitors to the Nagore Dargah are seldom aware of the town's historical importance as a port on the Coromandel Coast. Indeed, even among residents of the town, the memory of boats and warehouses along the Vettaru,<sup>60</sup> the river that flanks the town's northern limit, has grown faint with age. One of the few reminders that remain are in the form of names – Maraikkayar, Nakhuda, and Malumi - titles understood to be connected with a maritime career, and the tableau-like *tērs* or chariots that form part of the dargah's annual *kantūri* festival. On the first night of this twelve-day celebration, onlookers witness the arrival of a boat-shaped *ter*, carrying one of the flags to be hoisted atop the dargah's five minarets. Ties between the Nagore Dargah and maritime commerce that provide the historical foundations for this iconic representation, however, hitherto have not been explored. This chapter attempts to address that lack, by bringing into focus the contemporaneity of the rise of the Nagore Dargah and important changes taking place in the career of the port of Nagore, over the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Using evidence drawn from shrine's inscriptional record, along with archival and literary sources, in this chapter I argue that the rise of the dargah was underwritten by the port's growing significance in Tanjore's political economy. As a port dominated by native trade, emerging as such in the shadows of the European domination of

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<sup>60</sup> A distributary of the Kaveri, the Vettaru flanks the northern end of Nagore town today.

Nagapattinam – by the Portuguese, and subsequently the Dutch – and, ceded to European control only in the late eighteenth century, Nagore’s role as an important port of Tanjore has been noted, but only in passing. The relationship of this career to the dargah’s emergence, on the other hand, remains unacknowledged and therefore unexplored. Yet, it is precisely in this world of maritime trade and commerce that the dargah’s patrons, clients, and caretakers were imbricated. Changes in that material realm, bore important consequences for the wellbeing of the shrine, and vice versa.

Before we begin, a note on the available sources. The paucity of sources on the early period of the shrine’s history is a remarkable fact, given especially Nagore’s proximity to Nagapattinam. Located a mere five miles to the south of Nagore, Nagapattinam had been home to a Portuguese settlement since at least 1530, and its residents would have been contemporaries of the Sufi, who is believed to have passed away in Nagore in 1570. Other scholars too have noted this silence, leading at least one to wonder about the historicity of Shahul Hamid’s existence.<sup>61</sup> A systematic hagiographical narrative account of the Sufi shaikh’s life was composed, for the first time, only as late as the early nineteenth century. Before that, there had been other, much briefer mentions of Sufi and his miraculous acts, but the oldest historical ‘record’ pertaining to Shahul Hamid and the Nagore dargah is in fact an inscription, dating to 1645, found at the site of the shrine complex itself. It is interesting to note, that the physical expansion shrine site and its emergence as a recipient of patronage, in this instance by a Hindu king of Tanjore, pre-dated the first mention of Shahul Hamid in an Islamic Tamil *literary* context. While the remaining chapters of this dissertation engage precisely with those literary

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<sup>61</sup> M. Abdul Rahim, ‘The Durgah of Nagore and the Culture of the Tamil Muslims,’ *Bulletin of the Institute of Traditional Cultures, Madras* (1973): 92-104.

hagiographical texts and Shahul Hamid's illustrious career vis-à-vis them, in this chapter the focus of our attention will be on sources that pertain to the more material aspects of the history of the Nagore dargah and the veneration of Shahul Hamid. Inscriptions such as the one mentioned above afford us a glimpse into the early period of the dargah's history, its emergence as a site of repute, and as a recipient of generous patronage by the region's political and mercantile elites, both Muslim and Hindu. Not only that, as the dargah continued to be a recipient of important acts of patronage, these inscriptions help us construct a picture of the dargah's career all the way until the late eighteenth century. After this, we start to get information regarding aspects of the dargah's material context through archival records, which form the other major set of sources used in this chapter. Important and useful as these records are sources of information, they are not a robust enough archive to help us develop a historical narrative about the Nagore dargah on their own. Extant work on the political economy of South India in the late medieval, early modern, and colonial periods, along with scholarship on Coromandel/Bay of Bengal maritime commerce thus provide the crucial historical context, within which the place of Nagore has been interpellated.

In the discussion that follows, I attempt to establish the links between the rise of the Nagore Dargah and changes taking place in the political economy of Tanjore. I focus on the maritime commerce conducted from the ports of the kingdom, particularly Nagore. I argue that the early emergence of the shrine, datable to the mid-seventeenth century, was closely related to the growth of Nagore as a 'native' port, one dominated by trade conducted by a Tamil Muslim mercantile community. Referred to sometimes as 'Maraikkayars', their close association with the ports of the Cholanamandalam

(Coromandel), appears to have borne them the moniker ‘Chulia’, which is how they are referred by their European and South East Asian observers. A Muslim mercantile community domiciled along the length of the Coromandel Coast, the Chulias were prominent participants in the world of Bay of Bengal commerce, whose history, however, remains woefully underexamined. It has been argued, however, that in this period – namely the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries – the intrusion of European trading companies in the organization of maritime commerce along the Coromandel and in the Bay of Bengal resulted in important changes taking place in the character of trade conducted by ‘indigenous’ groups. One such change, involved the movement and concentration of Chulia Muslims in Nagore, from where they carried on vital import and export activities that served both the Tanjore court and agrarian hinterland.

Using inscriptional, archival, and secondary sources, I argue in this chapter, that contrary to what scholars had previously suggested, the ‘Hindu’ rulers of Tanjore – both the Nayakas and the Marathas – did possess political, administrative ties with the Muslim mercantile community of Tanjore, and the Nagore Dargah came to be a locus for its articulation. Courtly participation in endowing the dargah with material resources, monumental architecture and royal prestige, thus went hand in hand with the emergence of Nagore as a port in its own right. And as the dargah acquired greater acclaim in this manner, it attracted in turn the patronage of mercantile Muslims – Maraikkayars and others – from ports in the vicinity of Nagore, with whom it was linked through trade. Alongside, the dargah acquired certain material rights, in the region’s commerce, notably in the pearl fisheries conducted in the Gulf of Mannar, as well as in the agrarian economy, through the grant of villages in the form of *inām*. As the shrine thus emerged as



an important center of pilgrimage for people – Hindus and Muslims, from the hinterland as well as overseas – a market was built to support the economy of the burgeoning town and its steady stream of visitors, an aspect of Nagore’s social life that continues to be evidence even today. The Nagore Dargah was, in other words, not merely connected but a participant in world of Coromandel commerce in its own right. In different capacities – as merchant, market, mediator, and consumer – the place of the Nagore Dargah in Coromandel commerce would evolve alongside changes in the wider political economy of Tanjore and the Bay of Bengal.

### **Courting Patrons**

As mentioned above, we have very little information about the early history of the Nagore Dargah. Hagiographical narratives contend that the shrine is located today on the same 300 *velis* of land that were granted to Shahul Hamid,<sup>62</sup> during his lifetime by the erstwhile Nayaka, Achyutappa (1560-1614). No independent corroboration can be found for this claim, however, and it is generally held to be a later fabrication. The physical structure of the dargah, according to these hagiographies, began as a temporary wooden construction erected by Sufi shaikh’s son, Yusuf (Tam. ‘Yūcupu’), whose grave lies adjacent to that of Shahul Hamid. It is the local fisherfolk, it is believed, who contributed to the gradual emergence of a more permanent structure as well as the growing popularity of Sufi shaikh and his gravesite. Scholars, on the other, have suggested that it was the Walajah dynasty of Arcot nawabs who were the shrine’s principal political patrons.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> The *veli* is a land measure, of five *kāṇi* or 6.74 acres. J.P. Fabricius, *Tamil and English dictionary*. 4th ed., rev. and enl (Tranquebar: Evangelical Lutheran Mission Pub. House, 1972), 353; *Tamil Lexicon* (Madras: University of Madras, 1924-1936), 3838-3839.

<sup>63</sup> Susan Bayly, ‘Islam in Southern India: ‘Purist’ or ‘Syncretic’,’ in C.A. Bayly and D.H.A. Kolff, eds, *Two Colonial Empires* (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1986), 35-74; Susan Bayly, ‘The final period of

Patronage of a dargah has been seen as the quintessential ritual act of kingship for a parvenu Muslim lineage seeking to establish an independent Islamic state in the south. Certainly the Nagore did hold significance to the Arcot Nawabs, as can be seen from the elaborate pilgrimage that was undertaken in 1820 by the erstwhile Nawab Azam Jah, however, the early history of political patronage at the Nagore Dargah suggests that it was not the Walajahs, but the region's 'Hindu' kings – the Nayakas, and subsequently the Marathas – who acted as the key royal benefactors of the shrine, over the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. We learn this from two inscriptions recorded at the site of the dargah, from two of the five minarets – the earliest and the tallest – that bear testimony to Nayaka and Maratha patronage of the Nagore Dargah. In this section, I discuss these inscriptions, attempting to make sense of their import by reading them against the broader historical context of their execution, focusing on the political and economic ties between Nagore and Tanjore.

Discovered as recently as 1992, an inscription on one of the dargah's minarets contains within its brief text valuable details regarding the dargah's early patrons. Dating to 1645, the inscription records details regarding the construction of this minaret in the 'front entrance' of the dargah. The text of the inscription may be translated as follows:<sup>64</sup>

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Nawabi rule in the Carnatic', in *Saints, Goddesses and Kings: Muslims and Christians in South Indian Society 1700-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 216-237; Sanjay Subrahmanyam, 'Staying on: Portuguese of southern Coromandel in the late Seventeenth century,' *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* 22.4 (1985): 453.

<sup>64</sup> The following is the Tamil text of the inscription:

- 1) Pāttipa varuṣam āṭimācam 10 tēti śrivicaiyaravuka
- 2) nāyakkayyan kāriyattukkuk kattarāna
- 3) matāru rāvuttar nākūr mīrā rāvuttar mutal
- 4) vācalil kaṭṭina minār mīrā rāvuttar
- 5) tarmattukku akitam paṇṇinapēr
- 6) makkatilē akitam
- 7) paṇṇina pāvattilē
- 8) pōka kaṭavārākavum
- 9) keṇkaik karaiyil kārān

In the year Pāttipa, month Āṭi, tenth day, Matāru Rāvuttar Nākūr and Mīrā Rāvuttar, agents (*kāriyattukku kattarāna*) of Śrivicaiyarāvuka Nāyakkayyan, built the *mīrā rāvuttar minār* at the first entrance. Those who act in contravention of this charitable act ('*tarmattukku akitam paṇṇinapēr*'), will be under obligation for the sin of committing an unsuitable act in Mecca and/or killing a killing a pregnant cow on the banks of the Ganga.<sup>65</sup>

The inscription is thus made up of two parts: the first records details regarding the date of execution and the parties involved, while the second records the imprecation. Thus, we learn that in 1645, a minaret in the 'first entrance' to the dargah was built by two men — Matāru Rāvuttar and Nākūr Mīrā Rāvuttar.

As the names of the two men reveal, they were members of the Rāvuttar community, and belonged to Nagore.<sup>3</sup> The latter detail is important for it complicates the picture presented by colonial ethnographic accounts of Ravuttars being an inland community, engaged in the cultivation of tobacco and petty overland trade in Tanjore. It also complicates the distinction that is often maintained between the Maraikkāyars, as a coastal mercantile community, and the Ravuttars, understood to be a culturally distinct inland group. Although this inscription from 1645 appears to stand alone, it suggests that we reconsider the Ravuttars as part of the social fabric of Muslim maritime commerce, at least in Nagore, and perhaps in Tanjore as a whole. At the very least, it is important to

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10) pacuvai koṇṇa

11) pāvattilē poka kaṭavārākavum u u u

See, *Kalveṭṭu Kālāṇṭital* 43 (1995): 36-37. The inscription was originally recorded by the Epigraphy Department, Tamil University, Tanjore, and was reproduced in the journal *Āvaṇam* in 1992.

<sup>65</sup> In 2007, the text of this inscription was published yet again, this time by the Tamil Nadu state government's Dept. of Archaeology. This edition of the inscription, however, despite being a most recent publication, poses certain problems. First, it mistakes this to be an inscriptions from the eighteenth century, in spite of acknowledging that it is from the reign of Vijayaraghava Nayaka (1633-1673). In addition, it does not mention the date ('tenth day') of the inscription, and finally the two names of the men mentioned in the inscription (see line 3), given here as '*eratikku rāvuttar nāvūr mīrāvum*', are also substantially different, and more difficult to decipher.

bear in mind that the fact of their being exclusive social groups is first recorded in late nineteenth-century colonial ethnographic accounts and should not be deemed to extend back in time. Indeed, evidence suggests there were complementary and overlapping occupational titles.

The inscription does not, however, tell us anything about the nature of the business of these two Ravuttar men, but it does establish their connection with the erstwhile king. It qualifies the two men as ‘*śrivicaiyarakuva nāyakkayyan kāriyattukkuk kattarāna*’, literally the doer of the king’s deeds, which may be understood as implying that they were the official agents of the erstwhile ruler of Tanjore, Vijayaraghava Nayaka (1633-1673).<sup>66</sup> We note that the grammar of its text indicates that while these men were the king’s agents, the act of construction being recorded was *their* work, not the king’s.<sup>67</sup> Having said that, mention of the king’s name as well as the imprecations that follow in the second half of the inscription, do give it a seal of stately authority. That Muslims were part of the Tanjore Nayaka polity is not in itself a revelation, although discussions of their participation in South Indian polities, as a whole, is a subject in need of attention.<sup>67</sup> For the more modest aims of this chapter, that is to say from the perspective of understanding the dargah’s early history, the inscription bears great import for it links that history with Tanjore’s commercial and political economy, represented here in the persons of the king and his agents. To understand how, and why such an inscription should exist, we need to

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<sup>66</sup> This is conveyed in the adjectival construction ‘*kattarāna*’, as opposed to the adverbial ‘*kattarāka*’, which would have meant that the construction was carried out directly at the king’s behest.

<sup>67</sup> Interestingly, the first recorded inscription relating to the Tanjore Nayakas, which is used to establish the period of reign of the founder of this dynasty, Sevappa Nayaka (c. 1532-1580), records the ‘Gift of seven *velis* of land to the Faqirs of Samasarupalli by five Mannaiyars of Nanjikottai at the instance of the king (425 of 1924)’, listed in V.Vriddhagirisan, *The Nayaks of Tanjavur* (Annamalainagar: Annamalai University, 1942), 182.

consider the historical context in which it, as well as the minaret itself, came into existence.

We begin on the coast, where the Portuguese at Nagapattinam, settled there since the 1530s, were faced with the prospect of being overwhelmed by the Dutch in the middle of the seventeenth century.<sup>68</sup> The latter, having gotten off to a slow start on the Coromandel coast, managed to finally make a dent in the Portuguese stronghold over Bay of Bengal commerce with the capture of Melaka in 1641, preceded by Batticaloa (Ceylon) in 1638.<sup>69</sup> An important entrepot located in the Straits of Malacca, the Dutch declared that all shipping bound for Aceh or the Malay peninsula would be required henceforth to pass through Melaka, and to pay customs duties there.<sup>70</sup> The principal aim in doing so was not just to collect the toll, but to actively redirect commercial traffic in the region by severing the traditional connections between the other Straits' ports, like Bangeri, Kedah, and Ujanselang, and Nagapattinam, which was at the time the most important center of Asian shipping activity of the Coromandel.<sup>71</sup> The plan, it has been pointed out, was to 'provide freight services from the Coromandel at such low rates as to put Asian shippers out of business; once this was achieved, they would simply withdraw

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<sup>68</sup> A detailed discussion of the Dutch impact on Portuguese trade at Nagapattinam can be found in Jeyaseela Stephen, *Portuguese in the Tamil Coast: Historical Explorations in Commerce and Culture, 1507-1749* (Pondicherry: Navajothi, 1998): 172-187.

<sup>69</sup> For overviews of the early career of the 'Dutch East India Company', the name given by the British to the Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie, or VOC, in the Coromandel region, see Tapan Raychaudhuri, *Jan Company in Coromandel, 1605-1690* (Gravenhage: M. Nijhoff, 1962); S. Arasaratnam, *Ceylon and the Dutch, 1600-1800: External Influences and Internal Change in Early Modern Sri Lanka* (Brookfield, Vt.: Variorum, 1996); Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *The Political Economy of Commerce: Southern India, 1500-1650* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

<sup>70</sup> S. Arasaratnam, 'Some Notes on the Dutch in Malacca and the Indo-Malayan Trade 1641-1670,' *Journal of Southeast Asian History* 10.3, International Trade and Politics in Southeast Asia 1500-1800 (Dec. 1969): 480-490.

<sup>71</sup> Arasaratnam, 'Some Notes on the Dutch in Malacca', 484; Subrahmanyam, *The Political Economy of Commerce*, 205.

the service.’<sup>72</sup> Pursuant to this policy, on 12th April 1642, five Dutch ships began a blockade of Portuguese-controlled Nagapattinam. While the blockade itself would eventually be lifted upon the payment of a ransom,<sup>73</sup> the terms of trade for Portuguese Nagapattinam, as well as other mercantile communities operating in the region, especially the Maraikkayar Muslims, were now altered.

The monopolistic drive of the Dutch shaped their relations with other states of the Malay archipelago as well, as they signed a number of contracts over the following decade giving them privileged access to both goods and markets, over their European and Indian counterparts.<sup>74</sup> The first of these was signed with the Sultan of Kedah, in 1642, and enabled the Dutch to purchase, at a fixed price, one half of all the tin produced in that state, as well as brought there from elsewhere. Ships emanating from any part of India were to be allowed in only if they possessed a Dutch pass. A similar treaty was effected with Junk Ceylon (Phuket), in 1643. Finally, a treaty was signed in 1650 between the Queen of Aceh and the Dutch, and the Sultan of Perak (vassal to Aceh), according to which ‘the entire trade of Perak was to be shared by the Dutch and the Achinese, to the exclusion of all other nations, European or Indian.’<sup>75</sup> Thus, by 1650, a substantial proportion of the trade between the Coromandel and Southeast Asia came to rest in Dutch hands,<sup>76</sup> with important consequences for Nagore, which had been a key port involved in

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<sup>72</sup> Subrahmanyam, *The Political Economy of Commerce*, 211. For a more detailed discussion of debates within the Dutch East Indian Company regarding the feasibility of pursuing such a policy, see S. Arasaratnam, ‘Monopoly and Free Trade in Dutch-Asian Commercial Policy: Debate and Controversy within in the VOC,’ *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 4.1 (Mar. 1973): 1-15.

<sup>73</sup> The blockade itself was undertaken at a time when the Dutch and Portuguese had agreed to a ten-year truce, known as The Treaty of the Hague (1641). And until the ransom demanded had been paid, the treaty was declared to not be in effect. See, Subrahmanyam, *The Political Economy of Commerce*, 211.

<sup>74</sup> Arasaratnam, ‘Some Notes on the Dutch in Malacca,’ 482-484.

<sup>75</sup> Arasaratnam, ‘Some Notes on the Dutch in Malacca,’ 487

<sup>76</sup> Subrahmanyam, *The Political Economy of Commerce*, 190.

commerce with South East Asia. Before we discuss the impact of this ‘realignment’ of Coromandel commerce, we need to look also at Tanjore’s military entanglements on land – a source of much political instability in the region.

The middle decades of the seventeenth century were a period in which Tanjore and the other Nayaka polities of peninsular India were engaged in a seemingly continuous series of military conflicts, involving each other, as well as their neighbors.<sup>77</sup> This round of troubles began when Sriranga Raya III came to power in 1642 in what was left of the once mighty state of Vijayanagara. Feeling the pressure of the ‘Muhammadan’ armies of Bijapur and Golconda, Srīranga sought to impose his suzerainty over the once-feudatory Nayakas of Madurai, Senji, and Tanjore. War broke out between him and Tirumala Nayaka of Madurai, with Senji supporting the latter, and Vijayaraghava's position seemingly prone to vacillation.<sup>78</sup> While appears to have begun as an ally of Madura and Senji, he ended by aligning with Sriranga Raya and eventually attempting to sue for peace between Vijayanagara and Madurai. Tirumala Nayaka, on the other hand, faced with the prospect of Sriranga Raya laying siege to Senji, sought an intervention from Golkonda, forcing the Vijayanagara troops to engage with the Qutb Shahi army, in

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<sup>77</sup> The following discussion of mid-seventeenth inter-Nayaka ‘feuding’ is based on V. Vriddhagirisani, *The Nayaks of Tanjavur* (Annamalainagar: Annamalai University, 1942), 132-140. My focus on this period as one of political instability is not meant to set it apart from the prior decades. As has been pointed out for the Nayaka period as a whole, ‘one can hardly claim that...[it] was *more* was-torn than the previous epoch’ (Rao, Shulman and Subrahmanyam, *Symbols of Substance: Court and State in Nayaka Period Tamilnadu* [Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992], 220). My interest is more in highlighting the immediate political context for the emergence of a monumental structure at the Nagore Dargah.

<sup>78</sup> There is difference of opinion between ‘nationalist’ historians like Vriddhagirisani and ‘colonial’ scholarship of the kind Fr. Heras’ work represented. The latter, according to Vriddhagirisani, relied somewhat uncritically on Jesuit accounts of the politics of Nayaka kings, which, it is argued, do not square well ‘indigenous’ court chronicles. Tanjore’s role, in the conflicts of the period we’re discussing, is thus sought to be understood as either resulting from a sense of loyalty to the Vijayanagar imperial crown, or abject circumstances, which necessitate acting with less the proper feudal spirit. More recent ‘revisionist’ scholarship, especially on the eighteenth century, has recommended the use of more catholic frameworks to understand the politics of ‘successor states.’

Vellore. Sriranga managed to push back the Golconda offensive, but his own southern advance too was stemmed in the process. Meanwhile, although the Madurai Nayakas were able to retain their autonomy vis-a-vis Vijayanagara, on a parallel track Golconda and Bijapur made deeper inroads into Nayaka territory, rendering precarious the position of all the Nayaka states. The fort of Senji fell first, in 1646, and was followed by military push into Tanjore and Madurai, resulting in Madurai having to pay an annual tribute to Bijapur, and Tanjore being forced to acknowledge Qutb Shahi suzerainty.<sup>79</sup>

In the midst of all these entanglements, late in 1642, Vijayaraghava is also recorded as having attacked Nagapattinam.<sup>80</sup> Lasting a total of seven months, the attack followed in the wake of the Dutch blockade mentioned above. We do not know what the specific provocation for this attack was, but its context is telling. Mid-1642, perhaps in the wake of the Dutch blockade, the Portuguese had begun to fortify their settlement in Nagapattinam. This, despite the fact that their physical protection appears to have been the prerogative of the Tanjore Nayakas, who maintained an *adhikāri* or superintendent in the town. According to both European accounts, during the time of the blockade the *adhikāri* had ‘departed in haste,’ but, even as the Portuguese were negotiating a ransom, soldiers of the Nayaka arrive and began to skirmish with the Dutch. In the ensuing confusion, the Tanjore forces also entered the churches, and made away with the crown of Our Lady of the Conception, and the diadems of other saints. The Dutch, believing that

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<sup>79</sup> These conflicts would not stop, however, until three decades later a Maratha general of the Bijapuri army Ekoji, who went on to become the founder of the Maratha state in Tanjore, in 1676. While there is some disagreement on the precise date for the founding of Maratha rule in Tanjore, the generally accepted year is 1676, as discussed in K.R. Subramanian, *The Maratha Rajas of Tanjavur* (Madras, 1928), 16-18.

<sup>80</sup> Vridhagirisani, *The Nayaks of Tanjavur*, 154-155; Subrahmanyam, *The Political Economy of Commerce*, 210-212; Stephen, *Portuguese in the Tamil Coast*, 177-178. Interestingly, the accounts of each of these three scholars differ substantially from each other.



the settlers had ‘treacherously’ called on the Nayaka for aid, retired to their ships with some hostages.<sup>81</sup>

Even though this is a second-hand account of events, culled from European archives, certainly, the impression it conveys is that the rulers of Tanjore saw themselves as being sovereign in Nagapattinam in two consequential domains: military and fiscal. The prerogatives they exercised in these domains were likely particular, not overarching, but it is important to remember that this meant that the Portuguese settlement at Nagapattinam was considered a part of the Tanjore polity. Nayaka rulers expected to collect fiscal dues owed them by the Portuguese traders, and play a military role, as and when required. Notwithstanding the grant of commercial privileges to the Portuguese, then, Nagapattinam was not part of the Estado da India, that is to say it was not a part of the Portuguese ‘State of India’.<sup>82</sup> Following 1642, however, this arrangement would change. After the blockade, and, perhaps, because of the actions of the Nayaka troops, the Portuguese commenced fortifications in Nagapattinam. A major bone of contention with the Tanjore Nayakas, it was a likely reason for their seven-month long military engagement there.<sup>83</sup> The outcome of that engagement, coupled with the threat of the Dutch, was that by mid-1643, ‘the settlement of Our Lady of the Conception of Nagapattinam [had been] granted the title of City, with a City Council and aldermen replacing the *Eleitos* [elites], and a customs house being created in the name of D. Joao IV of Portugal.... Together, with the grant of City status, the Crown decided to have a

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<sup>81</sup> Subrahmanyam, *The Political Economy of Commerce*, 211.

<sup>82</sup> On the contention history of relations between Portuguese settlers, the Estado, church and Crown, see the excellent examination put forward by Ines G. Županov, *Missionary Tropics: The Catholic Frontier in India 16th-17th Centuries* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2005).

<sup>83</sup> It has been suggested that the Dutch may have instigated this, and certainly they would have stood to gain from the adverse position in which it put the Portuguese. Yet, notwithstanding Dutch exhortations to the contrary, the Nayakas eventually settled for peace. Vriddhagirisan, *The Nayaks of Tanjavur*, 154-155.

Captain-Major resident in the town, in addition to a captain, in charge of the garrison of the fortress.<sup>84</sup> In other words, by mid-1643, Nagapattinam had come under the jurisdiction of the Portuguese crown.

It is difficult to know for sure what this change in status meant for Tanjore, for the Portuguese did not remain in Nagapattinam for long after. In 1658, ‘without a shot being fired’, the Dutch were able to defeat the Portuguese and gain control of the fortified settlement. In the very same year, however, Vijayaraghava would be compelled to confirm for the Dutch the same rights that were enjoyed by the Portuguese.<sup>85</sup> The resistance he offered to the Dutch before acquiescing,<sup>86</sup> when seen in light of previous military engagements with the Portuguese at Nagapattinam,<sup>87</sup> suggests that for the Tanjore Nayakas, relinquishing control of this port came at a cost, which may or may not have been compensated for by the terms of the agreement of 1658.<sup>88</sup> It was in this political and economic context that the above cited inscription was executed, on what was perhaps the first monumental structure at the dargah complex — the first of five minarets, or *manōrās* as they are locally referred to, that have come to become the shrine’s visual

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<sup>84</sup> Subrahmanyam, *The Political Economy of Commerce*, 212.

<sup>85</sup> K.A. Nilakanta Sastri, Two silver plate grants from the Batavia Museum,’ *Tijdschrift voor Indische Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde*, Deel 79 (1939): 1-22.

<sup>86</sup> Arasaratnam, *Merchants, Companies, and Commerce*, 71.

<sup>87</sup> An attack similar to the one in 1642 has been reported for the year 1632, and there was as well an older history of military engagement that involved Tanjore, the Portuguese, and Jaffna, in Ceylon, as well. See Subrahmanyam, *The Political Economy of Commerce*, 209. According to Subrahmanyam ‘if aggravated, or short of liquidity’, the Tanjore Nayakas could ‘make the unexpected raid on the Portuguese settlement.’ Interestingly, the ‘target particularly favored by the Nayaka were the richly endowed churches of the town...financially supported *in extenso* by the Portuguese mercantile community of the town.’

<sup>88</sup> Subsequently, ‘in 1661 he conceded to them freedom from half the tolls in all parts of his kingdom and confirmed their right to mint coins in Nagapattinam, giving them half the mint duty... In 1666 he leased them the port of Tirumulapatnam, about ten miles north of Nagapattinam, and four neighbouring villages for an annual sum...’ Arasaratnam, *Merchants, Companies, and Commerce*, 71.

trademark.<sup>89</sup> The tallest of these, standing at a height of 90 feet, was also the last to be built, this time under the direct patronage of a Tanjore king of Maratha descent.

Established in 1676, by Ekoji (or Venkaji) – son of Shahji Bhonsale, a Maratha commander in the employ of Bijapur, and brother to ‘Chhatrapati’ Shivaji – Maratha rule in Tanjore lasted 176 years, but was as mired in military conflict as its predecessor.<sup>90</sup> After having successfully fended off challenges from the Madurai Nayaks, the squeeze came from the Satara-based Maratha lineage of Shivaji, who had successfully assumed control of revenue rights from the Carnatic province of the Bijapuri state, it was the Aurangzeb’s successful campaigns in the Deccan that brought Tanjore within the ambit of Mughal authority.<sup>91</sup> According M.A. Nayeem, the Carnatic province of the Deccan Sultanates having been absorbed as *subahs* of the Mughal empire, the erstwhile Nayakdoms were reconstituted as the *zamindaris* of Tiruchirappalli, Tanjore, Senji, Madurai, and Srirangapatnam.<sup>92</sup> The exercise of authority over these *zamindaris* does not appear to have extended much beyond the imposition of the payment of a *peshkash* or tribute ‘as a token of the recognition of Mughal overlordship’.<sup>93</sup> Yet, using the threat of potential military violence, payments of tribute were extracted, albeit at irregular

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<sup>89</sup> We do not know how much of the dargah's edifice as it stands today had come into being by 1645, but we do know that the second oldest inscription collected from the site dates to the year 1724. See *Archaeological Survey of India Annual Report on Epigraphy* (ARIE), 1963-64: 83, 133.

<sup>90</sup> On the multiple, conflicting narratives contained in contemporary Jesuit and Dutch accounts, as well as Telugu chronicles and later Maratha genealogies, see Sanjay Subrahmanyam, ‘The Politics of Fiscal Decline: A Reconsideration of Maratha Tanjavur,’ *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 32.2 (1995): 181-183.

<sup>91</sup> Subrahmanyam, ‘The Politics of Fiscal Decline,’ 19-21, 26-27; K. Rajayyan, *A History of British Diplomacy in Tanjavur* (Mysore: Rao and Raghavan, 1969), 13-17;

<sup>92</sup> M.A. Nayeem, ‘Mughal Documents relating to the Peshkash of the Zamindars of South India, 1694-1752 A.D.,’ *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 12 (1975): 425-432.

<sup>93</sup> Nayeem, ‘Mughal Documents relating to the Peshkash,’ 425.

intervals and seemingly ad hoc basis.<sup>94</sup> The Maratha kings of Tanjore thus retained their independence, but the Mughals, and through them, the Nawabs of Arcot, were able to claim suzerainty over the kingdom. What this meant was that, in addition to paying a *peshkash* to the Mughal representative in the South, the latter could on occasion intervene in matters of succession, determining who would gain the *sanad* or royal charter to occupy the throne. In the early 1730s, for instance, Tukkoji (1730-36) was able to ascend the throne only in return for a substantial payment, comprising the usual *peshkash* and a *nazr* or offering to the Mughal emperor as well as to the Subedar of the Deccan.<sup>95</sup> In fact, Arcot's involvement in succession disputes would be a factor in the coming to power of Tukkoji's successor, Ekoji II (1736-37), as well as Pratapasimha (1739-63), in whose reign the minaret was built.<sup>96</sup>

A second strain on Maratha resources came from the South, in the form of a military campaign in Ramnad as part of a three-way struggle between Tanjore, Ramnad's Setupati overlords, and Madurai. In 1700, Madurai fought Tanjore on account of the latter having captured certain of her towns, with the assistance of the Setupati.<sup>97</sup> Soon after a threat from Mysore, united the two, vexing Ramnad. As one historian put it, 'the triangular contest continued among these small powers, fortune favoring now one, now another, but left none of them better or wiser for all the events.'<sup>98</sup> Matters did come to a head though after the death of Kilavan Setupati in 1720, as Tanjore managed to successfully intervene in the ensuing succession struggle, retaking lands in the Pattukottai

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<sup>94</sup> Nayeem, 'Mughal Documents relating to the Peshkash,' 427-429; Rajayyan, *A History of British Diplomacy*, 14-15. See also, Muzaffar Alam, 'The Zamindars and Mughal Power in the Deccan, 1685-1712,' *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 11.1 (1974,): 74-91, especially 89-91.

<sup>95</sup> Nayeem, 'Mughal Documents', 429; Subrahmanyam, 'The Politics of Fiscal Decline', 189.

<sup>96</sup> Subrahmanyam, 'The Politics of Fiscal Decline,' 188, 192.

<sup>97</sup> Subramanian, *The Maratha Rajas of Tanjavur*, 28.

<sup>98</sup> Subramanian, *The Maratha Rajas of Tanjavur*, 28.

region that had previously been ceded to the Maravas.<sup>99</sup> Finally, there were the depredations of ‘Chanda Sahib’ or Husain Dost Khan, ally of the French, architect of the final defeat of the Madurai Nayakas, and one of the contending claimants to the Nawabdom of Arcot. He was responsible for the forcible ceding of Karaikal by Tanjore to the French in 1739, in addition to having extracted Rs 75 lakhs from Tanjore as the price of not being formally annexed in 1749.<sup>100</sup>

It was in the context of these political, military, and financial pressures that we note the Maratha king Pratapasimha as having built the above-mentioned minaret. Three inscriptions record this event, in Modi, Tamil, and Persian, with interesting differences in detail between the three.<sup>101</sup> Scholars of the Department of Epigraphy, Tamil University, Tanjore appear to have collated information from the Modi and Tamil inscriptions, on the basis of which the following details are provided:<sup>102</sup> ‘In the year 1674 of the cālīvākana saka era, year 4853 of the kali yuga, the southern year añkiraca, month māci, fifteenth day, on the day of the full moon of the *cukkila paṭcam*, to the west of the sanctuary (*canniti*) of Hazrat Mīrā Cākip, at the place bestowed by Sri Tulacā Rāca, son of Makārācā Rājasri Ekocī, the light of Bhosle clan (*pōcaḷā kulatīpa*), the Srimat Catrapati

<sup>99</sup> Subramanian, *The Maratha Rajas of Tanjavur*, 37. The creation of the Sivaganga and Ramnad zamindaris can be traced to this period, and to Tanjavur’s military interventions in the affairs of Ramnad. Divided into three parts, two were thus turned into zamindaries, and the third part – the Pattukottai region – was annexed to Tanjavur.

<sup>100</sup> Subrahmanyam, ‘The Politics of Fiscal Decline,’ 189, 210. See also, *The Private Diary of Ananda Ranga Pillai*, Vol. 1, pp. 81-82; and ‘Colonel Lawrence’s Narrative of the War on the Coast of Coromandel, from the Beginning of the Troubles to the Year 1754’, in Richard Owen Cambridge, compil. *An Account of the War in India between the English and the French on the Coast of Coromandel, from the Year 1750 to the Year 1760* (London: Jefferys, 1761), 1-4.

<sup>101</sup> The Tamil inscription appears to be in two parts, of which one has been reproduced in the volume *Nākapattina māvaṭṭak kalveṭṭukaḷ*, edited by Nā. Mārkcīya Kānti and Cu. Irācakōpāl (Cennai: Tamilnāṭu Aracu Tolliyaluturai, 2007), 270. We know this from a photographic reproduction of the both parts in Ce. Irācu (ed.), *Tañcai Marāṭṭiyar kalveṭṭukaḷ* [Inscriptions of the Marathas of Tanjavur] (Tañcāvūr: Tamilp Palkalaik Kaḷakam, 1987), xlii-xliii.

<sup>102</sup> Ce. Irācu (ed.), *Tañcai Marāṭṭiyar kalveṭṭukaḷ*, 184-185.

Makārāca Rācaśrī Śrīmant Piratāpa Cimma Makārāca Cākēp, built and bestowed as *dharma* a tower of 11 levels.’ ‘Carkēl (Persian, *sar-i khail*) Mānōci Cekatāp, the superintendent of Nagore port (nākūr bandar kārpar) Aruñōci Bōnsalē, mediator (*mattiyastar*) Cēk Aptul Mallik, carried this royal task to completion.’ The inscriptions also state that ‘with *dharma*, this right (*āvaṇam*) must persist in this place of Hazrat Caakip till there be the sun and the moon’, and that this place was built with the intention that this patronage must continue to grow as a clan tradition (*vamica paramparaiyāka*).<sup>103</sup> Interestingly, in the Persian iteration of this inscription, it is also mentioned that a market by the name ‘Qadir peinth’ (Tam. *pettai*) was established in the vicinity of ‘Tulaja Maharaj *peinth*’,<sup>104</sup> as well as referring to the Muslim official, Abdul Mallik, as ‘amīn’ or tax collector.<sup>105</sup>

Pratapasimha, during whose reign this minaret was built, was judged harshly by his colonial critics,<sup>106</sup> following whom later historians too have tended to see his reign as the marking the proverbial beginning of the end.<sup>107</sup> In these accounts, one of the principal reasons for the state’s weak fiscal situation was deemed to be the profligate granting of revenue yielding lands in the form of tax-free *inams* or *maniyams*, particularly during the

<sup>103</sup> Though the Tamil University publication lists the above-mentioned details as the inscription’s ‘translation’, it does not appear to be a direct literal translation of either the Tamil or Marathi inscription, but a collation of details – some taken verbatim, others not so – from the two inscriptions.

<sup>104</sup> G.S. Sai (ed.), *Annual Report on Indian Epigraphy 1963-64* (Mysore: Archaeological Survey of India, 1964), 133; Ziyāud-dīn A. Desai, *A Topographical List of Arabic, Persian and Urdu Inscriptions of South India* (New Delhi: Indian Council for Historical Research, 1989), 121; Ce. Irrācu (ed.), *Taṇcai Marāṭṭiyar kalvēṭṭukal*, 185.

<sup>105</sup> Francis Joseph Steingass, *A Comprehensive Persian-English dictionary, including the Arabic words and phrases to be met with in Persian literature* (London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1892), 101. (<http://dsal.srv02.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/philologic/contextualize.pl?p.0.steingass.1207443>)

<sup>106</sup> See, *Original Papers relative to Tanjavur: Containing all the Letters which passed, and Conferences which were held between His Highness the Nabob of Arcot and Lord Pigot, on the Subject of the Restoration of Tanjavur* (London, 1777), whose anonymous author excoriates the Marathas, especially Pratapasimha, for being a ‘perfidious tyrant’ and unworthy ‘vassal’ to their feudal lord, the Nawab of Arcot, an ‘old, faithful, and strenuous ally of the British nation’.

<sup>107</sup> This scholarship has been discussed at length in Subrahmanyam, ‘The Politics of Fiscal Decline.’

reigns of Pratapasimha and his successor Tulajaji.<sup>108</sup> However, as Subrahmayam has shown, ‘Tanjore was not unusual by south Indian standards in the proportion of its lands held in *inam*’, whereby roughly half of all cultivated land was held in *inam*, and ‘religious establishments accounted for roughly a third of this’, while ‘village servants for another third.’<sup>109</sup> Moreover, there was at least one colonial observer who approved of these measures as a means of managing land revenue assignments.<sup>110</sup> But what purpose did such acts serve? Subrahmanyam merely contends that ‘support to temples...and to choultries were traditions inherited by the Maratha rulers, the former quite clearly from early medieval times, the latter largely as a legacy of the Nayakas.’<sup>111</sup> According to him, ‘The Bhonsle rulers, anxious to appear as legitimate successors to the Nayakas, mimicked them in this respect and even expanded the scale of operations in view of the changed circumstances and ever-expanding pilgrimage networks of the eighteenth century.’<sup>112</sup>

Thus, legitimation – for the Marathas as well as their Nayaka predecessors – appears as the key motivation for acts of courtly benefaction to temples. Similar acts with respect to dargahs and churches are seen as an attempt ‘to widen the religious bases of their support....a useful reminder that the Nayaka states sought legitimacy through a variety of mechanisms, and had to placate diverse client groups.’<sup>113</sup> Yet, as

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<sup>108</sup> Subrahmanyam, ‘The Politics of Fiscal Decline’, 206-207.

<sup>109</sup> Nor did the Company fare much better through its own revenue collection strategies. Subrahmanyam, ‘The Politics of Fiscal Decline,’ 207-210.

<sup>110</sup> See Dalrymple, *A Short Account of the Gentoo Mode of Collecting the Revenues on the Coast of the Coromandel* (London: G. Bigg 1783), 2-7 especially.

<sup>111</sup> Subrahmanyam, ‘The Politics of Fiscal Decline,’ 207-208.

<sup>112</sup> Subrahmanyam, ‘The Politics of Fiscal Decline,’ 207-208. With respect to the Nayakas themselves, Subrahmayam and others have identified *annadana* or a kind of consumptive fiscal spending on public feeding, as opposed to the older form of gifting of land, as the principal means of kingly benefaction. See, Rao, Shulman, and Subrahmanyam, *Symbols of Substance: Court and State in Nayaka Period Tamilnadu* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992), 57-112.

<sup>113</sup> Rao, Shulman, and Subrahmanyam, *Symbols of Substance*, 89-90.

Subrahmanyam and others have themselves noted, Tanjore's political economy differed markedly from those of Madurai and Senji, which constitute in some sense the more quintessentially Nayaka, pālaiyam-oriented polities.<sup>114</sup> The Kaveri Delta's early settling, extensive paddy cultivation, a large proportion of 'circar' lands from which revenue was collected by 'state agents' through crop-sharing, and heavy involvement of the state in the export of rice render Tanjore's situation quite distinct.<sup>115</sup> Indeed, the significance of rice is the Tanjore economy, as a commodity needed both regionally, as well as extra-locally, is at times overshadowed by the dramatic development of the textile trade under European influence. According to one estimate, between ten to twelve per cent of Tanjore's rice production 'may have been exported by water, as well as transported by pack-bullock to the interior of the peninsula'. In this rice trade, the port of Nagore had a very important role to play, as has been noted by Arasaratnam, for the seventeenth century, and Jeyaseela Stephen for the sixteenth.<sup>116</sup>

As a rice surplus area, Tanjore – along with Bengal, Orissa, and the north Coromandel districts watered by the rivers Krishna and Godavari – was part of network of grain trade conducted in the Bay of Bengal littoral which involved Asian merchant shippers and consumers, for which 'the evidence...is, as with all Asian trade in the early modern period, fragmentary and episodic,'<sup>117</sup> really coming into view only with the arrival of the Europeans. With the eastern coast of the Malabar and Ceylon being two principal markets for this rice, Tanjore stood in a particularly advantageous position.

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<sup>114</sup> Rao, Shulman, and Subrahmanyam, *Symbols of Substance*, 96-99.

<sup>115</sup> Rao, Shulman, and Subrahmanyam, *Symbols of Substance*, 99-100.

<sup>116</sup> Sinnappah Arasaratnam, 'The Rice Trade in Eastern India 1650-1740,' *Modern South Studies* 22.3 (1988): 531-549; Jeyaseela Stephen, 'Hinterland Production and Intra-Asian Trade in Rice and Textiles' in *Expanding Portuguese Empire and the Tamil Economy (Sixteenth-Eighteenth Centuries)* (Delhi: Manohar, 2009), 140-188, especially 154.

<sup>117</sup> Arasaratnam, 'The Rice Trade,' 531.



Efficiently irrigated rice cultivation combined with relatively low population density' created an exportable surplus, which further benefited from low transport costs owing to hinterland's proximity to ports as well as the shorter sailing distances to the final markets. Additionally, rice was also exported to Southeast Asia, to the emporia ports of Malacca, Macassar, and Aceh, as well as Pasai and Palembang during times of shortage.<sup>118</sup> Nagore, in particular, was involved in this trade; 'rice was exchanged for raw silk which was in great demand for textile manufacture among the weavers in the hinterland of the Coromandel coast.'<sup>119</sup> The introduction of Europeans to the Coromandel economy, according to Arasaratnam, mainly enhanced an existing trade in grains; it did not create it. Stephen, however, notes, that the earliest Portuguese settlement in Nagapattinam in the 1530s was built mostly on the back of their edging out Maraikkayar traders who had traditionally conducted the rice trade between the Coromandel and the Malabar coasts. He points out that, although the Portuguese were principally interested in pepper, they realized the usefulness of commodities such as rice, in exchange for which pepper could be procured from the Malabar.<sup>120</sup> Much of this trade was carried on not by the Estado but by Portuguese settlers as private trade, albeit with Crown concessions, and after 1658, this trade in bulk goods would be inherited and carried out by the Dutch VOC with even greater success than the Estado.<sup>121</sup>

In the eighteenth century, considerable change took place in both the production and marketing of paddy and rice along much of eastern India.<sup>122</sup> The cumulative impact

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<sup>118</sup> Arasaratnam, 'The Rice Trade,' 534.

<sup>119</sup> Stephen, *Expanding Portuguese Empire*, 156.

<sup>120</sup> Stephen, *Expanding Portuguese Empire*, 140-141, 148-157.

<sup>121</sup> Stephen, *Expanding Portuguese Empire*, 178; Arasaratnam, 'The Rice Trade in Eastern India,' 536-540

<sup>122</sup> Arasaratnam, 'The Rice Trade in Eastern India,' 540-544.

of political, demographic, and economic changes caused certain rice surplus areas, such as the north and middle Coromandel, to become deficit zones, whose needs needed to be met from such surplus producing areas as Tanjore.<sup>123</sup> Ceylon, too, while witnessing a rise in demand for rice from the Dutch as well as the indigenous communities, saw a decline in imports from Bengal and a concomitant rise in small boat traffic from Tanjore and Madurai. Precisely how the mechanics of this trade operated is not entirely known. Subrahmanyam et al., while acknowledging the predominance of ‘circular’ lands in Tanjore, argue that here too, like in other Nayaka polities, revenue farming increasingly became the norm for the state. The state’s share of the rent, according to Arasaratnam, albeit ‘farmed out to rentiers’ was brought to the market, and there were also a ‘substantial amount of sales by the peasant producer to middlemen merchants and entrepreneurs. Peasants sold paddy for cash to be able to pay the various cash cesses and taxes demanded of them by the state.’<sup>124</sup> Crucially, he notes, ‘The state emerges as a major trader in paddy, directly or through the alienation of its rights to its prominent officials. The major grain sellers in Tanjore were important state officials.’<sup>125</sup> Arasaratnam’s evidence comes from the Dutch records maintained at Ceylon, where Tanjore’s rice was being imported by VOC officials, but it does allow to see the involvement of state officials in the rice trade; ‘they were dealing heavily with subadars, maniagars, hawaldars and other district officials. Advances had to be given to these officials when contracts were made for large quantities.’ Given the state’s close involvement in commercial transactions involving a staple like rice, the attendant need to

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<sup>123</sup> Arasaratnam, ‘The Rice Trade in Eastern India,’ 540-542.

<sup>124</sup> Arasaratnam, ‘The Rice Trade in Eastern India,’ 545.

<sup>125</sup> Arasaratnam, ‘The Rice Trade in Eastern India,’ 545.

maintain effective relations with mercantile communities like the Maraikkayars of Nagore, can be surmised as one that was about more than seeking ‘legitimacy’.

Indeed, while we suffer from the lack of evidence for how these relations were specifically were practiced in the period when the port was under the control of native rule, its significance to the latter group may be gauged from two events that post-date the inscription. The first was the siege of Comte de Lally in 1758, as part of the French offensive in the Third War of Carnatic (1749-1758), and second, exchanges between the East India Company and the Maratha kings of Tanjore in the context of the treaties signed following it. ‘The first act of hostility committed by the French against the Tanjoreans,’ writes Cambridge in his account of the wars of the Carnatic, ‘was the taking possession of Nagore, their sea port’ in 1758.<sup>126</sup> According to the author, ‘the behavior of the French at Nagore had provoked the King’s resentment,’ such as to order ‘his troops to oppose the March of the French.’<sup>127</sup> What had transpired in Nagore was the following:

...demanding immediate payment of the five millions and six hundred thousand rupees, with all the interest: and, to convince the king [of Tanjore] that he would derive no benefit from the usual delays and prevarications of Indian negotiations, he [‘Mr. Lally’] immediately sent forward a detachment to take possession of the opulent town of Nagore. This place is situated on a river about four miles to the north of Negapatam, and carries on a very considerable commerce; but the merchants had removed their money and jewels, and offered little for the redemption of their warehouses; on which Mr. Lally farmed out the plunder and ransom of the town for 200,000 rupees to Fischer the commander of the French hussars, stipulating, that, if the profit exceeded 100,000 rupees, a proportional addition was to be made to the public fund. Hitherto the conduct of Mr. Lally had been free from the reproach of those pecuniary views, which he continually imputed without distinction to everyone in the service of the French company ; but this agreement gave them no slight pretense to retort speculation on himself, as going shares with Fischer in the profits of Nagore.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Cambridge, compil. *An Account of the War in India between the English and the French on the Coast of Coromandel, from the Year 1750 to the Year 1760* (London: Jefferys, 1761), 137.

<sup>127</sup> Cambridge, compil. *An Account of the War in India*, 137.

<sup>128</sup> Robert Orme, *A history of the military transactions of the British nation in Indostan, from the year MDCCXLV. To which is prefixed A dissertation on the establishments made by Mahomedan conquerors in*

In the EIC's Country Correspondence for that year we find letters to the Company from both the Raja himself and Manaji Jagatap, his 'sirkeel' or *sar-i khail*, drawing to their attention Lally's attacks on 'Nagore (our Port).'<sup>129</sup> According to one observer, Ananda Ranga Pillai, diarist and erstwhile *dubash* of the French at Pondicherry, the value of 'the booty taken at Nagore is said to be reckoned at nine lakhs.'<sup>130</sup> Not only was Nagore thus understood to be wealthy and prosperous, but it was clearly also seen as closely tied to the authority of the Tanjore kings.

This comes through in the exchanges surrounding the so-called 'Nagore Settlement' of 1778, between the Company, Raja Tulajaji (1763-1787) and Muhammad Ali, the Nawab of Arcot, in the aftermath of the British-Walajah expedition against Tanjore in 1773 and the Tulajaji's subsequent 'Restoration' to the throne in 1776, at the behest of the Company.<sup>131</sup> Nagore emerged in these negotiations as a prized port and commercial establishment, over which the three parties involved were attempting to gain control. Thus, in 1773, following the success of the British-Walajah expedition in Tanjore, Company troops took control of Nagore at the insistence of the Nawab. The expedition and annexation of Tanjore met, however, with the severe disapproval of the Company's Court of Directors in London, and its representatives at Fort St George were

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*Indostan. From the year MDCCXLV. To which is Prefixed a Dissertation on the Establishments made by Mahomedan Conquerors in Indostan, Vol. 2* (London, 1763), 338-39.

<sup>129</sup> Letters, No. 126, 'From the King of Tanjavur', received 14th July 1758, No. 127, 'From Monogee', received 14th July 1758. Records of Fort St. George, Country Correspondence, Military Department, Vol. 6, 1758 (Madras: Printed by the Superintendent, Government Press, 1915), 55-56.

<sup>130</sup> H. Dodwell (ed.), *The Diary of Ananda Ranga Pillai. Translated from the Tamil by Order of the Government of Madras*, Vol. XI (Madras: Printed by the Superintendent, Government Press, 1927), 231.

<sup>131</sup> For details regarding this expedition, see K. Rajayyan, *A History of British Diplomacy in Tanjavur* (Mysore: Rao and Raghavan, 1969), 47-82, specially 64-76. On the subject of the restoration, see George Rous, compil., *The Restoration of the King of Tanjavur Considered* (1777); *Original Papers relative to Tanjavur: Containing all the Letters which passed, and the Conferences which were held, between His Highness the Nabob or Arcot and Lord Pigot, on the Subject of the Restoration of Tanjavur* (London: T. Cadell, 1777).

instructed to abrogate their present agreement with the Nawab and restore Tanjore to Tulajaji. This was done in 1776, and Nagore and a few other territories that had been ceded to Arcot were also restored. The Company, as mediator and the cause for Tanjore's continued existence, received the port of Devikottai, but in 1778, the Company successfully bargained to replace it with Nagore, along with a '*jaghire*' of 277 villages.<sup>132</sup> The revenue thus accruing to the Company amounted, by one estimate, to two and half lakh rupees, of which Nagore itself contributed, one-fifth part. Importantly, even after acceding to give up the port town to the Company, the Tanjore Raja retained for himself certain right. Article VIII of the *sunnud* thus states: 'The circar people collect duties the districts bordering on Nagore; these shall continue to be paid; but no duties shall be paid by me on any articles or commodities purchased at Nagore for my own use.'<sup>133</sup> Once again, the particular association of the Tanjore kings with Nagore's port emerges as both economically and politically significant. In fact, as late as 1792, the Raja continued to bring to the Company's attention the loss of revenue of 50,000 pagodas, resulting from his having ceded the port town.<sup>134</sup> The need for these revenues only grew, as Tanjore came to be eclipsed by greater Company control and larger revenue demands,<sup>135</sup> until finally in 1799 the Company gained complete control of Tanjore's revenue system and the King was allocated a fixed share as stipend. From this point onwards, Nagore's

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<sup>132</sup> East India Company, *Treaties and Grants from the Country Powers to the East-India Company, respecting their Presidency of Fort Saint George, on the Coast of Coromandel; Fort William, in Bengal; and Bombay on the Coast of Malabar. From the Year 1771 to 1784* (London, 1774), pp. 263-265; Rajayyan, *A History of British Diplomacy*, 75.

<sup>133</sup> East India Company, *Treaties and Grants*, 265.

<sup>134</sup> India Office Records (IOR), Home, Miscellaneous Series, 606, f. 573.

<sup>135</sup> 'Treaty of 1787', IOR, Home, Miscellaneous Series, 275, ff. xxi-xxviii. Also discussed in Rajayyan, *A History of British Diplomacy*, 86-88.

commercial significance changed in accordance with the Company's – and subsequently the British Crown's – interests in the region.

### **Mercantile Munificence**

The second group of benefactors who find mention in Nagore's inscriptional records is that of Muslim mercantile men. As discussed above, Nagore's standing as a port predominated by the Maraikkayar mercantile group had grown in the wake of Portuguese and Dutch dominance in Nagapattinam. We also noted the presence in Nagapattinam of a large number of churches supported by the European trading community settled there, as well as missionary activity, in Nagapattinam as well as in Velankanni, located 7 miles further South and home to an important Roman Catholic basilica and a center of pilgrimage in its own right.<sup>136</sup> During the same period, the Nagore Dargah emerged as a prominent Muslim shrine site.

It would be, however, three-quarters of a century after the inscription from the time of Vijayaraghava Nayaka that the next recorded inscription from the site of the Nagore Dargah came into existence. Found on the north side of the '*koṭimaram*' minaret at the shrine site, this is a bilingual inscription, the first part being in Persian Nastaliq and the second in Tamil. It dates to 1724 and records the construction of the said minaret by one 'Daud Khan son of Ismail Khan, inhabitant of Shahjahanpur in the vicinity of the capital (of India) Dehlī (Delhi), who had settled down in Mahmūd-bandar. Written by

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<sup>136</sup> Margaret Meibohm, 'Cultural Complexity in South India: Hindu and Catholic in Marian Pilgrimage,' PhD Thesis, University of Pennsylvania, 2004; Vasudha Narayanan, 'Sacred Land, Common Ground, Contested Territory: the Healing Mother of Velankanni Basilica and the Infant Jesus Shrine in Bangalore,' *Journal of Hindu-Christian Studies* 17 (2013): 20-32.

‘Abdu’llāh.’<sup>137</sup> The Tamil portion of the same inscription is recorded as being damaged, and therefore contains only a part of the information mentioned above, namely, that Daud Khan was a resident of Mahmud Bandar [‘makammatu vantarilirukkum ...tāvūtu icumāyil kān’], and the date of the inscription as recorded in both Hijri and Tamil calendars [‘hicurattu 1137....kurōti varuṭam, puraṭṭāci mātam mutal...’].<sup>138</sup>

Mahmud Bandar refers to the port christened by the Portuguese as Porto Novo, who first arrived there in 1597, and were able to obtain permission to establish a port from the erstwhile Nayaka ruler of Senji, Muthu Krishnappa.<sup>139</sup> The name Mahmud Bandar may have been introduced after Bijapur extended its sway over the port (and the wider Senji area) after 1640, or after Mughal authority was established there, in 1698.<sup>140</sup> The Vellar river, where the port was set up, served a hinterland that produced paddy and cotton, and manufactured woven textile, which was Porto Novo’s principal export. Many Portuguese settlers migrated there after the capture of Nagapattinam by the Dutch.<sup>141</sup> But, the Portuguese were only one among a wide array of participants in Porto Novo’s trade, which by some estimations was the most important port of central Coromandel, especially after the decline of Masulipatnam in the late seventeenth century.<sup>142</sup> Arasaratnam argues that ‘It was the major port of South East Asian trade, carried on

<sup>137</sup> The foregoing is the substance of the Persian part of the inscription, as rendered in English in Ziaud-din A. Desai, *A Topographical List of Arabic, Persian and Urdu Inscriptions in South India* (New Delhi: ICHR and Northern Book Centre, 1989), 120-121. The same text is given as well in *Archaeological Survey of India Annual Report on Indian Epigraphy*, 1963-64, 133.

<sup>138</sup> Archaeological Survey of India, *Annual Report on India Epigraphy 1963-64*, pp. 83, 133; Nā. Mārkeiya Kānti and Cu. Irācakōpāl (eds), *Nākapattina māvaṭṭak kalveṭṭukaḷ* (Cennai: Tamilnāṭu Aracu Tolliyaluturai, 2007), 270.

<sup>139</sup> Stephen, *Expanding Portuguese Empire*, 171-172.

<sup>140</sup> Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Writing the Mughal World: Studies on Culture and Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 350.

<sup>141</sup> Sanjay Subrahmanyam, ‘Staying on: The Portuguese of southern Coromandel in the late seventeenth century,’ *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* 22.4 (1985): 445-463.

<sup>142</sup> Sanjay Subrahmanyam, ‘Persians, Pilgrims and Portuguese: The Travails of Masulipatnam Shipping in the Western Indian Ocean, 1590-1665,’ *Modern Asian Studies* 22.3 (1988): 503-530.

complete freedom, outside encouraged to settle spheres of European influence, to which every European traders, whether Company or private, had to resort.<sup>143</sup> However, the principle conductors of Porto Novo's trade were the area's 'Chulia' Muslims, with close commercial and political ties with the ports of Kedah, Perak, Johore, and Aceh.<sup>144</sup> At the time of the inscription, the port would have been under Mughal control, and home to a variety of mercantile actors – Chulias, Europeans, Chettis, Golconda Muslims from Masulipatnam, as well as 'Pathan' merchants of San Thome, such as perhaps Daud Khan, the figure mentioned in the inscription.<sup>145</sup>

Located almost fifty miles away from Nagore, and home to a large number of dargahs of its own, it is remarkable that Daud Khan of Mahmud Bandar chose to endow the Nagore Dargah with his act of generosity. In part at least, this is indicative of the standing the dargah had garnered by that time, among the Muslims of the region, including such recent arrivals as Daud Khan himself. At another level, Daud Khan's career – in so far as he had clearly been a successful émigré from the North – mirrored that of Shahul Hamid himself. But to these factors, may be added, I would argue, the imbrication of Mahmud Bandar, alongside Nagore, in the Chulia/Muslim trading nexus that connected these ports, their hinterlands and commodities, to entrepôts in South East Asia, in particular. Mahmud Bandar, like Nagore, had witnessed a growth spurt in large part because of the concentration of Chulia trade there and the absence of political arrangements that allowed any one European trading company to monopolize trade. 'In 1717 duties at this port of  $2\frac{1}{2}$  per cent on imports and nothing on exports were by far the

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<sup>143</sup> Arasaratnam, *Merchants Companies and Commerce*, 162.

<sup>144</sup> Arasaratnam, *Merchants Companies and Commerce*, 146-148.

<sup>145</sup> See Alam and Subrahmanyam, *Writing the Mughal World*, 339-395, for a more detailed account of early Mughal policy and politics in the Coromandel.



most favorable in the entire coast.’<sup>146</sup> Both ports traded with Aceh, Johore, Perak and Kedah, and with the Burmese coast ports,<sup>147</sup> where, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, commerce was managed on behalf of the Malay royals by a ‘*saudagar raja*’ or royal agent, usually of south Indian Muslim or ‘Chulia’ extraction.<sup>148</sup> The numerous advantages presented by these Chulia ‘royal agents’ to the regional courts were sustained by their kinship ties with the Tamil Muslim mercantile world of the Coromandel. In turn, these Muslim mercantile mediators, were on occasion able to consolidate their political standing through inter-marriage with Malay women of noble birth, giving rise to a diasporic community that was equally firmly entrenched on either side of the Bay of Bengal littoral. A complex set of cultural and material considerations animated these relations, creating a framework within which Daud Khan’s meritorious act of benefaction becomes conceivable. It is possible to see his act of benefaction towards the Nagore Dargah as both recording and enabling his participation in the Chulia ‘cultural economy’, in which the ports of Mahmud Bandar and Nagore held such particular significance.

The earliest inscription relating to a Chulia Muslim, is in fact the last of the inscriptions recorded in the eighteenth century. Dating to Hijri 1196 or 1782, it is also the only one that is monolingual, written in Persian, in the Nasta‘līq calligraphic script. According to a published summary of this inscription, it is located on ‘the left column of the entrance porch’, and ‘states that two edifices were constructed by way of offering to the Sufi, Shāh al-Ḥamīd Sayyid ‘Abdu’l Qādir Mānikpuri, under the superintendence of

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<sup>146</sup> Arasaratnam, *Merchants Companies and Commerce*, 174.

<sup>147</sup> Arasaratnam, *Merchants Companies and Commerce*, 175-176.

<sup>148</sup> Barbara Watson Andaya, ‘The Indian Saudagar Raja (The King’s Merchant) in Traditional Malay Courts,’ *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 51.1 (1978): 12-35, on why the Tamil Muslim merchant fit the bill of a Saudagar Raja better than all other mercantile groups operating in the region.

Ḥājī ‘Abdu’l Qādir, nākhudā, Nāgūr.’<sup>149</sup> While this is certainly not the first act of benefaction attributed to a Maraikkayar donor, it is the first recorded in the form of an inscription. By this time, as noted earlier, Nagore had finally come under the East India Company’s control and would steadily witness greater and greater rationalization of the port’s management, in keeping with the Company’s commercial investments there. By the turn of the century the entire revenue dispensation of the Maratha state would become a Company prerogative, and Nagore’s fortunes would change once again, not least because unlike before Nagapattinam too was now a Company port, and its directors were keen to lessen the cost of administration. But these changes would be effected in the next century, and the Company too would patronize the dargah, but in Penang.

### **Enshrining Business**

As mentioned earlier, hagiographic traditions of the Nagore Dargah claim that a grant of 300 *velis* of land was made to Shahul Hamid during his lifetime by Achyutappa Nayaka in return for curing the king of life-threatening black magic. However, no copper plate or inscription exists to confirm this as fact. What these traditions also state is that Shahul Hamid’s adopted son, Yusuf, was married locally, to the daughter of a wealthy Nagore merchant. That is, the very first generation of his descendants had familial ties with the Maraikkayar community of Nagore. This is important to keep in mind, because today the 600 odd descendants of Yusuf, who continue to either live in Nagore or maintain active ties with the shrine and claim a share in the dargah’s income and earnings, are considered largely endogamous. At the time, as members of the port-town’s mercantile community,

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<sup>149</sup> Archaeological Survey of India, *Annual Report on India Epigraphy 1963-64*, 133.

the caretakers of the dargah would have been directly involved in commercial activities. The shrine today, of course, receives large sums of money as *kāṇikkai* or offering from pilgrims, but these are appreciable only during the period of the annual *kantūri*, and would have required supplementing as indeed they do today. It is also not known how much of a pilgrimage site the dargah was in the seventeenth century, nor indeed how many people depended on the shrine for their earnings.

In his ‘Lists of the Antiquarian Remains in the Presidency of Madras’, Robert Sewell mentions the existence of a copper plate from Pratapasimha’s reign which grants fifteen villages to the Nagore ‘mosque’,<sup>150</sup> and the same information is cited in later works as well.<sup>151</sup> Current trustees of the dargah as well as prominent members of the town’s fraternity too cite this copper plate frequently, but access to it is jealously guarded.<sup>152</sup> In a recent work published by anthropologist Shaik Abdul Azeez Saheb, the following names are listed as the villages granted to the dargah: Nedung Kattangudi, Vadakudi, Chadanga Nallur, Kurumperi, Aaliyur, Kaddambar vaalkai, Naangudi, Saraangu Tirukkanngudi, Puliur, Ilangadambanur, Vetri Vaalkai, Pullur, Thethi, and Mela Nagore.<sup>153</sup> These names need to be crosschecked and corroborated, but that being said, till these details can be ascertained, we may proceed with the knowledge of a grant of 15

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<sup>150</sup> Robert Sewell, *Lists of the Antiquarian Remains in the Presidency of Madras, compiled under the orders of the Government* (Madras: Government Press, 1882), 281.

<sup>151</sup> V. Rangacharya, *A Topographical List of the Inscriptions of the Madras Presidency (Collected till 1915), with notes and references, Vol. II* (Madras: Printed by the Superintendent, Government Press, 1919), 1346; Tulajendra Rajah Bhosale, *Raja Serfoji – II (With a Short History of Tanjavur Mahrattas)* (Tanjavur: Marathi Abhyas Parishad, 1995), 34.

<sup>152</sup> Knowledge of the names of the 15 villages in question appears not to be common. It was, however, pointed out that since independence and with the abolition of zamindari, the land at the dargah’s disposal has lessened significantly, but once again, details on these more financial aspects of the dargah’s functioning are not forthcoming, and require further research.

<sup>153</sup> *Nagore-E-Sharief: A Sacred Complex Study* (Delhi: B.R. Publishing, 2014), Appendix No. 3, 304. The author does not mention the source of this information.

villages was made to the dargah, during the reign of Pratapasimha (1739-1763), the incomes from which sustained its expenses as well as its caretakers. By way of comparison, we may note the grant of 10 villages to the French, in 1739, when Karaikal was forcibly let to them by Tanjore, under pressure from Chanda Sahib.<sup>154</sup> The value of this cession, was estimated at 50,000 pagodas, and the number of people in these villages was estimated to be almost 12,000. Without access to the terms of the grant made by Pratapasimha, it is impossible to know for sure the nature of rights the dargah enjoyed over these villages. The agreement of 1776, which confirmed the grant of ‘the town and seaport of Nagore’ along with 277 other villages to the British, includes the latter’s acquiescence to a number of conditions, including the guarantee that ‘The ryots shall enjoy their shares of cultivation, Inams and other privileges, as heretofore has been usual’ and that ‘Such Inams as have been granted for the use of Pagodas or charity to Brahmins, or maintaining choultries and water pandals, shall be continued as formerly....’<sup>155</sup> It is likely that the dargah’s fifteen villages would have been included in one of these two conditions, though this is not explicitly stated in the agreement.

As mentioned earlier, Sanjay Subrahmanyam has noted that these grants of land were seen as wasteful by East India Company officials. While he also observes that upon gaining control of revenue administration in Tanjore, the Company fared no better than the Maratha authorities at increasing revenue yields, Subrahmanyam understands these grants itself as ‘ritual’ acts, aimed principally at ‘legitimizing’ the state. Following his model of focusing on the ‘contact zone’ between state and society, it is possible to argue

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<sup>154</sup> Subrahmanyam, ‘The politics of fiscal decline,’ 189-190; also, *Ananda Ranga Pillai’s Diary*, Vol. 1, 81-82.

<sup>155</sup> Hickey, *The Tanjavur Mahratta principality in Southern India*, Appendix F, ‘Agreement with the Rajah of Tanjavur and the British Government in 1776’, xvi-xviii.

that the dargah – albeit as a corporate not individual entity – functioned like a portfolio capitalist, with investments in more than one commercial domain, including agriculture, manufacture and trade.<sup>156</sup> Yet, Subrahmanyam's case studies do not include such institutions as temples, dargahs or churches. In contrast to Subrahmanyam, albeit for an earlier period, for James Heitzman has analyzed what he calls the 'transactional network' of the Rajarajesvara temple of Tanjore, to analyze the relationship between the ritual and political economic aspects of grants made to temples. Notwithstanding the fact that his discussion is of period vastly removed from the eighteenth century, his observation that the state exists not in the form of a 'ramified bureaucratic system' but in the form of 'an extended court peopled by high-ranking associates of the king'<sup>157</sup> is not vastly dissimilar from what we find mentioned in Pratapasimha's inscription. As he put it, 'kings remained ritual leaders, but aspired to be managers in the Arthaśāstra style.'<sup>158</sup> Further, describing the 'transactional network' that maintained the Rajarajesvara temple, Heitzmann has argued that it was on the 'public' level that 'when the king manifested himself as the supreme donor and protector of religion in the kingdom, he legitimized his role as the maintainer of cosmic order (*dharma*) in the world'. On the other hand, at the 'administrative' level, he points out that 'funding and staffing the temple entailed on one hand a set of transactions bringing services, agricultural produce and money into the temple, and on the other hand a set of interactions moving produce and money out toward the hinterland.'<sup>159</sup> In so doing, 'the temple network regulated the transfer and ready

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<sup>156</sup> Sanjay Subrahmanyam, 'Aspects of state formation in South India and Southeast Asia, 1500-1650,' *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* 23.4 (1986): 357-377.

<sup>157</sup> James Heitzman, 'State Formation in South India, 850-1280,' *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 24.1 (1987): 46.

<sup>158</sup> Heitzman, 'State Formation in South India,' 59.

<sup>159</sup> James Heitzman, 'Ritual Polity and Economy: The Transactional Network of an Imperial Temple in Medieval South India,' *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 341/2 (1991): 33-34.

monetization of resources, building on the pre-existing paths of commercialization...[and it] brought a commercial and monetary arena under regulation by royal authority...'.<sup>160</sup>

Transposing the same logic on the Nagore Dargah, the grant of villages to the shrine may be understood as linking the state and the shrine in a material transactional network, that allowed revenues and other fiscal flows to reach the state, while allowing the dargah to act as commercial hub in its own right.<sup>161</sup>

Indeed, mention of the creation of a market (Qadir *peinth*), in addition to an existing one named after Tulaja Raja, gives us a further glimpse into the imbrication of the dargah in the commercial life of the port town. On the one hand, it is likely that this was entailed by the town's port-related activities. On the other, it is also likely descendants of the Sufi and that caretakers of the dargah would have been able to derive revenues from such spaces, either in the form of rent (which continues to be a practice even today), or for the purpose of conducting their own business, which as we have noted was tied to an extensive and intensive trade with Southeast Asia and Ceylon, as indeed was all Chulia trade from Tanjore coast. Where the dargah's special standing comes

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<sup>160</sup> Heitzman, 'Ritual Polity and Economy,' 35.

<sup>161</sup> Arjun Appadurai, 'Kings, Sects and Temples in South India, 1350-1700 AD,' *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* 14.1 (1977): 47-73. The difficulty arises in delineating the ideological component of this system, for as Heitzman points out with reference to the Cholas 'patterns of belief were their patterns of power' (p. 54). It is difficult to agree with Appadurai's interpretation of this ideological framework when he states, categorically, that, 'in South India, in the three centuries that preceded British rule, a single system of authoritative relations united religious and political interests and wedded them into a flexible and dynamic pan-regional network. The key components of this system were: (1) the growing number of temples which served as redistributive centers, where gifts to deities enabled the continuous transformation of material resources into status and authority; (2) the shared orientation of political and religious figures to these myriad economic/religious centers; (3) the resulting willingness of religious and political leaders to transact with each other and share in a symbiotic, rather than mutually exclusive, fashion' (p. 73). In such a framework, either there can be no royal involvement in an ostensibly Islamic site like dargah, or the latter must be made sense of within a schema that relies on an essentialist conceptualization of an autochthonous 'Tamil' religion (Susan Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings: Muslims and Christians in South Indian Society, 1700-1900* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989]) or such an unstable analytical basis as 'syncretism' (Vasudha Narayanan, 'Religious Vows at the Shrine of Shahul Hamid,' in Selva Raj and William Harman (eds), *Dealing with Deities: The Ritual Vow in South Asia* [New York: SUNY Press, 2006], 65-85).

through in these commercial transactions, perhaps, is in its stake in the pearl fisheries, conducted off the coast of Ramnad, in the Gulf of Mannar. A record of this material relationship comes to us from the English archives of the nineteenth century, however, as part of an exchange between the colonial administrations of Ceylon and Madras Presidency, in 1838.<sup>162</sup> It may be useful to cite at length, a letter sent from Nagore regarding the dargah's rights in the fishery:

To what is required in the Board's letter dated the 6th March 1838 to report about the documents and the enjoyment upon which the Manium Donies in the Pearl Fishery of Manar attached to the Ceylon Government are fished on account of the Pagodas and Durgas in the Tanjore zillah, the following particular will show that Maunium Donies are fishing on account of the Nagore Durgah in the Pearl Fishery of Manar.

About 250 years ago when the Country of Ceylon was under Teroomul Naick he granted two Donies for the above Durgah as Maunium. Having given a Mauniem of 5 stones for each Doney, he executed a Copper Sunnud for the purpose. Sixty years ago, when the Durgah had been plundered during the invasion by Moosanully (Mons'r Lally) a French man, the Copper Sunnud was also lost, and consequently it is not produced now. It is stated by Babensahib the present Moozafer of the Durgah that in the days of the above Naick and in those of the King who reigned the Ceylon Country afterwards, as well as in those of the Dutch who goverened that kingdom subsequently they allowed two Donies to fish as Mauniem and that accordingly the Revenue accrued in the fishing of the above Donies is devoted to the charges of lighting and other charitable purposes of the said Surgah. But that the Copper Sunnud having been lost in the above invasion, the year in which it was executed is not known, and that he had heard from his Predecessor that the Mauniem was granted in the days of Trimul Naick.

In addition to underlining the problem of accessing shrine records, and the Company as well as the shrine's own reliance on custom to establish transactional relations, this exchange brings to light the shrine's participation in one of the key commercial activities of the deep south of the Coromandel, appropriately referred to as the Fishery Coast. It is

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<sup>162</sup> 'Madras Government furnish the Government of Ceylon with information regarding the claims made by certain temples in the Tanjavur and Tinnevely Districts to participate in the Ceylon pearl fishery', IOR/F/4/1833/75988, India Office Records and Private Papers, British Library (IOR/BL), especially 105.

probable that such a grant was made during the reign of Tirumala Nayaka (1623-1659) of Madurai, during whose time Kayalpatnam<sup>163</sup> was resettled by Maraikkayars at the instance of the king.<sup>164</sup> What the letter also adds, however, is that ‘The revenue realized in the above years from the Pearl Fishery had been devoted to the lighting and other charitable purposes of the above institutions.’<sup>165</sup> The question arises, what were these ‘charitable purposes’ and were they mandated by the Colonial government’s management of revenues? This, however, takes us into the nineteenth century history of the shrine. What we may take away for now, is that the shrine’s burgeoning status over the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was closely tied to its involvement in Coromandel commerce, and its various affiliated economic activities.

## Conclusion

By way of drawing together the three threads that have gone into making this chapter, I have attempted to draw attention to the material foundations of the Nagore Dargah, an aspect that has not been adequately considered by scholars thus far. As mentioned at the start of the chapter, most modern-day pilgrims and tourists visiting the Nagore Dargah appear to be largely ignorant of the site’s history beyond being the location of the shrine. Yet, to scholars of Coromandel commerce, it is well known that Nagore was a port of some consequence. A hub for paddy trade with Ceylon and the Malabar, and textile with South East Asia, it served as a valuable port for the Tanjore’s hinterland. It brought in

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<sup>163</sup> J. Raja Mohamad, ‘Maritime Activities, Economy and Social Customs of the Muslims of Coromandel Coast, 1750-1900’, PhD Thesis, Pondicherry University, Pondicherry, 1997, 21.

<sup>164</sup> S. Arunachalam, *The History of the Pearl Fishery of the Tamil Coast* (Annamalai Nagar: Annamalai University, 1952), 114-115.

<sup>165</sup> ‘Madras Government furnish the Government of Ceylon’.



valuable revenues for the Tanjore court, in the process, as well as supplying it with goods from South East Asian entrepôts. Evolving largely without European intrusion, it developed the reputation of being a significant ‘native’ port, largely the domain of the Muslim Chulia mercantile community. With increasing pressures mounting on the kingdom’s revenues, and shrinking access to ports outside European control, Nagore came to be closely associated with the state of Tanjore, and its ruling elite. This proximity, I have attempted to show, found expression *and was enabled by* courtly patronage of the Nagore Dargah. For its part, the dargah too participated in this economy of maritime commerce, imbricated as it was in both directly, through the possession of certain material rights, and indirectly, through social ties with the Coromandel’s Muslim mercantile communities.

### CHAPTER 3

#### Pulavar Nāyakam's *Tirukkāraṇappurāṇam*: Retelling the *Caritai* of

Shahul Hamid

For Muslims everywhere, Ramaḍān, the ninth month of the Islamic calendar, is especially holy. As is well known, fasting during Ramaḍān constitutes one of the five pillars of Islam, which culminates with the celebration of 'Īd al-Fiṭr (the 'festival of breaking the fast'). What is less well known is that the fasting and feasting is meant to commemorate Prophet Muhammad's first revelation. It was in the month of Ramaḍān that Muhammad was visited by the archangel Jibrīl (Gabriel in English) and revealed to him words that eventually become the text of the Qur'ān. It is perhaps for this very reason that the first day of the month of Ramadan in the Hijri year 1227 (7 September 1812) was chosen to conduct the *araṅkērram* or formal inauguration of the monumental Islamic Tamil *kāppiyam*, the *Tirukkāraṇappurāṇam* (roughly translated, 'the story of the sacred principle').<sup>166</sup> Composed by the celebrated Tamil Muslim poet Ceyku Aptul Kāṭiru Nayinār Leppai Ālim Pulavar of Kayalpatnam and comprising 2,575 verses of Tamil poetry, the *Tirukkāraṇappurāṇam* was the poet's second *kāppiyam* and this was his second *araṅkērram* in Nagore. In 1810, people had gathered there to witness the *araṅkērram* of his first *kāppiyam*, the *Mukiyuttīn Purāṇam*, a composition about the life of Shaikh Abdul Qadir Jilani, founder of the eponymous Qadiri *tariqa*, the predominant Sufi order in South India. On this occasion, the theme of the work was even more suited to the location of the

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<sup>166</sup> While the words 'tiru' and 'purāṇam' are relatively easy to translate, 'kāraṇam' has a rather wide mandate, denoting, simultaneously, principle, source/origin, reason, motive, as well as means. See, *Tamil Lexicon* (Madras: University of Madras, 1924-1936), 883.

*arankērram*. Two years later, the poet had returned with his second kāppiyam, this time on the life for the *Tirukkāraṇappurāṇam* (henceforth, *TkP*) told the story of Nagore's own sufi, Shahul Hamid.

What makes the *TkP* all the more significant, is that it was the first kāppiyam to have been composed by Tamil Muslim poets on the life of a 'local' Sufi, and as such constitutes a rather important source not just for the history of the Nagore dargah but for Tamil Islam more generally. Never before had such a *kāppiyam* been composed by Tamil Muslim poets — not about Shahul Hamid, nor about any of the scores of other Sufis whose dargahs dot the coastline as well as hinterland of the Tamil-speaking region.<sup>167</sup> It was also the first Tamil hagiography to have been composed about Shahul Hamid, and as such marks a crucial moment in the development of what came to be a very rich Islamic Tamil literary tradition, one that continues to thrive even today. The present chapter is, therefore, an attempt to introduce this text and make sense of its contents with respect to the history of the Nagore dargah and the longer tradition of venerating Shahul Hamid through literary means.

The scholarly attention that the *TkP* has received, while enthusiastic in its praise of its work, has done little by way of either engaging with its contents or making sense of the work in terms of the historical sociocultural context in which it was composed, and to which it was, arguably, conceived as making a difference. Thus, the *TkP* has been celebrated by Tamil scholars of Islamic Tamil literature for two reasons. First, for being one of the four kāppiyams composed by Pulavar Nayakam, and therefore a key contributor to his poet's reputation and renown. And second, for being one of group of texts — Islamic

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<sup>167</sup> Including, especially, the dargahs of Natthar Walī in Trichy and that of 'Shahid' Ibrahim at Erwadi, near Kilakkarai.

Tamil kāppiyams — that have been understood by scholars to occupy a very important place in the history of ‘Islamic’ *Tamil literature*. In both cases, it is the *TkP*’s standing as a kāppiyam, a literary work, that is both the cause as well as the focus of scholarly attention. Of course, there is no doubt that the *TkP* is a literary work and was intended to be so by the poet, who was consciously adhering to the genre conventions of a Tamil kāppiyam. But what this means for how the text has been read and understood, is that almost no attention has been paid to its narrative content — the very thing, arguably, that the text is intended to communicate.

As hagiographical material, neither literary scholars nor historians have found the contents of works like the *TkP* worthy of attention. Replete with epic journeys, battles, spirits, miraculous cures and rescues, in the modern reader, the *TkP*, more readily elicits skepticism and incredulity, rather than interest. None of this, however, takes away from the historical quality of the work, in terms of it being located in a particular time and place, involving a specific set of social actors with particular interests at play. To add to this, moreover, is the self-awareness displayed the work, regarding its historical location and importance, captured in the form of a verse describing the work’s first public performance and reception. The present chapter, then, is an attempt, necessarily limited in its scope, to read this work historically — squaring what we know from outside the text with the information that the work itself provides us, while also keeping in mind its multiple valences, as poetry, as literature, as a venerative text, as a hagiography, *and* as a historical source.

To this end, by engaging with it principally as a work of hagiography, the present chapter hopes to broaden and deepen our appreciation of the *TkP* by focusing on its

historical significance. For the *TkP*, as mentioned earlier, is the first fully-fledged articulation of the life-story of Shahul Hamid, and, as such, it offers not just the most complete account of his life but also of what made him a Sufi *shaikh* — arguably, the region's most prominent Sufi shaikh. It thus forms a crucial moment in the process of the emergence and development of a literary venerative tradition surrounding the Nagore shrine and Shahul Hamid. As should be obvious, by adopting such a stance vis-a-vis the text, I am deliberately eschewing any attempt to undertake a documentary reading of the text; an approach that has been more efficient at disqualifying hagiographies from being of use to historians. This is not to suggest that these works do not contain at all the kind of historical 'facts' historians conventionally trade in; indeed, it has been pointed out that 'it is precisely the historically casual nature of the tales, the fact that their conscious "agenda" is pietistic, not historiographical, that lends credibility to such concrete items of historical information as they still contain.'<sup>168</sup> But the principle purpose of the text, the work it does, is not to serve as passive repositories of such information, but to construe and reconstrue them into a qualitatively different type of narrative, in this instance, one that re-conceptualizes Shahul Hamid's life as that of the most prominent Sufi *walī* of the region.

Despite being the first *kāppiyam* about Shahul Hamid, the *TkP* was not the first textual account of his life; there had been compositions before it – in Tamil and Arabic – in which his life-story, or parts of it, had been retold. The *TkP*, thus, should not be read simply as a standalone work, complete in itself and closed off from its peers and predecessors. Rather, as I attempt to show in this chapter, the *TkP* can be seen as being tasked with the collation and weaving together of all the pre-existing narrative

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<sup>168</sup> Ada Rapoport-Albert, 'Hagiography with Footnotes: Edifying Tales and the Writing of History in Hasidism,' *History and Theory* 27.4, Beiheft 27: Essays in Jewish Historiography (Dec. 1988): 126.

threads into one systematic and authoritative account. In the ebb and flow of a continuing tradition of re-telling stories from the life of a *walī* in multiple oral, literary and ritual modes, the composition of the *TkP* thus begins to resemble a key moment of articulation - a critical edition of the Shahul Hamid life-story. Given this, one of the key questions I hope to answer through this chapter include how do we understand the *TkP*'s relationship to the prior hagiographical and venerative literary tradition about Shahul Hamid? Can we see the *TkP* as constituting a decisive shift in that discourse? Did the *TkP* become the authoritative account of Shahul Hamid's life? Also, looking ahead in time, what influence did this work have on later narratives regarding Nagore and Shahul Hamid?

To answer these questions, I focus on three levels or aspects of the text. First, I analyze the way the text is described and presented by its prefatory *kaṭavuḷ vālttu paṭalam* (henceforth, *kvp*), a ubiquitous component of Tamil *kāppiyams* that takes on a special role, as discussed in the preceding chapter, in their Islamic iterations. I focus attention on both parts of the *kvp*, the verses of 'praise proper' and the 'contextual information' they provide regarding the people and processes involved in the making of the *TkP*. What we see on display in these verses, which may at first glance might appear to be merely literary convention or formality, extraneous to, or at best auxiliary to the narrative contained in the body of the *TkP*, is in fact an important and integral component of the larger work as a whole. It is the site for the articulation of the authority of the work, as well as its authors, and it is to this end that the verses containing the 'praise proper' and the 'contextual information' are deployed. After this I turn to the *kāppiyam* itself. As scholars have noted before, perhaps the most remarkable aspect of the hagiographical process and the problematic aspect of the texts it produces is its ability to both typify and exemplify the

lives it describes. Sufi *walīs* had to be readily identifiable, yet their uniqueness too had to be retained so as not to let their life-story collapse into a repetitious archetype. In the *TkP*, we can find this balance being achieved at two levels: in the organization of the by now familiar life-story of Shahul Hamid into the *kāṇṭams-paṭalam* structure that characterizes Tamil *kāppiyams*, and in the miracle stories that can be said to comprise the bulk of the narrative content itself. In the second section of this chapter, I focus on the *TkP*'s narrative structure, and in the third on its content. Whatever the extent of the role of the *TkP*'s authors in manufacturing the life-story of Shahul Hamid, the story they sought to retell was that of a figure who had by the time of the *TkP*'s composition already come to occupy the place of the region's most prominent Sufi shaikh. The purpose of the text was not to seek post-facto legitimacy for the Sufi or his shrine, but to re-articulate his life-story in a manner that was in keeping with the stature he had been accorded by his devotees, a stature that had previously been accorded only to the founding figures of Islam. Taken together, it is hoped that this discussion will illustrate the ways in which the *TkP* 'works' to re-construct and authorize the *wilāya* of Shahul Hamid.

### **Hierarchizing Authority: Sainthood and Authorship in the *kaṭavuḷ vāḷttu paṭalam***

While the *TkP* was the first Islamic Tamil *kāppiyam* dedicated to writing about Shahul Hamid's life, it was not the first time the *walī* had been mentioned in such a literary context. The Sufi shaikh's literary debut took place well before, in 1648,<sup>169</sup> when he came to find for himself a place of some significance in an Islamic Tamil *kāppiyam* by the name *Kanakāpiṣēka Mālai*. In this work, poet Ceyku Nayinār Kān of Madurai, better

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<sup>169</sup> Not long after the first minaret had come up at the site of the Nagore dargah, in 1645

known as ‘Kanakavirāyar’, included a whole verse in praise of the Sufi shaikh, as part of the *kvp*, a very important component of the Islamic Tamil kāppiyam. Ostensibly a section meant for the poet to offer his praises to God, the *kvp* can be found in a variety of Tamil kāppiyams and is not unique to Islamic Tamil works as such. However, unlike the non-Islamic kāppiyams where the number and order of the figures praised in this section could vary greatly from one text to another, in the case of the Islamic kāppiyams, poets offered verses of praise to a more or less fixed set of figures in a strictly hierarchized way.<sup>170</sup> M.M. Uvais lists the hierarchy of figures as follows:

1. Allah, the Creator
2. Muhammad, the final prophet, followed by those who preceded him
3. The Rashidun (‘rightly guided’) Caliphs: Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman, and Ali
4. Hasan and Hussain, the Prophet’s grandsons
5. The Sahaba, or Muhammad’s ‘companions’
6. The four Imams, founders of the four *madhabs* or schools of jurisprudence
7. Awliyā, the ‘friends’ of Allah

While both Uvais and Torsten Tschacher have noted this particular convention as uniquely Islamic in the world of Tamil kāppiyams, Tschacher also suggests that by following such a practice these pulavars (poets) were actively signaling their participation in a distinctly Muslim literary sphere. To this I would add that while the *kvp*’s form certainly did become conventionalized and distinct from other Tamil kāppiyams, its rhetorical purpose *within* the kāppiyam was also important. First and foremost, it articulated clearly the hierarchy of figures associated with the founding and establishment of Islam and Muslim community. Second, it attested to and confirmed the social standing and significance of the subject of the kāppiyams. And third, and more significantly for what we are discussing with respect to Shahul Hamid’s presence in this hierarchy, the *kvp*

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<sup>170</sup> Where the poets did get to exercise freedom was in the number of verses they chose to dedicate to each entity (or class of entities, as the case may be). See table 3.2 below.



provided an opportunity to the Tamil Muslim poets to include a number of locally significant figures within what was in fact a pan-Islamic hierarchy of founding figures. As can be seen in table 3.2 below, while the ordering of figures was more or less fixed, we see poets exercising somewhat greater discretion in their choice of *awliyā* to be venerated. As we can see from the tables below, Abdul Qadir Jilani and Shahul Hamid are the two *awliyā* who appear most frequently, and usually both of them get a verse each to themselves. Whenever these figures appear together, Shahul Hamid almost always follows Abdul Qadir Jilani. The inclusion of other *awliyā* is less common but not absent, and only in one instance do we find that the poet mentions four cases of other *awliyā* figure, usually after Shahul Hamid. Thus, for instance, in *Irājanāyakam* (1808), the order in which the *awliyā* are honored by the author Vaṇṇakkañciya Pulavar, is as follows: one verse each for Muhiyuddin Abdul Qadir Jilāni, Shahul Hamid, Ceyyitu Ipuṛākīm (of Ervadi), Catakattullā Appa, Mutaliyār Vevvai Cākipu and his son Apū Pakkar Vevvai Ālim, and Tawhītu Māmunā Vevvai Ālim, followed by one verse for all other *awliyā*. A clear hierarchy of *awliyā* is thus articulated by the kaṭavuḷ vāḷttu paṭalams of these work, wherein, Muhiyuddin Abdul Qadir Jilani is most significant and always precedes all other *awliyā*, including Shahul Hamid. Other Sufis, when they appear, usually follow after these figures, indicating a relatively lower rank.<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> The exception here is the *Tīnviḷakkam* (1821), in which Vaṇṇakkañciya Pulavar includes other *awliyā*, but on this occasion the additional *awliyā* are inserted between Abdul Qadir Jilani and Shahul Hamid.

**Table 3.1: Islamic Tamil Kāppiyams in Chronological Order**

	Name	Year	Author	Subject
1	<i>Āyiramacalā</i>	1572	Vaṇṇapparimalap pulavar	A thousand questions on Islam posed to Muhammad by a Jewish leader
2	<i>Mikurācumālai</i>	1590	Ālippulavar	On the ‘ascension’ of the Prophet Muḥammad to heaven.
3	<i>Tirunerinītam</i>	1613	Pīrmukammatu	—
4	<i>Kaṇakāpiṣēka Mālai</i>	1648	Kanakavirāyar	The eight ‘kings’ of Islam
5	<i>Cīrāppurāṇam</i>	c.1700	Umaruppulavar	Prophet’s life
6	<i>Tirumaṇakāṭci</i>	pre-1714	Cēkāti Nayinār Pulavar	Prophet’s wedding
7	<i>Cinna Cīra</i>	1732	Panī Akumatu	Prophet’s biography contd.
8	<i>Irājanāyakam</i>	1808	Vaṇṇakalañciyap pulavar	Nabi Sulaiman
9	<i>Kutpunāyakam</i>	1810	Pulavar Nāyakam	Muhyuddin Abdul Qadir Jilani
10	<i>Tirukkāraṇappurāṇam</i>	1812	Pulavar Nāyakam	Shahul Hamid
11	<i>Kutpunāyakam</i>	1814	Vaṇṇakalañciyap pulavar	Muhyuddin Abdul Qadir Jilani
12	<i>Tirumaṇimālai</i>	1816	Pulavar Nāyakam	Nabi Ibrahim
13	<i>Mukiyittīnpurāṇam</i>	1816	Patuṟuttīn Pulavar	Muhyuddin Abdul Qadir Jilani
14	<i>Iravuculkūlpataippōr</i>	1818	Kuññumūcu Ālim Pulavar	—
15	<i>Tīnviḷakkam</i>	1821	Vaṇṇakalañciyap pulavar	Ervadi ‘Sultan’ Ibrahim
16	<i>Putūkuccām</i>	1821	Pulavar Nāyakam	Islam’s ‘triumph’ over Syria
17	<i>Nākūrpurāṇam</i>	1893	Kulām Kātiṟu Nāvalar	<i>Talappurāṇam</i> on Nagore

**Table 3.2: Sequence of Verses in the *kaṭavuḷ vāḷttu paṭalam***

Name	Year	Allah	Prophets	Rāshidūn	Hasan-Husain	Sahaba	Imams	Awliyā
<i>Āyiramacalā</i>	1572	3-5	7-13	14-17	18	20-21	22	19
<i>Mikurācu-mālai</i>	1590	1-3	4-6	7-10	11	-	-	-
<i>Tirunerinītam</i>	1613	2	3	4	4	-	-	4 (AQJ)
<i>Kaṇakāpiṣēka mālai</i>	1648	1-3	4-7	8-11	12	13	14	15 (AQJ) 16 (SH)
<i>Cīrāp-purāṇam</i>	c.1700	1-4	5-8	9-12	13	14	15	16 (AQJ) 17 (SS)
<i>Tirumaṇa-kāṭci</i>	pre-1714	1-4	5-10	11-14	15	16-17	18	19 (AQJ) 20 (SH)
<i>Cinna Cīra</i>	1732	1	2-3	4	4	5	5	5
<i>Irājanāyakam</i>	1808	1-4	5-8	9-12	13	14-15	16	17 (AQJ) 18 (SH) 19-23 (others)
<i>Kutpu-nāyakam</i>	1810	1-9	10-12	13-16	17	18-19	-	20 (AQJ) 21 (SH)
<i>Tirukkāraṇap-purāṇam</i>	1812	1-6	7-9	10-13	14	15	15	16 (AQJ) 17 (Ghawth) 18 (SH) 19-26 (others)
<i>Kutpu-nāyakam</i>	1814	1-6	7-10	11-14	15	16-17	-	17 (AQJ) 18 (SH)
<i>Tirumaṇi-mālai</i>	1816	1-6	7-9	10-13	14	15	-	17 (AQJ) 18-20 (others) 21 (SH) 22 (SS)
<i>Mukiyittīn-purāṇam</i>	1816	4-6	7-10	11-14	15	16	17	18 (SH)
<i>Iravuculkūl-paṭaippōr</i>	1818	1-8	9-15	16-19	20-22	23-24	25	26 (AQJ)
<i>Tīnviḷakkam</i>	1821	1-2	3-4	5-8	10	9, 11-12	13	14-15 (AQJ) 16-22 (others/ 23 (SH)

It is useful to consider, briefly, the specific characterization of Shahul Hamid in these *kvp*s, for this will help us identify the continuities, innovations, and transformations that animate the *TkP*. In verse 16 of the *kvp* of the *Kanakāpiṣēka Mālai*, poet

Kanakavirāyar writes:

*vaṭṭamām pūvir tañcai maṇṇaṇiṇ piṇiyai tīrttu*  
*tuṭṭamā muniyai kūcīr curuṇṭura aṭaittu vāri*  
*maṭṭamāy kavilṭtu mēnmai vaḷaṅkikoṭu nākai mēvi*  
*kaṭṭamā lakarṛum cākul kamī tiṇai yaṭi tutippōm*

As we can see, the verse is not limited to offering generic words of praise in honor of Shahul Hamid, rather it attributes to him two specific miraculous deeds. The first such ‘miracle’ is curing the disease afflicting king of Tanjore (‘*tañcai maṇṇaṇiṇ piṇiyai tīrttu*’; the king’s name is not mentioned). And the second, he is described as having gotten rid of a *jinn* (disguised in the form of a muni or Hindu sage) by trapping it inside a goblet and flinging it into the sea. Worth noting here as well is the fact that Shahul Hamid is clearly identified with Nākai (Nagore), and the virtues of both saint and shrine are extolled.

After the *Kanakāpiṣēka Mālai*, there were only two Islamic Tamil *kāppiyams* that did not include a mention of Shahul Hamid their *kvp*. This near ubiquity of Shahul Hamid in the *kvp* of Islamic Tamil *kāppiyams* notwithstanding, the stature of these two works is such within the wide world of Islamic Tamil literature as to prompt us to consider why mention of Shahul Hamid had been eschewed from them. The two works in question are the well-known *Cīrāppurāṇam* (c. 1700), attributed to the pen of Umaruppulavar, and the lesser known *Cīrāvenkira Purāṇam* (1732; also known as the *Cinna Cīrā*), composed by Pani Akumatu of Kāyalpaṭṭinam. Taken together, these works provide a biography of the life of Prophet Muhammad and are therefore held — the *Cīrāppurāṇam* in particular —

in very high esteem. In the case of the *Cinna Cīrā*, the whole *kvp* itself is quite meagre — comprising only 5 verses. It may be that since the work was intended as an adjunct to the *Cīrāppurāṇam*, the poet did not think it necessary or even prudent to construct anew an elaborate *kvp*, which would explain the absence of any mention of Shahul Hamid. This is not the case in the *Cīrāppurāṇam*, however, which includes a proper *kvp*, 17 verses long, in which after Abdul Qadir Jilani, the poet Umaru offers praise to another local Sufi, Shaikh Sadaqatullah. Sadaqatullah ‘Appa’, as he is known today, was himself seventeenth century figure and a contemporary of the poet. Indeed, he had played an important role in the composition of *Cīrāppurāṇam*, by directing his student Mahmud al-Tibi to provide Umaru with a Tamil *urai* of the Prophet’s *sirah* or biography (from whence the name, ‘Cīra’), which may go some way towards explaining the reason why he had been included. Why include Sadaqatullah Appa but leave out Shahul Hamid?

This question takes on an even more interesting tenor when we consider the former’s reputation for orthodoxy, as transmitted by the story of his encounter with the poet Umaru. Likely an apocryphal narrative, recounts Umaru as having appeared before the shaikh without covering his upper body. Sadaqatullah Appa, a scholar-sufi with a rather stern temperament, rebukes the poet for resembling a Hindu, refuses to cooperate, and sends the poet on his way. As these stories usually go, it was only through divine intervention that this most well-known Islamic Tamil *kāppiyam* came into existence. As the disconsolate Umaru lamented his fate and prays to Allah, the Prophet Muhammad visited Sadaqatullah Appa in a dream, directing him to assist the poet in his endeavors.

A story with similar valences is recounted about Sadaqatullah Appa with respect to Nagore as well. It is said that once when the shaikh visited Nagore in order to pay his

respects to the great *walī* Shahul Hamīd, he chose to do from a distance and not to enter inside the dargah, thereby indicating, it is suggested his disapproval of ‘shrine culture’.

Whatever the historicity of this account, we do know that Shaikh Sadaqatullah composed a *qasīdah* (a genre of panegyric poetry in Arabic), in praise of Shahul Hamid. Titled ‘*Qasīdah ra’iyah fī Ganj Sawā’iyah*,’ in it the shaikh praises Shahul Hamid in generic terms of the form, but also mentions certain interesting specifics that tell us something of how the shaikh understood the wali’s popularity. Roughly translated, these lines (13-16) read as follows:

How many visit your garden,  
Noblemen, scholars, the generous, and merchants vie to get in,  
Even Christians and hopeless Brahmins,  
Oh Abdul Qadir, nullifier of deformities,  
Oh Lord of Nakūr, be my helper....<sup>172</sup>

In addition to Sadaqatulla Appa’s *qasīda*, an Arabic *maulid*, another type of panegyric poem (typically used with reference to the Prophet) was composed by Mahmud Tibi al-Qahiri (d. 1727), the person who provided Umaruppulavar with an *uṛai* or commentary on the life of the Prophet Muhammad, in Tamil, at the behest of Sadaqatulla Appa. Sam Shihabuddin (1638-1709), the elder of Shaykh Sadaqatullah’s two younger brothers, is also believed to have composed a *qasīdah* on Shahul Hamid. This evidence certainly goes against notion that Shahul Hamid’s absence from the *Cirāppurāṇam*’s *kvp* was in any way reflective of the text’s and its authors’ more orthodox Islamic values.

While solitary praise verses and a small handful of Arabic *qasīdas* may appear to be a rather sparse form of evidence of Shahul Hamid’s prominence, the context in which

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<sup>172</sup> Muhammad Yousuf Kokan, *Arabic and Persian in the Carnatic, 1710-1960* (Madras: University of Madras, 1974), 66-68. The entire poem has been published by Kokan, but it is not clear what his source was. He does mention, though, that this *qasīdah*, along with another one in praise of Muhiyuddin Abdul Qadir Jilani, also composed by Shaikh Sadaqatullah, are very popular in Tamil Nadu even today. My thanks to Nicholas Harris for helping me read, understand and translate this *qasida*.

these verses appear and the social standing of the authors of the poetry strongly suggests that by this time Shahul Hamid had come to occupy a status in the region's Muslim religious imagination that was second, among the Sufi *awliyā*, only to Muhiyuddin Abdul Qadir Jilani. This exalted status was maintained by Shahul Hamid as he continued to appear in the *kaṭavul vālttu paṭalams* of subsequent kāppiyams as well, right into the twentieth century, when the last known Islamic Tamil kāppiyam was composed.<sup>173</sup> Despite there being no one work, in Tamil, on the life of Shahul Hamid until 1812, it is clear that there did exist already a long tradition of venerating him, albeit indirectly, through literary means. It is important to keep this longer tradition of veneration in mind, as we turn to the *kvp* of the *TkP*.

Turning then to the *TkP*, two-thirds of the verses contained in the *kvp* — 26 of 39 — are given over to the task of offering praise. Of course, as we already know, Allah, as *kaṭavul*, is only one of the subjects to whom these verses are addressed, several other figures receive praise, typically following a particular sequence, although individual poets may choose to leave out certain figures or offer elaborate for some and not others. At any rate, the distribution of praise verses in the *TkP* is as follows: Allah, verses 1 - 6; Muhammad, verses 7 - 9; the Rashidun (the first four 'rightly guided' caliphs), verses 10 - 13; Hasan and Hussain (the prophet's grandsons, celebrated for their martyrdom in the Battle of Karbala), verse 14; the Sahaba and four Imams (Muhammad's 'companions' and transmitters of the Prophetic *sunnah*, and the founders of four Sunni schools of

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<sup>173</sup> Even notable exceptions, such as the celebrated *Cīṭāppurāṇam* (c. 1700) in which Shahul Hamid does not figure, do not necessarily indicate a fall in the fortunes of the Sufi shaikh and the cult of veneration surrounding him, for two of the figures involved in the composition of that work, the 'consultant' ulama in fact, are known to have themselves composed praise poetry about him, in Arabic. The last Islamic kāppiyam was composed by Āripu Nāvalar, son of Kulām Kāṭiṟu Nāvalar, both of whom were appointed dargah 'makāvittuvāns' or resident poets of Nagore. We shall discuss Kulām Kāṭiṟu literary contributions in the next chapter.

Islamic jurisprudence, respectively), verse 15; and Muhiyuddin Abdul Qadir Jilani, verse 16. Until this point in the *kvp*, if we compare the *TkP* with the *Kutpunāyakam*, the *kāppiyam* composed just two years prior in 1810 on the life of Muhiyuddin Abdul Qadir Jilani (and therefore also known as the ‘*Mukiyuttīnpurāṇam*’), we notice that in the latter work the same ground was covered by Pulavar Nāyakam over the course of 20 verses, and the praise portion of the *kvp* came to a close with verse 21, which was dedicated to Shahul Hamid. In the *TkP*, however, the project of offering praise takes on a much more elaborate scale.

The praise portion of the *TkP* is altered and extended to include a number of people who had never before been mentioned in the context of a *kvp*, all of whom were directly connected with Shahul Hamid. After verse 16, the first person venerated in the *TkP* is not Shahul Hamid, as in the case of the *Kutpunāyakam*, but Muhammad Ghaus — the sixteenth century Shattari Sufi based in Gwalior who is believed to have been Hamid’s *shaykh*, or spiritual teacher and preceptor. This was Ghaus’ first time being mentioned in a *kvp*. More importantly, his insertion between Abdul Qadir Jilani and Shahul Hamid reiterates the latter’s *tariqa* links with the Shattari order, in addition to or perhaps over and above his genealogical connection with the founder of the Qadiri *tariqa*, which was and continues to be, the predominant Sufi fellowship in the region as well as the order to which the region’s ulama or orthodoxy belong. The playing up Shahul Hamid’s lineage ties with Muhammad Ghaus, an important if somewhat controversial figure in the history of South Asian Sufism, served to reinforce a second *tariqa* source for his authority as a Sufi, and in so doing gave to the Shattari school a certain legitimacy in the Tamil region. That being said, the links with the Qadiri were not being erased either,



for in the very next verse, number 18, the poet, himself a Qadiri, praises Shahul Hamid using his cognomen — Abdul Qadir.

After this, in verses 19 through 26, praise is offered to a set of people to whom Shahul Hamid was connected through ties of kinship, and who were, therefore, his spiritual successors. Mentioned first and foremost is Yusuf (‘Yūcupu’), the *walī*’s ‘*kāraṇa putalvar*’ (miracle son), born as the result of a boon granted by Shahul Hamid. The life and career of Yusuf, the adopted son of a Sufi who never married, is in fact a key narrative sub-plot that unfolds throughout the *TkP*. Indeed, the single longest *paṭalam* in the *TkP* is the one that details Yusuf’s own wedding to Sultan Bibi. This union produced eight children — six boys, and two girls — and subsequent generations of Shahul Hamid’s descendants claim the legitimacy of their spiritual successorship by demonstrating their descent from one of these grandchildren. The degree of importance accorded to these genealogical links is made manifest by the fact that in the *kvp* each of the grandsons and the two daughters together, all receive individual verses of praise from Pulavar Nāyakam. When we compare this with, for instance, the Prophet’s companions and the founders of the four Sunni legal schools, all of whom cumulatively received only one verse of praise, we can see the emphasis that was being given to these eight people, who had not hitherto and nor would here after appeared in the *kvp*.

We thus see in the praise portion of *kvp* of the *TkP* the articulation of a kind of hierarchy, pertaining specifically to Shahul Hamid, which incorporated his teacher and preceptor on the one side, and his son and grandsons on the other. We will remember that in the early part of the *kvp*, Hasan and Hussain, as well as Ali (the last of the ‘rightly guided’ caliphs), all of whom shared a kinship bond with the Prophet and were seen - by

some though not all - as his true successors, were mentioned. Of course, their position in the hierarchy of venerable individuals in Islam is well established, but it is possible to infer an analogical case being made in the later part of the *kvp* for the legitimacy of spiritual succession for biological descendants of Shahul Hamid. After all, one of the ways in which the text itself goes on construct Shahul Hamid's own Sufi credentials is by tracing his lineage back to the Prophet, and in this genealogy too, the key figure through that link is established is Hasan, the Prophet's grandson.

Turning now to the second part of the *kvp*, verses 27 to 39, which make up the work's *nūlvaralāru*, verses dedicated to providing a kind of 'history of the book'. Although the form that these verses take is also that of *vāl̥ttu* or praise — at times deploying the very same verb in its infinitive form, *vāl̥ka vāl̥ka* — the people to whom these verses are addressed are of a very different order, for they were the poet's contemporaries, people who had played crucial roles in the actual process of composing the *TkP*. Islamic Tamil *kāppiyams* are remarkably forthcoming about information regarding its authorship and the process of composition, distinguishing them from Tamil and Sanskrit *purāṇa-kāppiyams*, which have been notoriously difficult to date and locate socially.<sup>174</sup> Unlike the primordial quality that is emphasized in the Sanskrit and Tamil Hindu *purāṇas*, the Islamic Tamil *kāppiyam*'s *kvp* insists on categorically naming, dating and locating that particular work. While this information is of course beneficial to the historian trying to read and make sense of these texts, for the authors and their intended audience itself clearly there was something at stake as well. Where the *TkP* differs from

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<sup>174</sup> Kamil Zvelebil, *Companion Studies to the History of Tamil Literature* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1992), 98-128; Torsten Tschacher, 'Convention and Community: The Poetics of Prefaces to Early Islamic Literature,' in Hans Harder und Thomas Oberlies, eds, *Zeitschrift für Indologie und Siidasiestudien*, Voll. 28 (Bremen: Hempen Verlag, 2012), 183-209.

the kāppiyams that came before it is in the fact that the life it sought to narrativize and retell did not yet exist in the form of an authoritative Arabic *mūlanūl* (source book) that poets had been able to deploy in order to write about the life of the Prophet Muhammad, the early Caliphs, Hasan and Hussain, or even Muhiyuddin Abdul Qadir Jilāni, about whom Pulavar Nāyakam himself had composed a kāppiyam.<sup>175</sup> On that occasion the poet was able to base his entire work on a single *mūlanūl* — al-Yāfi’s well known work *Khulāṣat al-mafākhir*.<sup>176</sup> In the case of the *TkP*, we know that there was no such one already authoritative source, and neither does the poet mention a singular *mūlanūl*. Instead, as he informs us, especially through the first three verses, a number of different kinds of sources were sought out, examined, compared and contrasted, in order to compose the *TkP*.

But, of course, not all sources are created equal and in these verses we can also discern the articulation of a negotiated hierarchy, whereby specific kind of credence is given to a specific source, depending on its author. Following immediately after the conclusion of the *vālttu* or ‘praise’ section of the *kvp*, Pulavar Nāyakam presents three verses that tell us about the various ‘sources’ he relied upon in order to compose the *TkP*. In order to be able to pay careful attention to the specific ways in which the poet mentions and describes these sources, I present here both the Tamil original as well as my translation of these verses.

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<sup>175</sup> Mu. Aptul Karīm, ed. *Kutpu nāyakam: Mukiyittin purāṇṇam, Ceyku Aptul Kātir Nayinār Leppai Ālim Iyarriyatu* (Atirāmpaṭṭinṇam: Āyisā Patippakam, 1982).

<sup>176</sup> Incidentally, the same work forms the foundation of a number of Southeast Asian ‘*hikayat*’ texts, composed in Javanese, Malay, and Sundanese, in the early modern period (although the available manuscripts date from the eighteenth century, the works themselves believed to be an earlier provenance. See, for instance, Julian Millie, *Splashed by the Saint: Ritual Reading and Islamic Sanctity in West Java* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2009), 49-63; Michael Feener and Michael Laffan, ‘Sufi Scents Across the Indian Ocean: Yemeni Hagiography and the Earliest History of Southeast Asian Islam’, *Archipel* 70 (2005): 202-206.

*Tiṇivaḷaṇ ceriyuṁ kāyal ceykaptul kātirīṇra*  
*Vaṇivaḷar maṛaiyin tīncol akumatu lappai yālim*  
*Kaṇivaḷar arapil kōtta karutturai paṭiyu maṛrai*  
*Maṇivaḷa ruraikaḷ tērntum vakaiyoṭu panuval ceytān* [27]

*Varicaiyin mikka kīrtti vaḷḷalār tōṇṇal pērar*  
*Caritai maṛṇarnta pāpā cākipu Leppai ālim*  
*Iruviḷi maṇiyām pīru Mukammatu cākip ēntal*  
*Arumai nanmarukar mēnmai yaṛivaḷar kuṇattin mikkār* [28]

*Cīraṇi koṇṭa vaḷḷal ceyku yūcupu tam pērar*  
*Kāraṇi karattin vaṇmai mukammatu kalipā tōṇṇal*  
*Tāraṇi puya kamītu cākipu ālim tanta*  
*Verāṇi uraiyinōṭum ikkavi paṇuval ceytān* [29]

Son of Ceykaptul Kātir, of wealthy and fertile Kāyal,  
 Akumatu Leppai Ālim, learned in the doctrine of the beautiful Quran,  
 compiled a summary in Arabic; according to it and after  
 examining other commentaries like it, systematically, he composed a work [27]

A grandson descended from the *vaḷḷalār* of great honor and fame,  
 Baba Cakipu Leppai Ālim — well acquainted with the biography and so on,  
 apple of the eye of the great Pīr Mukammatu Cākipu,  
 his precious nephew — was richly endowed in excellence and wisdom [28]

The beautiful benefactor Ceyku Yūcupu, his grandson  
 Mukammatu Kalipā, [who understands] the quality of the principle agent, his son  
 Kamītu Cākipu Ālim, [with] whose shoulders can support mountains,  
 using the ‘root’ given commentary by him, as well, this poet composed a work  
 [29]

Twice over the course of these three verses, the poet uses the expression *panuval ceytān* as the final verb ending. The first time he says this at the end of verse 27, after introducing the first set of sources, and the second time at the end of verse 29, after discussing another set of ‘sources’ that he had relied upon in order to ‘write the book’. Mentioned first and foremost, in verse 27, is a *karutturai* (gist or substance of the text), attributed to one Akumatu Leppai Ālim, son of Ceykaptul Kātiru of Kayalpatnam. The *karutturai* itself was composed in Arabic, and depending on how we read the verse, either Akumatu Leppai himself or his work, or perhaps both, were informed, in turn, by

the ‘excellent Quran’s religious words’ (*aṇiṇaḷar maṇaiyiṇ tīncol*). Within the space of half a verse the poet is able to flag multiple ways in which this *karutturai* was an authoritative work - the author was an *ālim* from Kayalpatnam - by now an important center of Islamic learning;<sup>177</sup> both he and his work were directly informed by Quranic doctrine; and the text itself was in Arabic and reminiscent, therefore, of the kind of *mūlanūl* that Pulavar Nāyakam had relied upon to compose the *Kutpunāyakam*. Given that this is the first text that the poet mentions as his ‘source’, arguably it held greater significance than the others whose mention followed. That being said, in the very same verse itself, the poet also reiterates the fact that he relied on multiple sources, not just, for instance, an Arabic *karutturai*. Indeed, in the very same verse, the poet states that in addition to this text he ‘also examined a number of other gem-like texts’ (*maṇiṇaḷar uraikaḷ tērntum*), and then proceeded to compose the book in a systematic manner (*vakaiyōṭa paṇuval ceytāṇ*).

The next two verses introduce figures and sources whose authority was based not on their knowledge of the Quran or Arabic, but on hereditary ties with Shahul Hamid. These verses are also more difficult to parse and understand, and therefore my reading of them must be taken as provisional. In verse 28, we are introduced to two figures: Baba Cakipu Leppai Ālim and Pīru Mukammatu Cākipu. Whereas Baba Cakipu is described as the person who possessed knowledge of the life-story of the famed lord and his descendants (*vaḷḷalār tōṇṇal pērar caritai maṇṇum uṇarnta*), Pīru Mukammatu is

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<sup>177</sup> See Susan Schomburg’s discussion of the history of Kayalpatnam’s emergence as a center of Islamic learning and scholarly and poetic production, “‘Reviving Religion’: The Qadiri Sufi Order, Popular Devotion to Sufi Saint Muhyiuddin ‘Abdul Qadir al-Gilani, and Processes of “Islamization” in Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka’. PhD Dissertation, Harvard University, 2003, especially Chapter 3, ‘Five Centuries of Outstanding Qādirī “Kāyalār” and their Literary Contributions’.

described as the former's son-in-law or nephew (*naṇmarukar*), in addition to being, in his own right, richly endowed with good qualities like intelligence and dignity (*mēṇmai arivaḷar kuṇattin mikkār*). While the verse thus elaborates the identities of these two men, what it does not specify is what they did for the composition of the *TkP*. In the absence of any mention of a written urai being provided, unlike in the previous verse, we are forced to imagine other modes of contribution — orality being one of them. Though it is impossible to be sure, perhaps the contributions of these two men was conveyed via oral means, conceivably including within its remit not just the provision of an account of the Sufi's *caritai* (life-story) that Baba Cakipu is supposed to have known and understood, but also being able to correct and explain contradictions that would have likely existed between the multiple accounts that the poet had access to. The further question that arises is what gave these men and their account of Sufi's life the authority that necessitated their involvement in the composition of the *TkP*. One clue that may help us answer this question lies in the names of these two men. Today, all the people who claim their descent from one of Shahul Hamid's six grandsons and two granddaughters are cumulatively referred to as the *cākipumārkaḷ*. The word *cākipu* (a Tamilization of the Arabic *ṣāhib*, meaning owner) occurs in the names of both men. In the context of this verse, *cākipu* can therefore be understood to refer to Shahul Hamid's descendants, who are also, by virtue of this link, his spiritual adepts. That being said, the additional inclusion of the terms 'Baba' and 'Pīru' in both names, respectively, suggests that both these men with spiritual teachers in their own right as well, possessing the social authority that would come with such a situation in life. Indeed, last but not least, the use of the term '*varicaiyiṇ mikka*' (of great[est?] rank) at the start of the verse as a way to

qualify the position of Baba Cākipu (who was, it should be noted, also an *ālim*) may be understood to indicate the high rank of this person among all the descendants of Shahul Hamid, at that time. Interestingly, when discussing the question of the *mūlanūl* for the *TkP*, Uvais completely skips over verse 28, without giving any reason for having done so, but as we can see, the roles played by these two figures are not, at first glance, clear to see.

Turning finally to verse 29, the last of the three verses that mention the ‘sources’ that were consulted by the poet in order to compose the *TkP*. The key figure in this verse is a person called Kamītu Cākipu Ālim, who is identified as having given to the poet a ‘*vēraṇi urai*,’ which the latter used in order to compose his book. As the name indicates, once again, Kamītu had both scholarly credentials as well as hereditary links with Shahul Hamid. The latter are emphasized in particular, by detailing the fact that Kamītu Cākipu was the son of one Mukammatu Kalipā, who was in turn a grandson of the great benefactor (*cīraṇi vaḷḷal*) Yusuf, the adopted son of Shahul Hamid. The presence of the term *kalipā* (from the Arabic *khalīfa*) in the father’s title is also suggestive for it can be read as implying that he was the eldest in the hereditary chain of spiritual succession that operates at several Sufi shrines including the Nagore, right into the present day.<sup>178</sup>

Having thus elaborated the identity and standing of the source of the *urai*, the text itself is described by the poet as a *vēraṇi urai*, which may be translated as ‘the beautiful, root

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<sup>178</sup> [https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/khalifa-COM\\_0486?s.num=0&s.f.s2\\_parent=s.f.book.encyclopaedia-of-islam-2&s.q=khalifa#d14903494e4399](https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/khalifa-COM_0486?s.num=0&s.f.s2_parent=s.f.book.encyclopaedia-of-islam-2&s.q=khalifa#d14903494e4399) (accessed 15 October 2018). The current claimant to the position of the dargah’s Kalifa, eldest son of the last Kalifa, has his own Facebook, in which no personal name is mentioned at all, instead alongside the photo is the title ‘Nagore Dargah Kalifa’, and a telling English subtitle that reads, ‘The High Priest of Nagore Dargah (Sajjada Nasheen).’ [<https://www.facebook.com/nagoredargahkalifasahib> (accessed 15 October 2018)]. The latter term, Sajjada Nasheen, is more commonly used in North India, at the dargahs of Muinuddin Chishti in Ajmer and Nizamuddin Awliya in Delhi, for instance.

text’, suggesting that the text was deemed to be foundational — similar to how an Arabic ‘*mūlanūl*’ would have been for the earlier *kāppiyams* — its authenticity and authority being based, once again, on kinship ties between the source of the *urai* and the subject of its content.

Although we are interested specifically in the sources deployed by the author of the *TkP*, in order to understand how the text authorized its account of Shahul Hamid’s life and whether there was some kind of continuity between earlier textual references and treatments of the subject, the *kvp* verses do not limit themselves to providing only this information. The process of authorization extended beyond just the question of sources, but also included other aspects of the compositional process, not least of which was recording the social pedigree and prestige of the patron and the author himself. A majority of the remaining verses of the second part of the *kvp*, we note, are dedicated to fulfilling this role. The patron of the work, Akumatu Cākipu, son of Abu Bakkar Sittīk, resident of Nākai (Nagore), is mentioned in two different places in *kvp* (as well as other places in the work), for having performed two crucial roles. First of all, he was the person who came up with the idea of composing a work like the *TkP*, as we are informed in verse 31: ‘*cākamītin takuticēr kāraṇattin... kavi muttam coriya vēṇṭum ena karuttu iyarrinānē*’. And in verse 39, at the culmination of the whole *kvp*, he is praised for the material support he provided that allowed for Shahul Hamid’s hagiography to be composed (‘*nāyakar caritaikku anpin avamaru nitiyam īnta akumatu cākipu*’). While it isn’t clear from these verses what the source of Akumatu Cākipu’s wealth may have been, once again the presence of the term ‘Cākipu’ prompts us to consider the possibility that he too may have been one of the descendants of the Sufī, albeit perhaps one whose



material and therefore social standing was supported by engagements that went beyond the dargah.

In the verses allocated to introducing himself and his work, all the effusive encomia that the poet had been offering up to this point is replaced with praise of a more self-effacing if not deprecatory nature, and in so doing adhering to the well-established poetic practice known as *avaiyaṭakkam*. After introducing himself as the son of Kapīpu Mukammatali Leppai and grandson of Mānāpiḷlai Leppai Ālim of Kayalpatnam (referred to in the verse by its alternative appellation ‘Kāhirūn’), the famed assayer of gems, in verse 33, in the following verse the poet goes on to describe himself as someone who despite being unaware of the rules and regulations of the four major works of Tamil grammar and prosody (‘*akattiyam aruntolkāppiyam yāpparuṅkalam nannūlin takaiṭṭiram teriyān*’). He writes that had been able to compose such a work because his desire to receive the bounty Shahul Hamid’s blessings (‘*cākamītin pakuttiṭam kāraṇattin palan ani kiṭaiṭṭa nāṭi*’). In verse 35, he compares himself to a blind man attempting the same task (‘*kaṇṇilātān tānum avvinai ceyvān pōl*’) as that done by artists who are like the nine precious gems (‘*cemmaṇi mutalavāya tiru nava maṇi kaṇṇāḷar*’), adding that any credit that may accrue to this work, which he was submitting before the greats of poetry, was too much (‘*pammiya nūlkaḷ tērnta pā aṇi periyōr munnar cammatatta innūl cērkkum takaimaiyē mikai uḷḷōrē*’). Continuing in the same self-deprecatory vein, in verse 36 he writes that just as people of the world covet the sweet smell that is emitted even by the very fibres of a fragrant flower (‘*virai tarum malarinōḷu nārumē vērum vācam parital ini yārum koḷvar pārinil anrō*’), so too will they accept his lowly words for they are in loving

praise of the great lord Aptul Kātir (*‘vaḷḷal uyar Aptul Kātiru inṣam puri pukaḷ koṇṭatāl en puncolum koḷvar anṛē’*).

Of the remaining verses, verse 30 tells us that the original name given to the work was in fact *‘kāraṇappurāṇam’*, verse 37 simply praises Shahul Hamid, and verse 38 gives us the date of completion for the *TkP* — *‘kicurattu ōrāyiram tarum irunūrrōṭu mānūlā irupattēḷil varu ṛamalānām tiṅkaḷāna mun tēti cōmanatu initu panuval ceytān’* — or Monday, the 1st of Ramadan, *hijri* 1227. Finally, in verse 32 the poet informs us of the patron’s motivation for commissioning such a work was to bring the blessings of the Nagore sufi to all those who venerated him (*‘nākai vāḷvōn pōrruvar karuṇai yeyta’*). In the same verse, the poet states his own agreement with such a noble cause and goes on to state that his own motivation too was to receive the blessings of the munificent Shahul Hamid (*‘vaḷḷal aruḷum tān perutal vēṇṭi cīraṇi panuval ceytān’*).

Although ostensibly extraneous to the *kāppiyam*’s main narrative and likely composed after the body of the work had already been completed, the *kvp* is an important part of Islam Tamil *kāppiyams*. Two types of verses are included in the *kvp*: verses in praise of Allah, Muhammad and other Islamic heroes, which can be referred to as *‘vāḷttu proper’* and verses that provide concrete information regard the process composition, including the people involved, their various particular roles, the naming of the text, as well as its date of completion, which may be referred to, following Uvais, as the *nūlvaralāru* verses, since they provide a kind of history of the composition came into being. Notwithstanding the fact that these two sets of verses seem to serve discrete purposes, in the text itself no categorical distinction is made between them; in fact, the offering of praise is an important aspect of the *nūlvaralāru* verses as well. For the sake of

analytical clarity, however, in the above discussion, I have chosen to focus on these sub-sections of the *kvp* separately, but also draw attention to the subtle ways in which a hierarchical ordering of figures is maintained right through the entire *kvp*. Continuing our discussion from the previous chapter regarding the significance of the manner in which the praise verses of an Islamic *kāppiyam*'s *kvp* are structured, we shall observe how in the case of the *TkP*, this same structure redeployed while also being creatively opened up and extended so as to be able include within its ambit a new class of people — namely, the son and grandsons, or successors, of Shahul Hamid. They appear in the *kvp* as the Sufi's spiritual successors and, therefore, venerable figures in their own. Later descendants of Shahul Hamid also figure in the *kvp*, in the *nūlvaralāru* verses. These figures were involved in the composition of the *TkP*, contributing their privileged knowledge of Shahul Hamid's life to the authorship process, and, in the process, lending their authority to the narrative being presented. Their own position, as spiritual successors of the *walī*, too benefited such a participation in the authorial process, more so because the work further authenticated their position *and* their story, by involving other 'sources' as well.

### **Narrativizing the Life of Shahul Hamid**

As we turn to the body of the text, perhaps the first thing we are likely to notice, aside from its length, is the way in which the *TkP* is organized. As recounted in Table 1 below, the work is divided into three *kāṇṭams* and 56 *paṭalams*. As levels of organization, *kāṇṭams* — usually understood as a canto or book — and *paṭalams* — which may be translated as sub-sections or chapters — can be found in most *kāppiyams*, and their deployment in the *TkP* is, in that sense, conventional, not exceptional. That being said, in

my opinion, in the *TkP*, even these formal literary conventions of *kāppiyam* composition have been deployed with a certain intent. As I try to show in this section, if on the one hand we find indexed at the level of the *paṭalam* continuity between the *TkP* and the forms and formats in which stories about Shahul Hamid circulated prior to 1812, in the tripartite *kāṇṭam* structure of the work we can observe a subtle but important (re-)orientation of the import of these stories. The *TkP* is, then, not simply an extension or elaboration of the stories that were already in existence and circulation, but also a re-organization and re-orientation of those stories, into what could perhaps be understood as a kind of dissertation on and about Shahul Hamid's sainthood. Hence also the name, *Tirukkāraṇappurāṇam* (and not, for instance, *Muhyuttīnpurāṇam*/*Kutpunāyakam*, or *Cīrāppurāṇam*, which clearly identify the subject of the work as a person, rather than a concept, 'God's omnipotence'). Before turning to the question of how this reorientation is achieved, let us first establish the site of continuity.

As we can see from the table (given below) listing the 'contents' of *TkP*, the primary or fundamental narrative unit in the work is the *paṭalam*. Numbering 56 in total, we will have more to say about the specific contents of these *paṭalams* in the next section, here what I would like to bring to our attention is the resemblance these *paṭalams* bear, as narrative units, to the *hikāyat* stories that make up Mahmūd al-Tibi's *maulūd*, composed in the early eighteenth century. Similar to the manner in which each of the 30 odd *hikāyats* of the *maulūd* are structured, in the *TkP* too, it is 'miraculous' acts and events from the life of the *walī* that form the theme and plot of each *paṭalam*.<sup>179</sup> What

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<sup>179</sup> There are of course differences as well. For instance, whereas in the case of the *maulūd* the *hikāyats* are merely numbered and come to a total of 33, in the *TkP*, the gist of the anecdote being described forms the title of the *paṭalam*. Second, whereas in the Arabic work, the text presumes of its audience an awareness of

makes this all the more striking is that the *maulūd*, composed by as well regarded a scholar as the person who provided the *urai* on the basis of which the *Cīrāppurāṇam* was composed, is not even referenced as one of the ‘sources’ for the *TkP*. Given this, the similarity that exists between these works at the level of what constitutes the key theme of any given narrative unit then could be seen as indexing a broader, more generalized social practice of remembering and retelling stories about Shahul Hamid. This is further evinced by the fact that even in the *kvp* praise verses, it is specific deeds or ‘miracles’ associated with the *walī* that find repeated mention. Of course, compared to the *hikāyats* and the *kvp* verses, in the form in which they appear in the *TkP*’s *paṭalams*, these narratives are more expansive — due to the inclusion of more details as well as poetic ornamentation — and their number too had grown, but the fundamental story units defining the contours of the *paṭalams* were perhaps already in place by the time the *TkP* was composed. That the miracle stories that make up the *TkP* were not an invention of this rather late hagiography, but a narrative mode deployed to talk about the *walī* even in the earliest records we have of him, is important because it militates against the idea that miracle stories were figments of the popular religious imagination that had belatedly forced their way into what must at one point have been the memory of the *historic* figure, unsullied by fantastic fraudulence.<sup>180</sup> It has been suggested that the development of the miracle anecdote as the fundamental narrative unit to talk about the life of a Sufi saint emerges from the context of ‘natural conversation’, and that textual iterations of these

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story details, which are only sparingly and obliquely gestured by the brief text, the 2,500 odd verses of *TkP* are invested in a more detailed, if prolix, exposition of Shahul Hamid’s life and deeds.

<sup>180</sup> Carl W. Ernst, *Eternal Garden: Mysticism, History and Politics at a South Asian Sufi Center* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992).

stories as found in printed hagiographies follow that oral-aural template.<sup>181</sup> In the context of the production and consumption of hagiographical narratives about Abdul Qadir Jilani in Southeast Asia, Julian Millie finds that ‘the prominence of *khāriq ul-‘ādah* [‘contrary to the human understanding of nature or reason’]<sup>182</sup> anecdotes in the genres of Islamic hagiography has a relation to the patterns employed in naturally occurring conversation. The model for the written anecdote is, *to a large extent*, the anecdote uttered in natural conversation.’<sup>183</sup> The miracle stories that dominate the *paṭalams* of the *TkP* then must be understood, first and foremost, not as reflecting a latter day demoticization of the memory of the Sufī, but as carrying on from and deliberately mapping on to pre-existing traditions of narrativizing and memorializing the life of Shahul Hamid by focusing on his miraculous deeds. By maintaining continuity, the authors of the *TkP* were both ensuring that their work would find recognition and acceptance from their audience, as well as allowing for the authority of an age old oral and textual tradition to accrete and accrue to their new iteration of the Shahul Hamid life-story.

The primary task for the authors of the *TkP* was not, to put it in terms borrowed from Hayden White, to familiarize the unfamiliar — for the stories that made up the memory of Shahul Hamid’s life were already well known. Rather, it was to try and *re-*

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<sup>181</sup> Julian Millie, ‘Khāriq Ul-‘Ādah Anecdotes and the Representation of Karāmāt: Written and Spoken Hagiography in Islam,’ *History of Religions* 48.1 (Aug 2008): 43-65.

<sup>182</sup> Millie, ‘Khāriq Ul-‘Ādah Anecdotes’, 43.

<sup>183</sup> Millie, ‘Khāriq Ul-‘Ādah Anecdotes’, 44. I italicize these words simply to reiterate the point that the relationship between the oral and textual forms of a hagiographic story/anecdote need not necessarily be seen as the former producing the latter. In fact, this is point on which Millie’s own position is less clear than the above quote suggests, for, while at one point she says that ‘written representations of karamat *are shaped by* the patterns of oral conversation’ (p. 55), but on the very next page she insists that ‘The written form *cannot but replicate* the patterns of ordinary conversation’ (p. 56). Another assumption she deploys in this article that requires more explication than it has received is the notion that the anecdote predominates oral conversations because it is somehow ‘natural’ to that context (p. 55). In support of this idea, which is fairly central to her larger thesis regarding the conversational telling of anecdotes being the basis for subsequent textual retelling, she merely cites (without any discussion) a text, Monika Fludernik’s *Towards a “Natural” Narratology* (London: Routledge, 1996).

familiarize that already familiar story, or, to put it in terms borrowed from Hayden White, to try and re-emplot the over-emplotted *hikāyat* anecdotes in the form of a hagiographic *kāppiyam*.<sup>184</sup> In fact, for White, narrativization itself may be understood as a ‘process of decodation and recodation in which an original perception is clarified by being cast in a figurative mode different from that in which it has come encoded by convention, authority, or custom.’<sup>185</sup> And the efficacy or ‘explanatory force’ of a narrative depends ‘on the contrast between the original encodation and the later one.’<sup>186</sup> To compose a *kāppiyam* about the life of Shahul Hamid was not simply to tell the same stories again, but to re-tell those stories, *differently*. How differently? If we agree to see the *paṭalam* as constituting the site of continuity in narrative forms, then the *TkP*’s innovations and interventions may perhaps be located in the manner in which the work chooses to organize those *paṭalams*, and in so doing re-orient them and ‘reconfigure’ their meaning and import. We noted in our discussion of the *TkP*’s *kvp* verses the poet’s use of the term ‘vakai’ (‘kind, class, sort’; *kvp*, verse 27) to describe the project of composing the *kāppiyam*. Collecting, collating and ordering, or rather re-ordering stories pertaining to the life of Shahul Hamid was, even in the estimation of the authors of the *TkP* themselves, one of the key accomplishments of the work.

One level, that may be seen as the primary level of ‘re-ordering’ that the old anecdote/*hikāyat* stories undergo, is in their chronologization. This gives to the stories the quality of unfolding in time, rather like Shahul Hamid’s own life would have, and

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<sup>184</sup> Hayden White, ‘The Metaphysics of Narrativity: Time and Symbol in Ricoeur’s Philosophy of History,’ in *The Content of Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 173.

<sup>185</sup> Hayden White, ‘Historical Text as Literary Artefact’, in *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1978), 81-100, esp. 86-87, 96.

<sup>186</sup> White, ‘Historical Text as Literary Artefact’.

combined with the kind of expansion and elaboration that the stories underwent in the *TkP*, it enables the creation of a continuous and seamless biographical narrative. It thus gets rid of the staccatic quality of the *maulūd* form, where the life of Shahul Hamid appears as little more than a concatenation of remarkable stories pertaining to him. Despite the fact that the *hikāyats* of the *maulūd* too are chronologically ordered, the logic of progression resembles seriality rather than sequence; no attempt is made to connect one *hikāyat* to the next. The second level of re-ordering, on which the remainder of this section will be focused, is in the bundling of stories, which results in the division of the *TkP* into *kāṇṭams*, a term typically translated as canto or book, but referring essentially to a section within a large literary work.<sup>187</sup> There are in the *TkP*, as mentioned before, three *kāṇṭams*, and their introduction plays a very important, in my opinion, in the transformation of the pre-existing stories about Shahul Hamid into one coherent *kāppiyam* narrative, and elevating his stature to a level that was comparable not only with other Islamic figures of religious authority, but also other non-Islamic heroes of the Tamil cultural region.<sup>188</sup> The *kāṇṭam* structure, in other words, does the work of creating a recognizable cultural ‘hero’ out of the more idiosyncratic materials about Shahul Hamid’s life that were in circulation prior to 1812.

If we were to think of the *kāppiyam* not just as a literary genre to be adjudged on the basis of its aesthetic qualities, but also as a highly stylized narrative mode of communication, than we can also begin to see the project of the *TkP* as aiming to present

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<sup>187</sup> This level of the narrative organization of the *TkP* may perhaps be compared to what Ricouer identifies as the ‘configurational dimension’ of a narrative, whereby the ‘plot construes significant wholes out of scattered events’. Ricouer, ‘Narrative Time’, 178.

<sup>188</sup> The reader may note in this argument the influence of the work of Paul Ricouer and Hayden White. The articles of White I have cited above, the key reference in the case of Ricouer is his essay ‘Narrative Time’, *Critical Inquiry* 7.1 (Aug., 1980): 169-190.



the already familiar stories about Shahul Hamid in a manner that allowed that those stories to resonate with other, prior instances of panegyric and hagiographical kāppiyams, and thereby echo its own points more loudly. Here I include not just Islamic but also non-Islamic kāppiyams, which brings me to a related if somewhat tangential discussion regarding the relationship between these two realms of Tamil literature. Scholars of Tamil literature often note that works of Tamil literature works composed by Muslim poets bear a strong resemblance to work composed by their non-Muslim counterparts. In the case of Islamic kāppiyams, we see this argument being made as far back as 1955 in an essay written by V.I. Subramonium, in which he noted of the *Cīrāppurāṇam* that it ‘follows closely the Hindu purāṇic form.’ Though Subramonium did not undertake a detailed examination of the *Cīrā*, he nonetheless compared it specifically to Parañcōti Munivar’s *Tiruvilaiyāṭal Purāṇam*, a panegyric work that chronicles the 64 ‘sports’ of Siva at Madurai.<sup>189</sup> Subramonium specifically notes that like the *Tiruvilaiyāṭal Purāṇam*, the *Cīrā* too was divided into three *kāṇṭams* and included at the beginning of the first *kāṇṭam*, a *nakara* and *nāṭṭu* paṭalam, in which instead of the deserts of Arabia where Muhammad lived, what had been described are fertile riverine tracts of the Tamil country. It is important to note here that the *Tiruvilaiyāṭal Purāṇam* has been dated by some scholars to c. seventeenth century, putting it at a distance of only century or so from the *Cīrā*, which was composed in the early eighteenth century.<sup>190</sup> More recently, Vasudha Narayanan has drawn comparisons between the *Cīrāppurāṇam* and Kampan’s

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<sup>189</sup> V.I. Subramonium, ‘Muslim Literature in Tamil,’ *Tamil Culture* 4.1 (1955): 76-77.

<sup>190</sup> Kamil Zvelebil, *Tamil Literature* (Weisbaden: Otto Harassowitz, 1974), 179.

*Irāmatatāram*.<sup>191</sup> Like Subramonium, she too draws attention to the *kāṇṭam* structure of both texts, as well as the manner in which the Tamil countryside and fortified towns come to stand in for the Arabic landscape a reader expects to find in a text detailing the life of the Prophet Muhammad. She also compares particular verses from the *Cīrā* with Kampan's composition, drawing attention to striking similarities in the poetic imagery deployed by both poets, which suggests to Narayanan that the *Cīrā*'s poet had deep and intimate knowledge of the *Irāmatatāram*, and had been influenced by it. For both these scholars, then, it is clear that the composer of the *Cīrā*, was not only familiar with these other non-Islamic works but was also influenced by them.<sup>192</sup>

In contrast, in a more recent discussion of Islamic Tamil kāppiyams, Torsten Tschacher has argued against such an approach, suggesting instead that instead of comparing individual Islamic Tamil literary works to non-Islamic examples, we look at these works as being situated within a self-consciously Islamic Tamil literary tradition, one that created and followed its own specific literary conventions.<sup>193</sup> Critiquing the methods adopted by these scholars, wherein typically an individual instance of Islamic Tamil literature in a particular genre is sought to be interpreted in light of another non-Islamic work composed in the same genre, Tschacher suggests that the compositions of Tamil Muslim poets must be seen first and foremost participating in a distinct and self-conscious world of Islamic Tamil literature, one that had its own literary conventions and

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<sup>191</sup> Vasudha Narayanan, 'Religious Vocabulary and Regional Identity: A Study of the Tamil *Cirappuranam*,' in David Gilmartin and Bruce B. Lawrence, eds, *Beyond Turk and Hindu: Rethinking Religious Identities in Islamate South Asia* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2000), 74-97.

<sup>192</sup> Narayanan hastens to add as well though that although these works provided the 'framing vocabulary' deployed by Tamil Muslim poets, their 'exegesis is clearly Islamic in character' (p. 81).

<sup>193</sup> Tschacher, 'Convention and Community'.

drew inspiration from the world of Islam that stretched well beyond the Tamil country.<sup>194</sup> While there is certainly something to be said about the importance of not seeing works of Islamic Tamil literature merely as Islamic variations of a pre-existing literary form, it seems to me that to view either the *Cīrā* or the *TkP* as works that bore resemblance or connection only with other Islamic kāppiyams would be to deny them added resonances and significations that would flow were they allowed to be seen as also participating in a wider world of non-Islamic Tamil kāppiyam composition. The intertextual references created by these texts, even those that came from outside the Islamic framework, did not diminish, but in fact accentuated the status of these works.

Returning then to the question of the importance of *kāṇṭam* structure of the *TkP*, let us begin by taking a quick survey of the contents of each of the three that make up the text. As we can see from the table given at the end of the chapter, the *TkP*'s three *kāṇṭams* are not uniform in length. The first *kāṇṭam*, titled '*Māṇikkapūr kāṇṭam*' is the shortest, containing 11 chapters and a total of 459 verses. In it, despite the name, which refers to the place of Shahul Hamid's birth, what we are given is in fact an account of the first 18 years of his life. This includes his birth to a *saiyyad* couple, through whom Shahul Hamid could trace his descent to the Prophet as well as the Sufi master Muhiyuddin Abdul Qadir Jilāni; his childhood, during which time he not only performed miracles, giving evidence of his special status to his parents, but also showed a prodigious talent for mastering the disciplines that made up the formal syllabus of an Islamic education; his journey in search of a spiritual teacher, through the course of which

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<sup>194</sup> According to Tschacher, Tamil Muslim poets made self-conscious use of certain literary conventions that were limited in their use and circulation only to Islamic Tamil literature; the highly standardized *kvp* section of the Islamic Tamil kāppiyam being one illustrative example.

he encountered and converted 400 bandits to Islam, who in turn became his followers; as well as the time Shahul Hamid spent in Gwalior, as a student of the noted Shattari master Muhammad Ghaus. It is here that experience the *mukāshafa* or the ‘lifting of the veil’ a heightened spiritual state which revealed to him his true purpose, prompted him to further continue his journey of spiritual seeking, turning down, in the process, the hand of his teacher’s daughter in marriage. From here on began the Sufi’s 10-year long period of peripateticism, beginning with the *hajj*.

From this point on begins the second *kāṇṭam* of the *TkP*, titled ‘*Paratēyacañcāra Kāṇṭam*’ or the ‘Book of Foreign Travels’. This, second canto of the *TkP* is, interestingly enough, also its longest — comprising 28 chapters and a total of 1181 verses, it is more than twice as long as the *Māṇikkapūr kāṇṭam*. Although it begins with saint’s intention of performing the *hajj*, that mandatory pilgrimage forms only one part of the Sufi’s extensive travel itinerary. Indeed, the story of Shahul Hamid performing the *hajj* occupies only one *paṭalam* (18), and it is not even the most expansive chapter of this *kāṇṭam*, detailed using a total of 35 verses. In contrast, recounted over 82 verses in the ‘*Tiruppatikaṭeciritta paṭalam*’ (21), are his travels to a number of other sacred sites, located both in the holy cities of the Haramayn and beyond. These included, for instance, the grave of Hawwa (Eve), in Jeddah; the graves of Prophet Muhammad, Abu Bakr and Umar, located in Medina; the grave of Fatima, whose location is believed to be unknown and isn’t mentioned in the text either; Tūr Sīnā (Mount Sinai), where Moses received the Ten Commandments; to ‘Bait al-Muqaddas’ or the ‘Holy City’ of Jerusalem, the site of the Dome of the Rock, where the Prophet traveled on his night journey, the *isrā*, and experienced the *mi’rāj*, or his bodily ascent to the heavens. A number of other sites are

also mentioned, some of which — such as Nineveh and Hudaydah, located in modern day Iraq and Yemen, respectively — are immediately recognizable, while others are not.<sup>195</sup>

Towards the end of his ‘pilgrimage’ to these Islamic *tiruppatikaḷ*, Shahul Hamid and his party return to Mecca and Medina to perform the non-obligatory *umrah*, following which they left the Arabian Peninsula, setting sail for Indian shores from the port city of Jeddah.

At this point begins the second leg of Shahul Hamid’s travels, which, though geographically less extensive and therefore perhaps less impressive, receives more careful treatment in the work; 19 of the 28 *paṭalams* that make up this *kāṇṭam* are devoted to detailing the ‘Indian’ leg of his travels. Thus, through *paṭalams* 22 to 40, we are able to his journey from Jeddah, first to Ponnani (in Kerala), then to Galle and Adam’s Peak in Sri Lanka, then to the Maldives, followed by Kayalpatnam, Kilakarai, Nattham, Pothigai Malai, Tiruchirappalli, Tanjore, Pettai, Kuthanur, and Tiruvarur, until he finally arrived in the vicinity of Nagore. Unlike the sites mentioned above, which were bundled together into a single *paṭalam*, each destination in this leg of Shahul Hamid’s journey is discussed in a separate chapter, usually named after that place itself, which suggests that these sites hold special significance. At each of these places, as well as along the way, he is recorded as having performed a variety of miracles, including the curing of the Tanjore king from the effects of black magic.

The third and final *kāṇṭam* of the *TkP* is titled the ‘*Nākūr kāṇṭam*,’ named after the town where Shahul Hamid finally settled and where there emerged, after his passing,

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<sup>195</sup> It is perhaps important to note here that, it is in precisely this period, leading up to 1812, the year that the *TkP* was completed, that the holy cities of Mecca and Medina had come under Wahhabi control. In keeping with the principle of *tauḥīd* and a corresponding condemnation of *shirk*, several tombs and shrines in these cities as well as others that came under Wahhabi control were destroyed and practices of veneration at such sites were sought to be strictly prohibited. Given this context, the *TkP*’s extolling of a saint’s travels to these very sites and his offering of prayers and performing *khalwa* (time spent in solitude) there, is noteworthy.

a monumental shrine complex and cult of veneration. This canto is comprised of 16 chapters and 935 verses, and contains two of the longest chapters in the whole work — one detailing the wedding ceremonies of Yusuf, Shahul Hamid’s adopted son, and the other details the *walī*’s passing away at the age of 68, the *paṭalam* with which the *TkP*’s narrative ends. Rather incredibly, the longest *kāṇṭam* in the *TkP* was thus neither the section that authenticated his biological and spiritual descent, nor the one that describes his time in the town with which he came to be affiliated, rather it is the middle canto, the ‘*Paratēyacañcāra kāṇṭam*’, in which the focus of attention is on the Sufi’s ‘foreign travels’, and within that, on his travels in and around South India. Given that these are sites that mark the travel of a saint, we may be tempted to see them as marking out a kind of sacred territory, as an attempt to ‘localize’ the Sufi, and through him, Islam, in an ‘alien’ landscape. It is important to note, however, that not all these sites were foreign to Islam. Ponnani, the Maldives, Galle (and Adams Peak), Kayalpatnam, and Kilakarai, in particular, were home to much older settlements of Muslims, even at the time of Shahul Hamid’s purported travels. What is interesting here is the way in the stories of Shahul Hamid’s activities at these sites establishes subtle, if at times, surprising distinctions between one and the other ‘Muslim’ towns, however, we will look at these aspects in the next section of the chapter.

From the perspective of the internal logic of the text too, the 3-*kāṇṭam* structure is important, and can be read in at least two ways, which may be labeled as *ẓāhir* and *bāṭin*, connoting the text’s apparent and hidden meanings or outward and inward meanings.<sup>196</sup>

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<sup>196</sup> Arabic terms that appear in the Qur’ānic context, *ẓāhir* and *bāṭin* are important concepts within Islamic theological, philosophical, and mystical hermeneutical traditions. They index an important distinction maintained by Islamic scholars between a text’s -- especially the Qur’ān -- exoteric and esoteric meanings. For a brief discussion of these twin terms, see I. Poonawala ‘al-Ẓāhir wa ’l-Bāṭin,’ in Bearman et. Al, ed.

Thus, at one level the tripartite division appears to do little more than create stages in the life of Shahul Hamid — a beginning, middle, and end. — but even such a basic re-organization of the materials that make up the story of Shahul Hamid’s life give to it multiple added significations and significance. Their logical flow within the text may be seen as serving to ‘explain’, albeit in an oblique manner, Shahul Hamid’s movement to and association with Nagore, especially given his North Indian provenance. This is not to be confused, however, the kind of ‘localization’ thesis that scholars of Islam in South Asia have often put forth when considering Islamic ‘vernacular’ texts, where the subject of a work almost always ends up being seen as an over-substantialized and radically foreign entity called ‘Islam,’ in ineluctable need of localization into a locale that is either implicitly or explicitly, inexorably ‘Hindu’. On the contrary, in the ‘vernacularization’ of Shahul Hamid’s life, it is precisely his peripateticism, his ‘foreign travels’ (*paratēya cañcāram*) that form both the bulk of the narrative as well as the motor driving the story forward. And this brings me the last level of signification invoked by the *kāṇṭam*, namely, the similarities and overlaps that it invokes and evokes with the spiritual ‘journey’ of a Sufi. If the previous two significations can be understood as the *zāhir*, that is the more apparent and probabilistic interpretations of the purpose of the *kāṇṭam* structure, to think of the three *kāṇṭams* as marking the *maqām* or waystations in the progression and development of a Sufi may perhaps bring us closer to the *bātin* aspects of the text. As I hope to have shown, the breaking up of the long narrative of Shahul Hamid’s life into stages and sub-stages, allowed the authors of the *TkP* to map, however

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*Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition (Brill, 2012) [http://dx.doi.org.proxy.library.upenn.edu/10.1163/1573-3912\\_islam\\_SIM\\_8078](http://dx.doi.org.proxy.library.upenn.edu/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_8078) (accessed 15th August 2019).

imperfectly, the journey that defined Shahul Hamid's life on to the various stages and stations experienced by a Sufi on his journey to a vision and union with God.

**Table 3.3: Chapterization of the *Tirukkāraṇappurāṇam***

Number	Title	Verse Count
<b>Canto I - Māṇikkapūr kāṇṭam</b>		
1	Kaṭavuḷ vāḷttu paṭalam	39
2	Nāṭṭup paṭalam	33
3	Nakarap paṭalam	24
4	Marapuvali paṭalam	27
5	Nāyakar tōrriya paṭalam	66
6	Amutaḷitta paṭalam	24
7	Aṭiciliyarriya paṭalam	24
8	Tuṛaviyaṛ paṭalam	44
9	Kuruviyaṛ paṭalam	77
10	Murītupēru paṭalam	55
11	Kaccir̥kup pōnta paṭalam	46
<b>Canto II - Paratēya Caṇcāra kāṇṭam</b>		
12	Lākūr pukka paṭalam	44
13	Iruṭiyar valipaṭu paṭalam	33
14	Pākaḷitta paṭalam	47
15	Puttu punalaruntu paṭalam	70
16	Tapatiyan piṇiṇṇku paṭalam	28
17	Pōrpurip paṭalam	37
18	Kaccucey paṭalam	35
19	Tōṇṛal kaṇṇurra paṭalam	73
20	Tānamaḷitta paṭalam	39
21	Tiruppatikaṭeciritta paṭalam	82
22	Ponnāni pukka paṭalam	33



23	Kaṭṭai taḷaitta paṭalam	31
24	Viṭamutucey paṭalam	13
25	Cinnaiyiṭaḷitta paṭalam	65
26	Pāvā Āta malaiyait tericitta paṭalam	25
27	Kāyaṟpaṭṭaṇam pukka paṭalam	27
28	Erutāvi peru paṭalam	38
29	Nākaḷitta paṭalam	29
30	Kīḷakkarai pukka paṭalam	12
31	Pacācukaḷaḷivunṭa paṭalam	89
32	Ponnaḷitta paṭalam	21
33	Potiya malaiyai kaṇṇurra paṭalam	36
34	Natthaṟoliyai kaṇṇurra paṭalam	26
35	Taṇcai kāvalam vinaitiṅku paṭalam	60
36	Terāmpēṭṭai pukka paṭalam	28
37	Kūttānūr pukka paṭalam	24
38	Tiruvavarur pukka paṭalam	23
39	Viṭaiyarūḷiya paṭalam	34
40	Mēlai Nākūr pukka paṭalam	79
<b>Canto III - Nākūr kāṇṭam</b>		
41	Kaliṟu Alakis Calāmaik kaṇṇurra paṭalam	65
42	Cittirakūṭam kaṇṇurra paṭalam	76
43	Micuvākkū taḷirppitta paṭalam	23
44	Maṇam poruntu paṭalam	91
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47	Matupān taṇṭanai paṭalam	28
48	Tanamīṭṭiya paṭalam	23
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### Meaningful Miracles

Finally, we come to the question of miracles. Sainly miracles, or *karāmāt* as they are referred to in the Islamic context, can be found in great profusion Sufi hagiographies.

And the *TkP* is no different, as we have noted several times already, miracle narratives form the basic building blocks of the narrative of Shahul Hamid's life. How do we make sense of these miracle stories? Why do they dominate the Sufi hagiographical genre?

Although we have come some distance today from the kind of disapprobation hagiographies received at the hands of historians in pursuit of historical 'facts' about the lives of Sufi saint, scholars of Islam in South Asia continue to reveal a kind of discomfiture when faced with the more fantastical and miraculous aspects of hagiographical texts. Carl Ernst, for instance, while acknowledging the ubiquity of miracle stories in hagiographies penned by elites members of a Sufi fellowship, chooses nonetheless to understand them as symptomatic of a 'popular' religiosity.<sup>197</sup> For him, the real texts of South Asian 'Sufism' are not these later day hagiographies with their patently propagandist fabrications, but treatises penned closer to lifetime of the *walī* in

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<sup>197</sup> Carl Ernst, *Eternal Garden: Mysticism, History and Politics at a South Asian Sufi Center* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992).

question, which were more philosophical in their substance and sober in style.<sup>198</sup> If Ernst thus denies the ‘proper’ Sufi as being a worker of miracles, at the other end of sociological spectrum, Richard Eaton finds the capacity to work miracles to be absolutely central to careers of the many *pīrs* of humbler origins and non-tariqa affiliations, whose shrines dot the ‘frontier’ regions of the subcontinent.<sup>199</sup> These plebeian sufis and their prosaic miracles were responsible, among other things, for the Islamization of the inhabitants of these regions.

Yet, neither paradigm fits the case of Shahul Hamid, for whom hagiographers like Pulavar Nāyakam trace, in equal measure, an impeccable Sufi lineage as well as an illustrious miracle-working career. Indeed, if look at the criteria laid out by Simon Digby as constituting the ‘attributes of a Sufi shaikh’ — descent from the Prophet, connection with a *silsilah* of an already established Sufi *tariqa*, a reputation for orthodoxy, the performance of austerities, mastery of Islamic doctrine, working of miracles, reputation for dislike of society (translating into peripateticism) combined with care of followers, and visible ecstasy<sup>200</sup> — we find that Shahul Hamid, as represented by the *TkP*, meets all of them. In fact, Digby is one of the few scholars who has tried to deal with the question of Sufi miracles directly.<sup>201</sup> He notes that historians, when making use of hagiographical

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<sup>198</sup> Ernst, ‘From Hagiography to Martyrology: Conflicting Testimonies to a Sufi Martyr of the Delhi Sultanate,’ *History of Religions* 24.4 (May, 1985): 312.

<sup>199</sup> Richard Eaton, *Sufis of Bijapur, 1300-1700: Social roles of Sufis in medieval India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978); *The rise of Islam and the Bengal frontier, 1204-1760* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

<sup>200</sup> Simon Digby, ‘The Sufi Shaikh as a Source of Authority in Medieval India’, in Richard Eaton, ed., *India’s Islamic Traditions, 711-1750* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003), 238-39.

<sup>201</sup> See also, Digby, ‘To Ride a Tiger or a Wall? Strategies of Prestige in an Indian Sufi Legend,’ in Winand M. Callewaert and Rupery Snell, eds, *According to Tradition: Hagiographical Writing in India* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1994), 99-130, in which Digby probes deeply one particular miracle narrative, that of the confrontation between the Sufi who rides a tiger and one who rides a wall. He argues that this was a recurring trope in a variety of hagiographical contexts, both Islamic and otherwise, that represented the contest for supremacy between itinerant and settled Sufis.

works pertaining to the lives these figures, ‘often ignore or pass over in silence frequent mentions of the appearance of supernatural beings and narratives of the exercise of supernatural powers.’<sup>202</sup> It was undeniable, he notes, that ‘a strong, often crude, belief in the miraculous pervaded all sections of society, including the learned and the powerful.’<sup>203</sup> This being said, however, for Digby the roots of these supernatural acts, especially when wild in temper and malignant in their effects, lay not within Islam but in the ‘shamanistic’ practices that preceded its arrival, and, ‘even if this was submerged under the apparatus of traditional Islamic learning, it was part of the mental stock in trade of Sufis, which particularly commended them...to considerable portions of the non-Muslim population of the north Indian plains.’<sup>204</sup> The only explanation he offers for their ubiquity in hagiographical texts is the rather circular notion that ‘karāmāt were proofs to the devotees of a Sufi shaikh that he had attained to the status they had attributed to him.’<sup>205</sup>

In the same essay, however, he also refers to Ali Hujwīrī, a Lahore-based mystic of the 11th century and author of the earliest Persian treatise on Sufism, the *Kashf al-mahjūb* (‘Lifting of the Veil’).<sup>206</sup> Although Digby introduces this particular work as providing ‘a theoretical basis for [the] large assumption of supernatural powers’, in the essay the idea he develops further is that of the role of *awliya* as ‘governors’ of God’s earthly realms, which constitute their respective *wilāyas*.<sup>207</sup> We shall return to this notion,

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<sup>202</sup> Digby, ‘The Sufi Shaikh as a Source of Authority in Medieval India’, 241.

<sup>203</sup> Digby, ‘The Sufi Shaikh as a Source of Authority in Medieval India’, 241.

<sup>204</sup> Digby, ‘The Sufi Shaikh as a Source of Authority in Medieval India’, 238. See also his ‘Qalandars and Related Groups: Elements of Social Deviance in the Religious Life of the Delhi Sultanate’, in Yohanan Friedman, ed., *Islam in Asia*, Vol. 1 (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1984), 66.

<sup>205</sup> Digby, ‘Qalandars and Related Groups’.

<sup>206</sup> On Hujwiri, see introduction to R.A. Nicholson, tr., *The Kashf al-mahjūb, the oldest Persian treatise on Sufism* (Leiden and London: E. J. Brill and Luzac & co., 1911).

<sup>207</sup> Digby, ‘The Sufi Shaikh as a Source of Authority in Medieval India’, 241-43.

for it has a bearing on our discussion of Shahul Hamid too, but for now what may be noted is that an epistemological basis for miracles could very much be found in the elite Sufi intellectual traditions, and were not a prerogative of the ‘crude’ popular intellect.<sup>208</sup> This prompts us to reconsider the place of miracles in the life of a *wali*, a subject on which Muslim intellectuals, especially Sufis, have written great deal over the centuries.

To make sense of the miracles contained in the *TkP*, I turn to this intellectual tradition, specifically, the ways in which it has sought to differentiate between miracles associated with the prophet, known as *mu’jizāt*, and those attributed to Sufi saints or *awliya*, known as *karāmāt*. There is a long tradition of debate and scholarship on this subject, dating all the way back to the earliest generation of writers, like the Baghdadi sufi al-Kharrāz (d. 899), down to modern times and the work of Salafi ideologues like the Ottoman Rashid Rida (d. 1865). While it would be impossible to recount here even the key thinkers and positions taken in the space we have here, what needs to be noted for the purposes of our discussion is that what distinguishes a *karāma* from a *mu’jiza* is not so much the miracle act itself — whose ultimate source, in both cases, is Allah<sup>209</sup> — but the kind of evidentiary role it plays given the office of the person to whom it is attributed. Whereas Muhammad’s miracles served as proof of his prophetic mission, the miracles of Shahul Hamid, or any other *wali*, are deemed as proof only of their enjoying God’s favor.<sup>210</sup> As a theological term, *karāma*, derived from the Arabic root ‘*karuma*’, which literally means honor, refers to Allah revealing something on behalf of a *walī* by means

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<sup>208</sup> Muhammad Amanullah, ‘Debate over the Karāmah of Allah’s Friends,’ *Arab Law Quarterly* (2003): 365-375.

<sup>209</sup> The possibility of miracles was also central to the debate between the Mu’tazilites, who denied it, and the Ash’arites, who affirmed them, and who came to represent to the Sunni common sense on the subject.

<sup>210</sup> For a brief overview of *mu’jizāt* and *karāmāt*, see entries by A.J. Wensinck and L. Gardet, respectively, in *EI2* <[http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912\\_islam\\_SIM\\_5309](http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_5309)> and <[http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912\\_islam\\_COM\\_0445](http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0445)> (accessed 2 January 2019).

of an extraordinary events or occurrence that breaks with the customary nature of things, referred to in Arabic as *kharq al- 'āda*. Thus, whereas the *mu'jizāt* was accompanied by a claim of prophethood, no such room exists for saints and their *karāmāt*.

While this classification and its underlying rationale appear clear cut, as is well known, Islamic history is replete with instances when *awliyā* have been castigated, even executed, for claiming to have undergone experiences that were seen as either laying claim to the prophetic mantle or challenging it.<sup>211</sup> The story of Mansur al-Hallāj (d. 922), who exclaimed in state of spiritual ecstasy *anā al-haq* or 'I am the truth', and his subsequent condemnation and execution is well known.<sup>212</sup> Closer to the life and times of Shahul Hamid, his own teacher, Muhammad Ghaus was accused by his detractors for having claimed to have experienced the *mi'rāj* ascension, like the Prophet Muhammad.<sup>213</sup> From a Sufi perspective, the impulse - often uncontrollable - for such experiences came not from a desire to claim prophethood or usurp Muhammad's position as Allah's final *rasūl* or messenger, but from their adoration of Muhammad, whom they sought to emulate and to whom they traced both their history and lineage.<sup>214</sup> Just as scholars of Christian sainthood in particular have noted the recurrence of certain miracle motifs in hagiographies, as well as the similarities they bear with the acts from the life of Christ, in the Islamic context, too, such overlaps have been observed, both within the fraternity of

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<sup>211</sup> Jonathan A.C. Brown, 'Faithful Dissenters: Sunni Skepticism about the Miracles of Saints,' *Journal of Sufi Studies* 1 (2012): 123–168;

<sup>212</sup> Made famous in scholarly circles by the work of Louis Massignon. For briefer overview of his life and the controversy, see L. Massignon and L. Gardet, 'al-Hallāj', EI2.

<sup>213</sup> The controversy, to which I shall return later in this section, is discussed in an essay by Carl Ernst, titled 'Persecution and Circumspection in Shattari Sufism', published in Fred De Jong and Berndt Radtke, eds, *Islamic Mysticism Contested: Thirteen Centuries of Debate and Conflict* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 3-7.

<sup>214</sup> For many orthodox Sufi commentators, including al-Ghazali (d. 1111), who upheld Hallaj's execution, it was not his spiritual attainments that were in question, but the fact that his exultations had made public knowledge that could be misinterpreted and misused by those uninitiated in the Sufi path.

*awliyas* as well as between them and the prophets, especially Muhammad.<sup>215</sup> There was thus, as has been observed by scholars, an in-built, productive tension between the timeless authority of Muhammad, and the temporally situated but continually regenerating authority of the *awliyas*,<sup>216</sup> between the desire for proximity and overlap and the need to maintain a distinction. And this tension can perhaps be seen as extending to the miracles performed by the Sufi *awliyā*. It is important to remember here, that disputes notwithstanding, belief in miracles represents the mainstream of Sunni orthodoxy. The rejection of miracles was tantamount to disbelief, a much more grievous error that even Ibn Taymiyya, frequently cited as opposed to miracles, warned against.<sup>217</sup>

What kinds of *karāmāt* do we find being attributed to Shahul Hamid in the *TkP*? Miracle stories, far from being a form of narrative embellishment lay at the very heart of the *TkP*, with each *paṭalam* being structured around the retelling of a miraculous event associated with him. In fact, the very first miracles took place even before he was born, while he was still inside his mother's womb, presaging the birth of a special person. One such pre-birth miracle, given in the *nāyakar tōrriya paṭalam*, took place when very early one morning the pregnant mother, Fatima, went to fetch some water from the well to perform her ablutions before offering *tahajjud* prayers.<sup>218</sup> As she lowered the bucket in the

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<sup>215</sup> Earle Waugh, "Following the Beloved: Muhammad as Model in the Sufi Tradition," in Frank E. Reynolds and Donald Capps, eds, *The Biographical Process: Studies in the History and Psychology of Religion* (The Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1976), 64-79; Carl Ernst, 'From Hagiography to Martyrology: Conflicting Testimonies to a Sufi Martyr of the Delhi Sultanate,' *History of Religions* 24.4 (May, 1985): 310-312.

<sup>216</sup> For a detailed discussion of Sufi views on the complicated relationship between *wilāya* and *nubuwwa*, sainthood and prophethood, especially those of Ibn Arabi, which were in turn a development of the view of Hakim al-Tirmidhi, see Michel Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the saints: Prophethood and Sainthood in the doctrine of Ibn 'Arabī*, translated by Liadain Sherrard (Cambridge : Islamic Texts Society, 1993).

<sup>217</sup> Brown, 'Faithful Dissenters', 132-133.

<sup>218</sup> A non-obligatory *namāz* or *salāt*, offered after the night-time *ishā* prayers and before the morning's *fajr* prayers. As per Islamic traditions, it was performed by Muhammad even after the five prayer minimum had been made obligatory. See discussion by A.J. Wensinck, 'Tahajjud', *EI2* <[http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912\\_islam\\_SIM\\_7302](http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_7302)> (accessed on 13 January 2019).

well, the rope slipped from her hand and caused the bucket to fall inside. As Fatima despaired that without water to cleanse her body she would not be able to perform her prayers, a voice from her womb called out to her asking her not to worry but to turn and look to her side. To her amazement there stood just then beside her a full bucket of water, ready for her to use (verses 23-29). According to the *TkP*, this miracle took place just after Fatima had been visited in her dreams by the prophet Khidr, who had come to inform her that the child she was carrying had been nominated by Allah to hold a high office higher than other great men (verses 18-22, especially 22; later texts simply use the term ‘qutb’). The whole story bears a striking resemblance to narratives regarding the birth of Jesus, or Īsā in the Islamic tradition, wherein Maryam is described as having been visited in a dream by the archangel Jibrīl informing her that she would give birth to a prophet. Two further details from that story are important for the purpose of understanding how the story of Fatima and Shahul Hamid echo that of Maryam and Īsā.

<sup>219</sup> Firstly, whereas the incident with the bucket and the well comes after Fatima is visited by Khidr, in the case of Maryam, she had been approached by Jibrīl when she was filling a pitcher of water. Whereas in the case of Maryam, Jesus’ immaculate conception is indicated in the Quran (sūrā 66:12) in such a way that puts stress on her being protected from impurity, in the case of Fatima, a similar emphasis on her virtue and piety is conveyed by referring to her anxiety about failing to perform her prayers without water for ablutions.

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<sup>219</sup> Maryam’s importance to the Islamic tradition is well known. The above arguments are based on the detailed discussion of the subject by A.J. Wensick and Penelope Johnstone in EI2, <[http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912\\_islam\\_COM\\_0692](http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0692)> (accessed 15 January 2019).



That was during her sixth month of pregnancy. In the ninth month, there took place an even more spectacular event. The town of Manikpur came under attack from a band of ‘majūsi’ fire-worshippers, the as-yet-unborn child miraculously appeared forth from his mother’s womb in the form of a strong warrior and set out to combat attackers, and returned back to it after successfully fending them off (30-53). Once again, though the parallels are much less obvious we may note here that in the miraculous narratives that came to be associated with the birth of Prophet Muhammad, the extinguishing of the sacred fires of the Persian fire-worshippers was one of a host of other calamities that would befall the Persian non-believers. The miracles associated with Shahul Hamid’s life do not only bare resemblance to those associated with past prophets, there are interesting overlaps with other *awliyā* as well. One such miracle comes from the time he was just a baby. Thus, in the chapter titled ‘*Amutalitta paṭalam*’ we learn of the time when at the tender age of 15 months, Shahul Hamid turned his face away from his mother’s breast and refused to drink milk, because, as the mother realized soon after, he had understood that the month of Ramadan and the obligation of fasting had commenced, which even the people of Manikpur had not yet realized. A similar feat is associated with Abdul Qadir Jilāni, as is his successful conversion of bandits,<sup>220</sup> a miraculous feat that the *TkP* ascribes to Shahul Hamid as well, on his journey from Manikpur to Gwalior. These 400 bandit-turned-followers are remembered as not only having embraced Islam after their encounter with Shahul Hamid, but as also having been trained by him in its intellectual traditions. These followers accompanied Shahul Hamid through all his travels right until the time that he and his son settled down in Nagore.

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<sup>220</sup> D. S. Margoliouth, ‘Contributions to the Biography of ‘Abd al-Kadir of Jilan,’ *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* (1907), 304.

Perhaps the most interesting story, one that once again brings up echoes with experiences attributed to past *awliyā*, related to the ‘*mukāṣafa*’ incident. The term *mukāṣafa* is derived from the term *kashf*, literally meaning ‘to take away the veil’. At the time when Shahul Hamid was staying in Gwalior, at the *khanqah* of his teacher Muhammad Ghaus, he is described as having experienced - in his sleep - a unique mystical experience. In this dream, Shahul Hamid was approached by Khidr, who enabled him to get a glimpse of the whole earth and then took him through the seven heavens, at each level of which he was greeted by various important people in the hierarchy of venerable figures in Islam, including numerous *awliyā*, the four imāms, past prophets, Muhammad’s companions, and Muhammad himself. At the very last stage he was addressed by the voice of Allah, whom informed him of his position as the exalted ‘qutb’ of the age. This *mukāṣafa* experience attributed to Shahul Hamid, which resembles in many ways the *mi’rāj*, the ascension of Prophet Muhammad, also echoes similar experiences being claimed by other Sufis. Most prominent among these is of course Ruzbihan Baqli of Shiraz (d. 1209), the author of *Kashf al-Asrar* (‘The Unveiling of Secrets’), in which is presented his own ascension experience,<sup>221</sup> but closer to Shahul Hamid’s life - though the *TkP* itself does not draw our attention to this fact - Muhammad Ghaus also claimed to undergone a similar experience, for which he came to be at the receiving end of an orthodox condemnation, so much so that he was eventually forced to leave Gwalior and move to the safety of Ahmedabad.<sup>222</sup> Importantly, unlike the cases of

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<sup>221</sup> Carl Ernst, ‘Vertical Pilgrimage and Interior Landscape in the Visionary Diary of Rūzbihān Baqlī (d. 1209),’ *The Muslim World* 88.2 (April 1998): 129-140.

<sup>222</sup> Ernst, ‘Persecution and Circumspection in Shattari Sufism,’ in Fred De Jong and Berndt Radtke, eds, *Islamic Mysticism Contested: Thirteen Centuries of Debate and Conflict* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1999), 416-435; Scott Kugle, ‘Heaven’s Witness: The Uses and Abuses of Muhammad Ghawth’s Mystical Ascension,’ *Journal of Islamic Studies* 14:1 (2003): 1–36.

both Baqli and Ghaus, the hagiographers of Shahul Hamid take care to point out that he underwent the mukāshafa ascension in a dream, not in person, an experience typically reserved for the Prophet and his *mi'rāj*.

Given the number of miracles recounted in the *TkP*, it is not possible to go into the details of each, so for now the above examples must suffice insofar as the question of the predominance of miracles which appear to be subtle reworkings of miracles associated with other *awliyā* and prophets. However, there is a two more aspects regarding the miracles of Shahul Hamid that I would like to discuss by way of concluding this section. These pertain to Sufi shaikh's time in South India, a subject discussed in the latter part of the second, '*paratēya cañcāra kāṇṭam*' of the text and the third, '*nākūr kāṇṭam*'. We have already noted that in the *paratēya cañcāra kāṇṭam*, the authors of the *TkP* have given greater space and attention to describing Shahul Hamid's travels in what we might consider the more proximate vicinity of Nagore, in and around South India. While his travels may at first glance resemble those Hindu Saivite poet-saints, whose pilgrimages to temple sites are a central theme of the popular Tēvāram songs attributed to them, closer attention reveals a different dynamic at place. The first thing to note here is that not all the places visited by Shahul Hamid had explicitly Islamic associations, and even when we consider his visits places with a predominant Muslim identity, the events that took place there indicate that Sufi shaikh had differential, hierarchize-able associations with each of these sites. A hierarchical relationship is articulated with respect to the 'Hindu' sites as well, as we shall see, albeit one that is accommodative and conciliatory.

Thus, for instance, we are told that when Shahul Hamid arrived in Kayalpatnam, after having spent time in *khalwah* at Adams Peak, the shaikh and his companions and followers were received with much fanfare by the town's leader, one Aptul Kappāru (27.10/1124), who even offered his daughter's hand in marriage (27.10/1129, 27.10/1130). In contrast, in the next town, Kilakarai, the townsfolks are recorded as having denied them their every request and offering only salty water to drink (1215). Shahul Hamid's response was to cause the town's entire water supply to turn salty and undrinkable (1216-1217). It was only after a gap of a century, when Sadaqatullah Appa asked for his forgiveness on the town's behalf, that the water became potable once more (1220). We may compare these experiences with the events that took place in Trichy, when he visited the grave of Natthar Wali. Here, we are told, Shahul Hamid was welcomed by the shrine's caretakers with a feast, prepared by them at the instruction of the *walī* himself, who had appeared to them in a dream (1371). While Yusuf and the other followers are described as busy enjoying the feast, Shahul Hamid himself is reported as having retired to Natthar Wali's burial chamber (1377). The story depicts the two saints, one living the other dead, as having been in conversation with each other, which lasted three days, after which Shahul Hamid obtained Natthar Wali's leave to continue onwards in his journey (1392). Thus, clearly, even with places that were ostensibly 'Islamized', a kind of relative hierarchy of relations were established between Shahul Hamid himself and the Muslim residents, both lay and mystic, in the past, present, and future.

We may compare this with the Sufi shaikh's visit to places whose religious associations, were comparatively more 'Hindu', namely, Tiruvarur and Tanjore. Shahul Hamid is recorded as having arrived in the temple town of Tiruvarur around the time of its

annual festival. The vast crowds of devotees gathered in the town to participate in the pulling of the temple's monumental chariot (1510), yet, despite all their efforts they were unable to get it to move. Then, learning of the presence of a great Sufi in their town, some people approached Shahul Hamid to help them find a solution to their problem (1511). He is reported as having instructed the people let the chariot be and stop pulling it, and when they did so, they found the chariot moving on its own. His miraculous powers had thus allowed and enabled the temple chariot and the deity it was carrying to successfully complete a perambulation of the city (1524). Shahul Hamid's visit to Tanjore receives the most detailed treatment in this second leg of travels, with 60 verses used to describe the events that took place there. He is described as having been invited to stay in the Tanjorean king Accuta's (1396; identified as Achyutappa Nayaka by later hagiographies) palace itself, received with much fanfare and generosity. While there, the Sufi shaikh is approached on behalf of the king by his ministers, asking him for his help in finding a cure for the king, who had been afflicted by a disease for which they had been unable to find any cure (1401). Shahul Hamid, after taking a look at the king, deduced the root of the problem as black magic, and proceeded to effect a cure. As per his directions, in the palace roof was found a lifeless pigeon with a number iron needles piercing its body in several places (1440). As he proceeded to remove the needles one by one, at the very same moment, the king found the various parts of his body also being cured of its afflictions. This would not be the only boon the Tanjore king received from Shahul Hamid. Being hitherto childless, the queen also approached Shahul Hamid and asked for his assistance (1449) and was promptly told that she would bear a son, which she did. The curing of the Tanjore king, we might remember, is one of the most popular miracles associated with

Shahul Hamid, and even today one of the more expensive modes of seeking his intercession involves paying money to release a pigeon.

## Conclusion

The *TkP* is one of a small yet significant corpus of literary works composed by Muslim poets that scholars of Islamic Tamil literature, as well as the wider world of Tamil Muslims, hold in high esteem. A further claim to fame lay in the fact that the work had been composed by the foremost of traditional Tamil Muslim poets, ‘Pulavar Nāyakam’ Ceyku Aptul Kāṭiṟu Nayinar Leppai Ālim of Kayalpatnam, celebrated for having composed more kāppiyams than any other poet, four in total, as well as for having been a pioneer in the field of ‘native’ print publishing in Tamil. All these accolades notwithstanding, the *TkP* remains, as we noted, a work that has not yet been studied nor has an *urai* been composed for, unlike works like *Cīrāppurāṇam* as well as Pulavar Nāyakam’s own *Mukiyuttīn Purāṇam*. Less still has been an acknowledgment of its historical standing as the first of the Islamic Tamil kāppiyams to be composed on a ‘local’ subject. Prior to this, most kāppiyams composed by Muslim *pulavars* or poets, had centered around retelling the lives of the founding figures of Islam. Per force, these were figures who had no historical ties with the Tamil-speaking region. In detailing the life of Shahul Hamid of Nagore, the *TkP* was thus marking an important innovation in the deployment of the *purāṇa-kāppiyam* genre by Tamil Muslim poets. Furthermore, and with greater significance for this dissertation, the *TkP* is the earliest extant Tamil hagio-biography that we know of regarding Shahul Hamid and is, therefore, a valuable resource that can tell us a great deal about *how*

the shaikh was remembered and venerated in the early nineteenth century, if not earlier still. This provides a much-needed diachronic depth to ethnographic studies that focus on dargah practices in the contemporary and attempt to make sense their historical origins and rationale. Most significantly, perhaps, the *TkP* is a pioneer text, in that it appears to inaugurate a long and a still vital tradition of composing literary hagiographical works on the life and works of Shahul Hamid. While being part of an older Islamic literary venerative tradition that took the form of elaborate kāppiyams, the *TkP* heralded, as well, a new and significant strand of Islamic Tamil literary composition — one that would continue on into the age of prose as well. It is for all these reason that the *TkP* lies at the heart of present chapter.

All this being said, what do we know of the *TkP*'s afterlife? What purpose did a work like the *TkP* serve once it had been composed? How was it received and what was its afterlife? I shall would like to conclude this chapter with a few observations on this question. Unlike is the case of Catholic Christianity, in Islam there is no institution that authorizes saints, so the work doesn't form a dossier in support of Shahul Hamid's 'canonization,' because no such process exists. The Sufi shaikh's status as the region's most prominent *walī* had been acknowledged well before the composition of the *TkP*. If anything, the early nineteenth century seems to have marked a high point in the career of the dargah, and by extension of the shaikh himself. We have already noted that Pulavar Nāyakam's first kāppiyam, *Kutpunāyakam* also known as the *Mukiyuttīn Purāṇam*, was inaugurated -- like the *TkP* two years later -- at the Nagore dargah itself. Similarly, Vaṇṇakkañciyap Pulavar's rendition of a hagiography for Abdul Qadir Jilāni, known as the *Mukiyuttīn Purāṇam* was also inaugurated at the Nagore dargah in 1814.

Significantly, in that work, the poet offers a verse from the *TkP* in praise of Shahul Hamid at the end of each *paṭalam*, constituting one of the rare instances in which we see the *TkP* being ‘read’ and circulated.

That this was a high point in Nagore’s career and fame is reiterated by the fact that the practice of venerating Shahul Hamid through literary means was not limited to Tamil speakers only. Not long after this flurry of Nagore-based literary activity in Tamil, in 1817, Moulvi Ghulam Aazzuddin Khan Bahadur Mustaqeem Jung Nami, an Urdu poet at the court of the Nawabs of Arcot composed an versified Urdu work on the life of Shahul Hamid, entitled ‘*Ganj-i Qudrat*’.<sup>223</sup> The Arcot nawabs had an interest in being patrons of the Nagore dargah, fueled at least in part by their struggle to assert dominance over the Marathas of Tanjore, the other major royal patrons of the shrine. The Maratha title to the Tanjore throne was seen by the Arcot Nawabs as being held at the pleasure of the Mughal emperor, whose sovereignty over the region was represented by them. This contest for supremacy continued into the nineteenth century, by which time the East India Company had become the key brokers of power in the region. It was, thus, under their tutelage that, in 1822, erstwhile Nawab Azam Jah, undertook his monumental royal ‘pilgrimage’ to Nagore.<sup>224</sup> A record of this journey was preserved by court poet Ghulam Abdul Qadir Nazir, who accompanied the Nawab on this journey, in a Persian work titled

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<sup>223</sup> Kokan, *Arabic and Persian in Carnatic 1710-1860* (Madras: University of Madras, 1976), 293-296.

<sup>224</sup> A record of this journey was preserved by court poet Ghulam Abdul Qadir Nazir, who accompanied the Nawab on this journey, in a Persian work titled *Bahar-i-Azamjahi*. Both the Persian original and an English translation of this work have been published under the aegis of the University of Madras. See, S. Muhammad Husayn Nainar (ed. and trans.), *Ghulam Abdul Qadir Nazir’s Bahar-i-Azamjahi*, Sources of the History of the Nawwaabs of the Carnatic V, Madras University Islamic Series No. 11 (Madras: University of Madras, 1950), and M. Abdul Rahim, ‘An Assessment of Ghulam Abdul Qadir Nazir’s Bahar-I Azamjahi as a Source of Understanding Some Aspects of the Muslim Society of Early nineteenth Century Tamilaham,’ *Bulletin of the Institute of Traditional Cultures Madras* (July to December, 1977): 99-108.



*Bahar-i-Azamjahi*, which allows us to glimpse to some degree the significance of Nagore to the religious and political topography of South India, and to further understand the reasons for the composition of a work like the *TkP* in the early nineteenth century.

## CHAPTER 4

## Islam, Tamil Print Culture, and Shahul Hamid: ‘Elite’ Hagiographies in the Nineteenth Century

The slow uptake of modern print technologies as a medium of publishing, reproducing, and disseminating texts by Islamic societies worldwide is a subject that has attracted some scholarly comment. The principal reason for this hesitation, it is argued, lay in the fear and skepticism felt by the *ulama*, the traditional custodians of Islamic knowledge, towards a technology that was seen as enabling and fostering unsupervised access to the written word.<sup>225</sup> In South Asia, too, even though the *ulama* did eventually come to play a pioneering role in the embrace of print, scholars contend that this was a rearguard action that eventually served to deny them even the final vestiges of their authority. Print itself is seen to have played a critical role in the scripturalization of Muslim religiosity and the birth of a kind of ‘Protestant Islam,’ where saint veneration, miraculous intercessions, and other enchantments were considered illegitimate and in need of weeding out.<sup>226</sup> If this was one iteration of an Islamic ‘print modernity’, most clearly visible in the older centers of Muslim life, the picture in such a growing commercial and industrial metropolis as late colonial Bombay was very different.<sup>227</sup> Here, as in England, it has been

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<sup>225</sup> The most comprehensive articulation of this position may be found in Francis Robinson, ‘Technology and Religious Change: Islam and the Impact of Print,’ *Modern Asian Studies* 27.1 (1993): 229-251. Robinson discusses impact of print on modern South Asian Muslim religiosity in two other essays, namely, ‘Religious change and the self in Muslim South Asia since 1800’, *South Asia* 22 (1999): 13-27, and ‘Crisis of Authority: Crisis of Islam?’, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Third Series, 19.3 (Jul., 2009): 339-354. See also, Barbara Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband, 1860-1900* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982).

<sup>226</sup> Here we can see Robinson modeling his argument on Elizabeth Eisenstein’s *Elizabeth Eisenstein, The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: Communication and Cultural Transformation in Early-Modern Europe* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1979).

<sup>227</sup> Nile Green, *Bombay Islam: The Religious Economy of the West Indian Ocean, 1840-1915* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

argued, the popularity of printed hagiographies index the degree to which miracles and enchantments kept pace with the seemingly ‘rational’ transformations being wrought by industrialization, serving especially the needs of the city’s subaltern classes.

When we turn to look at the situation in Tamil-speaking South India, we notice, firstly, Tamil’s early and successful encounter with print technology, compared not just with sub-continental ‘vernaculars’ but also with non-European languages. Enabled and sustained by European missionary activity in peninsular India, generalized access to the technology remained limited, however, until the middle of the first half of the nineteenth century; the press at Fort St George and the private press of the Raja of Tanjore being the only non-ecclesiastic centers of Tamil print activity.<sup>228</sup> That Muslim actors and Islamic texts are entirely absent from discussions of the history of early Tamil print culture, is thus not surprising. What is surprising, however, is that Tamil Muslims do not figure even in discussions of late nineteenth Tamil print culture. This is a remarkable oversight on the part of scholars, given that Muslims are so clearly documented even in the earliest catalogues of printed Tamil texts collated by colonial bibliographers.<sup>229</sup> While the reasons for this scholarly oversight remain open to discussion, what the archives of nineteenth-century Tamil print culture make very apparent is that Tamil Muslims came to be active participants in Tamil print culture from as early as the 1840s, soon after print technology

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<sup>228</sup> On the role of the press at Fort St George, see Sascha Ebeling, *Colonizing the Realm of Words: The Transformation of Tamil Literature in nineteenth-century South India* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2010), as well as his essay titled ‘The College of Fort St George and the Transformation of Tamil Philology during the Nineteenth Century’, in Thomas Trautmann, ed., *Madras School of Orientalism* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2009), 233-260. On the press that was established by the Tanjore king Serfoji II (r. 1798-1832), see Graham Shaw, ‘The Tanjore "Aesop" in the Context of Early Marathi Printing,’ *The Library*, 5th ser., 31 (1978): 207-14, and Indira V. Peterson, ‘The Schools of Serfoji II of Tanjore: Education and Princely Modernity in Early 19th –Century India,’ in Michael S. Dodson and Brian A. Hatcher, eds, *Transcolonial Modernities in South Asia* (London and New York: Routledge 2012), 15-44.

<sup>229</sup> We can see this, for instance, in as recent a work as A.R. Venkatachalapathy, *The Province of the Book: Scholars, Scribes, and Scribblers in colonial Tamilnadu* (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2012).

was legally made more accessible to native involvement, beyond ecclesiastical and state-sponsored institutions. In fact, being either hidden or entirely absent from such sites of Tamil literary and philological activity as Fort St George, the Tanjore court, and Christian missions – sites that have left behind an archival trace – ‘print culture’ constitutes an invaluable historical resource as an archive, however incomplete, that documents the sustained and dynamic participation by Tamil Muslims in the Tamil literary world of the long nineteenth century.

My examination of the development of literary hagiographical traditions surrounding Shahul Hamid suggests that the Nagore dargah played an important role in the emergence and development of an Islamic Tamil print culture, both as subject and as a patron of printed textual production. In some ways, a correlation between print and hagiography is only to be expected; scholars of the early history of print, in India as well as in Europe, have repeatedly noted the popularity of hagiographies as printed texts.<sup>230</sup> What is less clear, however, is why this should have been the case. Two kinds of arguments have been made in this regard, pertaining especially to the South Asian context. On the one hand, we have scholars like Stuart Blackburn, who stress the role of cultural ‘continuity’ across periods of seemingly radical technological change, such as the introduction of mechanized printing.<sup>231</sup> The introduction of print technology did not immediately alter literary practices and preferences, and this was evinced by the extraordinary and continued popularity of traditional narratives in printed form. For

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<sup>230</sup> See, for instance, Roger Chartier’s Introduction, to *The Culture of Print: Power and the Uses of Print in Early Modern Europe* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1989), 1-10.

<sup>231</sup> Stuart Blackburn, ‘The Tale of the Book: Storytelling and Print in Nineteenth-century Tamil,’ in Rachel Dwyer and Christopher Pinner, eds, *Pleasure and the Nation: The History, Politics and Consumption of Public Culture in India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001), 115-160; ‘The Burden of Authenticity: Printed Oral Tales in Tamil Literary History,’ in Stuart Blackburn and Vasudha Dalmia, eds, *India’s literary History: Essays on the Nineteenth Century* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004), 119-145;

Blackburn, the popularity of hagiography in print should not be surprising at all, it simply reflected a continuity in narrative traditions and practices in spite of the advent of print. A second kind of argument may be found in the work of Nile Green, whose *Bombay Islam* (also referenced above) is a rare work of historical scholarship on Islam insofar as it tries to engage seriously with such errant texts as hagiographies as valid historical sources. Yet, the old historian's prejudice towards hagiographies returns via the backdoor even for Green, as in his attempt to defend and rehabilitate these texts he accords to them a categorically subaltern status, in terms of the social classes to whom they catered as well as the 'enchanted' ideas they contained.<sup>232</sup>

In the present chapter we will see that, unlike what has been argued in the context of the Muslims of late colonial Bombay, for Tamil-speaking Muslims of the nineteenth century, printed hagiography was by no means a 'popular' form of print culture, in the sense of either embodying 'low brow' cultural tastes or serving only 'working class' social needs. Returning to Blackburn's concern not to overemphasize the revolutionary impact of print 'technology,' the materials that this chapter draws upon and the world of literary activity that they reflect, suggests that there is a need to be sensitive, as well, to the kinds of changes that were wrought by print, even in the production of texts composed in conventional genres. Ignoring such changes obscures the dynamism of nineteenth-century Tamil literary and print culture, a field that merits more attention than

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<sup>232</sup> Albeit articulated in the context of early modern France, relevant here is Roger Chartier's careful unpacking of the problems of the easy deployment of the category of the 'popular' to identify a social class and its cultural practices. See the 'Introduction' to his *The Cultural uses of Print in early modern France* (Princeton University Press, 1987), 3-5. Articulating the problem of using 'popular culture' as an analytic category, he points out, rather sharply 'It seems to me a poor methodology that supposes, a priori, the validity of the very divisions that need to be established. When, on the one hand, the concept of popular culture obliterates the bases shared by the whole of society and when, on the other, it masks the plurality of cleavages that differentiate cultural practices, it cannot be held as pertinent to a comprehension of the forms and the materials that characterize the cultural universe of societies in the modern period' (p. 5).

it has hitherto received. Speaking on the basis of the materials I have examined, one such remarkable development was the fact that virtually all the Tamil Islamic texts printed in the nineteenth century were issued by presses that were owned by non-Muslims. Another development was the process of (re)issuing older works, which, regardless of their previous literary status, gained new textual authority in printed form, mimicing the status of a ‘classic’. Of equal if not greater significance was the composition and printing of *vacana kāppiyams*, prose renderings of complex versified works, which ostensibly put the import of the original composition within the grasp of the ordinary or non-specialist reader – painstaking work that is given short shrift owing to its derivative character. Often, the people involved in the printing processes had ties with the older modes of producing and publicizing literature. And while this undeniably contributed to the accreditation of the printed text, it also resulted in a progressive reorientation of their skills and the sites of their employment, as many poets became editors, often with long term associations with one or other printing press. The dissemination of print technology, thus, had definitely engendered change in nineteenth-century Tamil literary culture, and in more than just the mode of reading and choice of literary form.

In what follows, I illustrate the points made above in the context of the evolution of the development of the literary hagiographical traditions surrounding Shahul Hamid and the Nagore dargah over the course of the introduction and popularization of print in nineteenth-century South India. We begin, in a sense where we left off in the previous chapter, with the figure of ‘Pulavar Nāyakam’ Ceyku Aptul Kāṭiṟu Nayinār Leppai Ālim, author of the *Tirukkāraṇappurāṇam* and the person credited with pioneering Tamil Muslims’ engagement with print. One of the earliest works of Islamic Tamil literature to

appear in print was the *Nākaiyantāti*, first published in 1843, by the poet himself. As we continue to trace the appropriation and use of print by Tamil Muslims, both in South India as well as Jaffna in Ceylon and Penang and Singapore in the Straits Settlements, we find that venerative poetry about Shahul Hamid (along with other Islamic heroes, some local other translocal) was a staple fixture. It is particularly important to note that the figures involved in the composition, publication, and patronage of these works were all members of echelons of Tamil Muslim (and at times non-Muslim) society that was ‘elite’. This is not to suggest that these texts did not circulate among other social classes, but rather to reiterate that the ‘enchantments’ of hagiography were not the exclusive predilection of unlettered subaltern classes. Indeed, when the Shahul Hamid story was committed to prose in the late nineteenth century and made widely available to a lay audience, it was done by the leading Tamil Muslim poet of the day, in his capacity as the dargah’s ‘makāvittuvān,’ or poet laureate, and under the aegis of the shrine’s hereditary caretakers. While we are still some ways away from understanding the particular popularity of hagiographies in the era of print, it is hoped that this chapter will at least serve to complicate some of the long-standing views that see the fabulations contained within hagiographies as indexing a popular and unlettered religious mindset.

### **Nagore and the Beginnings of an Islamic Tamil ‘print culture’**

Scholars of Tamil literature have noted, with some pride, that the beginnings of ‘vernacular’ print in the Indian subcontinent took place with Tamil; the earliest known non-European printed text was a Jesuit catechism in Tamil issued from Portuguese Goa

in 1577 using types cast in Europe.<sup>233</sup> The uneven subsequent development of Tamil print within the missionary world, where it remained cloistered until the setting up of a printing press as the College of Fort St George, established in 1812,<sup>234</sup> has been documented in some detail. And while ‘natives’ too had already entered the sphere of print publishing by the early part of the nineteenth century, a dramatic expansion and opening up of ‘Tamil print culture’ may be said have taken place after 1835, when Charles Metcalf, then Governor General, decided to remove the restrictions that were at the time in place on the ‘Native Press’. It is from this point onwards that we see a substantial expansion in the social world of print, with native-owned presses – some already in existence – receiving further fillip to their commercial enterprise in the form of legalization. The new hub of Tamil print was the colonial city of Madras, and it is from here that several of the early works came to be published.<sup>235</sup>

Unfortunately, Tamil’s early print beginnings notwithstanding, we continue to lack today an adequate social history of this early period in native printing, scholarly attention having been directed rather more at the ‘discovery’ and publication of the so-

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<sup>233</sup> For a discussion of the key moments and feature of this early period of Tamil print culture, see, B.S. Kesavan, *History of Printing and Publishing in India: A Story of Cultural Re-Awakening, Vol. 1, South Indian Origins of Printing* (New Delhi: National Book Trust, 1984), 13-67; Stuart Blackburn, *Print, Folklore, and Nationalism in Colonial South India* (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2003), 26-72;

<sup>234</sup> The exception to this was the printing press installed in 1807 at the Tanjore court by Serfoji II (r. 1798-1832), which was in service in that capacity only until 1814. Serfoji II’s pioneering role as modernizer in the fields of education in princely India are discussed in Indira V. Peterson, ‘The Schools of Serfoji II of Tanjore: Education and Princely Modernity in early nineteenth century India,’ in Michael Dodson and Brian Hatcher, eds, *Trans-colonial Modernities in South Asia* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 15-44. His specific contributions to the field of print are discussed at some length in this essay, and were further elucidated by Professor Peterson at a talk given at the University of Pennsylvania, entitled ‘The Marathi and Sanskrit Press of Serfoji II: The Printed Book and Vernacular Modernity at the Tanjore Court’ (20 September 2017).

<sup>235</sup> See Kesavan, *History of Printing and Publishing*, 88-91. See also, Mā.Cu. Campantan’s *Acchum Patippum* (Cennai: Tamilar Patippakam, 1980), a valuable resource on Tamil printers and publishers of the nineteenth century.



called *Caṅkam* texts, the assumed earliest layer of Tamil's literary history, which took place towards the close of the nineteenth century through the efforts of U.Ve.

Cāmināṭayyar (1855-1942).<sup>236</sup> A corollary of this focus has been to see the social history of early Tamil print as best (and indeed sufficiently) represented through the career of U.Ve. Cāmināṭayyar. His autobiography, a rich repository of information and insight no doubt, has been used by scholars as a kind of map or model of the Tamil literary world of the nineteenth century. Even the earlier part of that century has been mapped using this work, by drawing on U.Ve. Ca's detailed account of his teacher, Mīnāṭcuntaram Piḷḷai (1815-1876). Yet, as important as both these figures were in the Tamil literary world of the long nineteenth century, seeing them as somehow 'representative' of it risks blinding us to other actors, networks, and processes that animated the world of Tamil print, especially those that do not find explicit mention in U.Ve.Cā's account. Tamil Muslim print culture is one such case in point.<sup>237</sup>

Though largely ignored by scholars of the nineteenth-century Tamil literary and print worlds, the extant archives of early Tamil printed texts suggest categorically an active Muslim participation in print activities. As native-owned printing presses began to emerge as participants in their own right within a print arena that had hitherto been dominated either by missionaries or by the government-run press at Fort St George,

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<sup>236</sup> We see this in in Sascha Ebeling's *Colonizing the Realm of Words: The transformation of Tamil literature in nineteenth-century South India* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2010) as well as in A.R. Venkatachalapathy's *Province of the Book: Scholars, Scribes and Scribblers in colonial Tamilnadu* (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2012).

<sup>237</sup> Norman Cutler makes a similar observation in his essay 'Three Moments in the Genealogy of Tamil Literary Culture', where he writes, 'In Caminataiyar's story, segments of the Tamil population other than those just mentioned—lower-caste Hindus and Christians, as well as Muslims—are conspicuous by their absence. Though I do not pursue this point in this chapter, we cannot but wonder what kinds of literary cultures members of these groups participated in contemporaneously with the one Caminataiyar describes for us so vividly.' Published in Sheldon Pollock, ed., *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 287.

Muslim literary figures (poets, authors, publishers, editors, and publicists) took part in different capacities in this complex process. While the first Muslim-owned Tamil press would not emerge until the early part of the twentieth century, the work of various Muslim poets and litterateurs certainly found their way to print well before that. In fact, the beginnings of the process take us all the way back to 1842 (Hijri 1258) and Pulavar Nāyakam, author of the *Tirukkāraṇappurāṇam* discussed in the previous chapter. For it was in that year that Pulavar Nāyakam brought out the first printed edition of Umaru Pulavar's *Cīrāppurāṇam*, the celebrated seventeenth-century Islamic *kāppiyam* on the life of Prophet Muhammad. The work was printed in Madras, at the Vittiyaṇvilāca Accukūṭam by Pulavar Nāyakam in collaboration with one Uvais Nayinār Leppai, son of Ceyku Camcuttīn Leppai Ālim (see Figure 1),<sup>238</sup> and marks the inaugural moment of Islamic Tamil print culture. That Pulavar Nāyakam should have chosen to commit the *Cīrā* rather than one of his own *kāppiyams* to print, suggests that this work was held in especially high regard within the Tamil Muslim literary community, a position that it continues to enjoy down to the present day. Regarding the process whereby the work made its transition from manuscript to printed form, however, we still do not know enough. From an epistolary 'nirupa' verse written by Pulavar Nāyakam we learn that a person was hired to make a copy from a manuscript of the *kāppiyam* that had been in the possession of

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<sup>238</sup> According to Tamil biographers of the poet, it was Uvais Nayinār Leppai of Kayalpattinam who approached Pulavar Nāyakam for this task. The work itself was quite arduous, with the poet having had to consult a number of manuscripts, in various states of decay, and seemingly riddled with inconsistencies and errors as well. Committing all his energies to the task, it is said that once, when being visited by Tiruttaṇikai Caravaṇa Perumāḷ Aiyar, the Pulavar confided in him that the task of editing and publishing the *Cīrā* felt like the equivalent of composing 3 new *kāppiyams*. Tiruttaṇikai Caravaṇa Perumāḷ Aiyar's new print edition of the Tiruvācakam was published by the same press, in 1845. Sadly, at this point we do not know more about this particular press, because even though Ma. Cu. Sampantan has reproduced the title page of the 1842 edition of the *Cīrā*, which mentions the name of the press, he does not include it among the presses he discusses in the body of his otherwise very rich and informative book, *Accum Patippum* (Ceṇṇai: Tamiḷar Patippakam, 1980).

Mukammatu Kācim Maraikkāyar.<sup>239</sup> Other scholars have suggested that Ceykuna Pulavar collected, and painstakingly collated and corrected several old palm-leaf manuscripts for the publication, and also added introductory material of his own, which included mention of his own works.<sup>240</sup>

Incidentally, preserved in one biography of Pulavar Nāyakam is an anecdote that claims that pirated copies of his edition of the *Cīrā* were sold by one Camcuttīn, an unscrupulous sandalwood trader from Trichy. According to Aptur Rāhīm, in whose account this story appears, because of the sheer labor that had gone into the production of the new *Cīrā*, the book had been priced at one *varākam* (more commonly known as the ‘star pagoda,’ a gold coin that was the equivalent of three-and-a-half rupees in the mid-nineteenth century).<sup>241</sup> Camcuttīn is alleged to have bought a copy of the book and used it to publish further pirated copies, which he was able to sell at a lower price. Upon finding out about this, an irate Pulavar Nāyakam is described as having confronted the offender and demanded an explanation, to be met only with further insolence on the part of the book pirate. Justice nonetheless prevailed, for a few days later, the man was hanged to death on a charge of murder.<sup>242</sup> This story, even if apocryphal, is interesting for a number of reasons. At one Star Pagoda, judging by John Murdoch’s assessment of printing costs and book prices,<sup>243</sup> the book would have been among the more expensive printed texts available at the time. Murdoch also makes the point that ‘works that have a small

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<sup>239</sup> Preface to *Tirukkāraṇappurāṇam*, p, vi.

<sup>240</sup> Schomburg, 337; Mu. Aptul Karim, *Kutpu Nayakam* (Atirampattinam: Ayisa Patippakam, 1982), p.12.

<sup>241</sup> Miron Winslow, *A Comprehensive Tamil and English dictionary of high and low Tamil* (Madras: P.R. Hunt, 1862), 306.

<sup>242</sup> Em. Ār. Em. Aptur Rāhīm, *Muslim Tamil pulavarkaḷ* (Cennai: Yunivarsal Papliṣars, [1957] 1999), 119.

<sup>243</sup> John Murdoch, *Classified Catalogue of Tamil Printed Books* (Madras: The Christian Vernacular Society, 1865), lx-lxi. For comparison, Murdoch tells us that an edition of the *Tirukkural*, 389 pages in length, printed in 8vo, and bound in sheep skin, sold for Rs 1.25.

circulation are more expensive.’ Yet here the existence of someone like the ‘book pirate’ Camcuttīn gives us a clue as to how even highly priced books could and did find wider circulation and illuminates in part the economic operation of the book ‘market’.

### **The *Nākaiyantāti***

The *Cīrāppurāṇam* was not the only book that Pulavar Nāyakam set to print. The following year, in 1843, he brought out a print edition of one of his own compositions -- the *Nākaiyantāti*. Pertaining to Nagore dargah and composed in praise of Shahul Hamid, the work took its name from a term frequently used by Muslim poets to refer to Nagore, ‘Nākai’, and the genre in which it had been composed, namely the *antāti*. Apart from the *Cīrā* and this *antāti*, the only other work that Pulavar Nāyakam is credited with having printed is a collection of the celebrated songs (*pāṭalkaḷ*) of Kunaṅkuṭi Mastān Cākipu.<sup>244</sup> Two things strike us immediately about this decision to publish a work like the *Nākaiyantāti*. First, that he chose to publish a work about Nagore and Shahul Hamid from his own substantial compositional *oeuvre*. And second, despite having the option of printing a longer and more elevated *kāppiyam* about Nagore, he chose instead to print a shorter work in a ‘minor’ genre. All these associations and aspects give to the *Nākaiyantāti* a kind of elite or celebrity status within the realm of Islamic Tamil literary and print culture, despite the fact that the work is not the only or even the most celebrated *antāti* to have been composed by Tamil Muslims.<sup>245</sup> Rather, in its printed form and, at

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<sup>244</sup> It may be mentioned here that while biographers of Pulavar Nāyakam are unanimous in attributing its publication to him, few details of this original print edition of Mastān Cākipu’s songs are known today and no copies of it appear to be extant. See Cēmumu. Mukamatali’s preface to 1999 edition of the *Tirukkāraṇappurāṇam*, vi.

<sup>245</sup> See the useful discussion of Islamic Tamil *antātis* in Uvais, *Islamiya tamīl ilakkiya varalāru*, Vol. III, 277-293.

least in part, because of the association of that printed form with the most prolific and celebrated of Tamil Muslim poets, the *Nākaiyantāti* comes to have a more successful career than any other composition of Pulavar Nāyakam and any other Islamic Tamil *antāti*. With that being said, clearly the Pulavar's original decision to print the *Nākaiyantāti* as well as that of later editors and publishers to continue to do so well into the twentieth century, indicates both the prominence and popularity of the Nagore dargah as a literary theme, and concurrently, the centrality of literary works in the culture of veneration.

Turning to the work itself, given that the *Nākaiyantāti*'s cultural significance is closely tied up with print right from the beginning, a study of its 'contents' must take into account both the arrangement of the work as a printed text as well as its thematic preoccupations. As indicated by the title page, the printed text was comprised of not just the original *antāti* composition, but also the commentary (*mūlamum uraiyum*) that had been written for it, by all accounts, by the poet himself. This is a rather interesting feature of the *Nākaiyantāti*, given that, typically, insofar as premodern or classical Tamil literature is concerned, such commentaries were written by later scholars in elucidation of earlier works.<sup>246</sup> In such commentaries, scholars have come to expect a dialectical negotiation between the original text and the new context in which it was being received and commented upon.<sup>247</sup> In the case of the *Nākaiyantāti*, the *urai* may reasonably be read as being intended to clarify and reiterate 'authorial intentions', while simultaneously making available a somewhat arcane literary work to audiences unskilled at deciphering

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<sup>246</sup> Zvelebil, *Tamil Literature*, 231-234

<sup>247</sup> See, for instance, Norman Cutler, 'Interpreting Tirukkural: The Role of Commentary in the Creation of a Text,' *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 112.4 (Oct. - Dec. 1992): 549-566

poetry.<sup>248</sup> There was still a negotiation involved, but it may be understood as having taken between two forms – poetry and. Exactly when the *urai* was written and whether the work as a whole was composed for the purpose of printing, we do not know. In one hagio-biography of the poet, Pulavar Nāyakam is described as having patiently waited for several years for someone else to successfully interpret the work and provide a commentary, and only because no one was able to do so, he decided to undertake the task himself. Yet another scholar states that Pulavar Nāyakam finished composing the work in 1842 and given that the *Nākaiyantāti* was published the very next year, the task of writing the commentary must therefore have been done soon after, if not simultaneously. This suggests yet another way to think about the combining of the *mūlam* and *urai* in the same work is to see it as bringing together, in print form, the two conventional roles of a traditional poet: composition and performance or exegesis.

The work itself may be said to consist of three parts. Following the preliminary pages, (which containing various paratextual information discussed later in this section), using a brief *viruttam* verse the poet introduces himself in the form of an *avvaiyaṭakkam*, a conventional apology through which the poet submits himself and his work to scrutiny by an assembly of scholars. After this, there follows a 200 verse-long composition simply titled *Antātitturaiyinakaval*. Also composed by Pulavar Nāyakam, it is separate from the *Nākaiyantāti* and appears to have been intended as a kind of elaborate preface to it. After this commences the *Nākaiyantāti* proper, which forms the bulk of the printed text.

Interestingly, whereas the *Antātitturaiyinakaval* appears as one continuous composition

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<sup>248</sup> Or, as Ma. Mu. Uvais puts it ‘Perhaps he might have written the commentary after realising the pedantic nature of his work.’ M.M. Uvais, *Muslim Contribution to Tamil Literature* (Kandy, Sri Lanka: Tamil Manram, 1953), 30.

in the printed text, the *Nākaiyantāti* itself does not. Instead, what we have are a series of studies of the 101 quatrains that make up the composition. Each study begins with a couplet (and sometimes just a single line) from the *Antātitturaiyinakaval*, which is followed by a stanza from the *Nākaiyantāti*, and this in turn is followed by an *urai* that is made up of a line-by-line exegesis, sometimes a summary, and a gloss.

**mutal**napik kuriya muṛaiyoṭu puṇartti  
**nutaliya** poruḷai nuvaṇṇu kēṭṭatu [akaval]

**mātavak** kāraṇa vāraṇat tārmaku mutaḷitta  
**mātavark** kārui rāruiyar tōṇṇal marapuṭaiyīr  
**mātavak** kākkaiya nōykarai pōkkuka vaṇciṛakin  
**mātavak** kāṇmalart tēṇṇaṭa nākai makīpatiyē [antāti]

eṇpatu – periya tavattīrkum kāraṇaākiya vētattaiyuṭaiya makumūtennum kāraṇap  
peyarai uṭaiyavar perra pakaḷārukku niṛainta uyirannārākiya makcaḷiruvaril periya  
makanāratu vaṅkiṣattil vantavarē.... nākūrai āḷum aracarē eṇṇavāru. --- mā – perumai,  
tavam – tavacu, mātu – makaḷ, avar – cuṭṭuppeyar, mā – veṇṇuppu, tavakkam – tikaippu,  
mā – vaṇṭu, tava – tāva. [urai]

As we can see, it is the quatrains -- and not to the *akaval* couplet – that receives an *urai*.

And because the *Nākaiyantāti* proper is not actually printed at all in the form of one continuous composition, it is only through the structure of the *urai* that we are able to identify the *antāti* proper. In metrical terms, the *Nākaiyantāti* follows the basic rule of the *antāti* arrangement, with the poet beginning each new stanza with the offset of the previous stanza.<sup>249</sup> It is thus reminiscent of such other well-known *antātis* as Kāraikkāl

Ammaiyār's *Arputa Tiruvantāti*, Nampi Āṇṭār Nampi's *Tiruttonṭar Tiruvantāti*, and

Paṭṭar's *Abirāmiyantāti*.<sup>250</sup> The only added effect in the *Nākaiyantāti* of that the

<sup>249</sup> For a brief description of the key features and examples of the *antāti* form, see Zvelebil, *Tamil Literature*, 195. 'A purely formally define genre', the *antāti* is simply any 'poem in which the last syllable or foot of the last line of a stanza (the 'end' portion) is identical with the first syllable or foot of the following stanza (the 'beginning' portion).'

<sup>250</sup> Zvelebil, *Tamil Literature*, 195.

beginning of each line of a given verse or stanza doesn't merely rhyme, but is in fact, at least phonetically speaking, identical. Thus, after the first quatrain (see above), which ends with the phrase '*makipatiyē*', each line of the next quatrain goes as follows:

**Patiyē maṇaṇi** marunapi mātular paṇṇarivut  
**Patiyē maṇaṇi** marukarin nālvar pakarneritip  
**Patiyē maṇaṇi** maruvāti yārkkum payirrumuyar  
**Patiyē maṇaṇimi** rumporuḷ nākaip patikkaracē [2]

Before we turn to the work's thematic focus, it is worth noting perhaps that although the *antāti* genre is technically defined only along formal lines, the genre's popularity in Tamil literature is closely associated with the poetry of the Tamil *bhakti* saints, both the Shaivite Nāyanmārs and the Vaishnavite Ālvārs.<sup>251</sup> The *antātis* that are included in the literary canons of these two theistic sects do not, however, exhaust even the world of non-Islamic Tamil *antātis* addressed to deities. Thus, while it is tempting to read the *Nākaiyantāti* against Kāraikkāl Ammaiyār's *Arputa Tiruvantāti*, a work that has already received some scholarly appraisal,<sup>252</sup> we run the risk of generating false equivalences and dichotomies by comparing and contrasting two works that don't just belong to two different sectarian traditions, but are also separated by a vast expanse of time and have come to occupy very different locations in their respective interpretive communities, despite formally adhering to the same genre.<sup>253</sup>

This brings us to question of the thematic focus of the composition. As we read through the work - *urai* included - the first thing we notice is that, unlike the

<sup>251</sup> Norman Cutler, *Songs of Experience: The Poetics of Tamil Devotion* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987), 175-176.

<sup>252</sup> For my understanding of *bhakti* poetry and *antātis* in particular, I have relied on Norman Cutler, *Songs of Experience* and Elaine Craddock, 'Kāraikkāl Ammaiyār through her Poetry', in *Siva's Demon Devotee: Kāraikkāl Ammaiyār* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010).

<sup>253</sup> What we would need, following the model adopted by Cutler, is to work out a theologically informed poetics to the Islamic Tamil *antātis*, a task that remains a desideratum for the present chapter.



*Tirukkāraṇappurāṇam*, the *Nākaiyantāti* does not unfold as a linear narrative about the life of Shahul Hamid. Thus, even though the miracles attributed to Shahul Hamid in the *Tirukkāraṇappurāṇam* do find mention here, the manner of their appearance is rather more haphazard. Thus, for instance, Shahul Hamid's rescuing of the sinking merchant ship, which is associated with the latter part of his life, after he had settled in Nagore (stanza 4), precedes the miracle that enabled the birth of Yusuf, his adopted son (stanza 6), which took place much earlier. This is not to say that miracles do not play an important role in the *Nākaiyantāti*, but that their role is rather different from the *TKP*. Here miracles are typically 'referenced' within the confines of a single line or verse, as opposed to being detailed in a dedicated *paṭalam*. This resembles the praise verses dedicated to the *shaikh* as part of the *kaṭavuḷ vāḷttu paṭalam* of the *kāppiyams* composed by Tamil Muslim poets and suggest that the poet presumes a familiarity with the stories and events being referred to, on the part of the book's readers and other audiences.<sup>254</sup>

While we struggle to find a narrative thread connecting together the verses of the *Nākaiyantāti*, two themes do recur in the work and their association with Shahul Hamid is, I believe, sought to be highlighted by the poet in a way that gives to the *Nākaiyantāti* a rather unique identity as hagiographical work about the *shaikh*. First, and foremost perhaps, is the emphasis that is placed on Nagore or Nākai itself, from which the *antāti* takes its name. Here it should also be pointed out that the *Nākaiyantāti* is the second oldest *antāti* known to have been composed by a Tamil Muslim poet - preceded only by the *Matīnattantāti* attributed to Cavvātu Pulavar's (d.1808).<sup>255</sup> Interestingly, while *antātis*

<sup>254</sup> Discussed in the previous chapter.

<sup>255</sup> Zvelebil (1974: 195) attributes an *antāti* to Carkkarai Pulavar, a close contemporary of Javvātu Pulavar, but Ma. Mu. Uvais insists that this is an incorrect attribution. See Uvais, *Islāmiya Tamil Ilakkiya Varalāru*, Vol. III, 277.

centered on a place are not unique to Tamil Muslim poets,<sup>256</sup> they are by far the dominant type composed by them; of the thirteen *antātis* known to have been composed by Tamil Muslim poets, all but two are named after a place.<sup>257</sup> Now, in the *Nākaiyantāti*, when referring to Shahul Hamid the poet seldom uses his name or title; instead he is identified and described by his relationship with Nagore. Thus, in the very first stanza, the poet refers to the Sufi *shaikh* as ‘Nākai *makīpatiyē*’ or the king of Nagore -- a title that repeats itself in variety of forms throughout the work, including ‘Nākai patikku aracē’, ‘Nākai mannar’, and ‘Nākai irācatarē’. What these phrases make clear is poet’s understanding of the relationship between Shahul Hamid and Nagore, which is that of a sovereign and his territory. This association with the Sufi, in turn, causes Nagore to become a worthy recipient of titles and praise in its own right. Thus, through the work Nagore comes to be referred to as ‘*nannākai*’ (good Nākai), ‘*polinākai*’ (bountiful Nākai), ‘*vaṇṇākai*’ (fertile Nākai), and ‘*mānākai*’ (great Nākai), to mention just a few of the epithets used.<sup>258</sup> What is perhaps most striking about the way Nagore is described is that when it comes to describing the landscape, the poet completely eschews any mention of the town’s seaside location and chooses instead to recast it as town situated amidst either fertile paddy fields or verdant groves with lily-filled ponds. Why did he do so? According to classical Tamil poetics, the latter landscapes are among the five *tinai*s or ‘landscapes’ most frequently deployed in *akam* ‘interior’ or love poetry, and they index the *uri* (emotions) pertaining to the various stages in the relationship between lovers. When we

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<sup>256</sup> For representative list of place-related *antātis*, irrespective of sectarian affiliation, see Pi. Kaliyaperumāl, *Antāti Ilakkiyaṅkaḷ* (Citamparam: Maṇivācakar Nūlakam, 1967), 114-118.

<sup>257</sup> Among the eleven, with as many as six being name after Medina, followed by three about Nagore – Pulavar Nāyakam’s *Nākaiyantāti* being the earliest among them - and one each about Mecca and Baghdad. For brief overviews of these works as well as an extended discussion of one of the later Medina *antātis* that was composed by Piccai Ipuṛākīm Pulavar, see Uvais, *Islāmiya Tamil Ilakkiya Varalāru*, Vol. III, 278-293.

<sup>258</sup> Stanzas 88, 47, 95, 98.

consider why the poet chose to adopt these particular *tinai*s to describe Nagore, it is useful to recall similar descriptions of the Chola country found in the *tirunāṭṭuppaṭalam* of the *Periyapurāṇam*, suggesting that such verdant and fertile locales served the role of a *locus amoenus* or the ideal landscape for panegyric or praise poetry.<sup>259</sup>

The second major theme that the verses of the *Nākaiyantāti* appears to emphasize is Shahul Hamid's ability to cure disease. While miracle cures for infertility and black magic do form part of story cycle contained the *Tirukkāraṇappurāṇam*, in *Nākaiyantāti* we see, additionally, references to shaikh's powers in curing the ailments of his devotees. In fact, in the very first verse of the *Nākaiyantāti* the poet describes how he himself had been miraculous cured of his disease by Shahul Hamid.<sup>260</sup> In fact, the poet mentions this personal aspect of his connection with Shahul Hamid and the Nagore dargah on multiple occasions.<sup>261</sup> In his study of the *Nākaiyantāti*, Tamil scholar Nūrmaitīn carefully notes and details several of these references, but finds it difficult to interpret them in light of the fact that there is no historical evidence to show that the poet either suffered from any major ailment during his lifetime.<sup>262</sup> Here, we may perhaps speculate (in the absence of further corroboratory evidence) that perhaps the poet's verses were meant to reflect and reiterate the kind of relationship that many of shrine's pilgrims and shaikh's's followers might have shared with Nagore, not unlike what we find in evidence there even today.

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<sup>259</sup> I thank Dr. Daud Ali for drawing my attention to this similarity and to the idea of *loci amoeni*, as discussed in Ernst R. Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1973), 183-202. Not unlike what Curtius describes for medieval Latin poetry, in Tamil *kāppiyam* literature too, 'the descriptions of landscape...in poetry are to be understood in the light of a continuous tradition (p. 185)'

<sup>260</sup> Ceykaptul Kāṭiru Nayinār, *Nākaiyantāti – Mūlamum Uraiyum* (Kōlumpu: Aruṇācalam & Rājā, 1931), 16.

<sup>261</sup> See, for instance, pp. 20, 22-23,

<sup>262</sup> Other than one letter in which the poet had sought medication (*lekiyam*) for gas (*vāttu*)! See Vā. Mu. A. Nūrmaitīn, *Neñcayallum Nākaiyantāti* (Cennai: Ulaka Tamil Kalvi Iyakkam, 1986), 47.

This aspect of the *Nākaiyantāti* is amplified by the paratextual elements of the printed text, specifically the advertisement (*viḷamparam*) printed on the second page of the edition.<sup>263</sup>

The almighty god Allah, because he approves of goodness and hates evil -  
- all that is not governed by his *ajal*,<sup>264</sup> including death causing demonic  
incantations, sorcerers, black magic, illusions, inciting a demon against an  
enemy, wicked deeds, enmity, distress, disease, and all other difficulties --  
everyone knows that there is not a single doubt that a careful reading in  
pure state of this antāti will cause all these difficulties to be terminated.

This brings us to the question of the *Nākaiyantāti*'s publication career. According to Ma. Mu. Uvais, writing in 1994, the *Nākaiyantāti* has been published a total of five times. First, in 1842, by the author himself, at the Vittiyaṅvilāca press in Chennai. This was followed by a second edition in 1872, for which he provides no other details. The third and fourth editions are attributed to Makutūmukammatu Pulavar and were published in Chennai at the Manōnmaṇi Vilāca Accukūṭam in 1872 and the Patmanāpavilāca Accukūṭam in 1895, respectively. The fifth edition was published in 1914 by M.Kē.Es. Iprāhim Cākip, at Chennai's Kalāratnākaram Press. Already we can see that the *Nākaiyantāti* had a fairly successful print career and was associated with prominent presses and editor-publishers of Chennai. In fact, however, the *Nākaiyantāti* enjoyed an even more successful print career, as we note additional editions of the text, including an 1878 edition, printed at the Vānivilāca Accukkūṭam, preserved at the Roja Muthiah Research Library in Chennai, a 1912 edition brought out by Ceyku Tampi Pāvalar at the

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<sup>263</sup> The advertisement appears in both the 1878 and 1931 editions. In Tamil, it reads as follows:  
'Allāvennum vallakaṭavuḷ nanmaikku uvappum, tīmaikku veṟuppuṁ ānavan ātalāl avan ajal ennum viti anṇi  
marra māraṇam pēy, pilli, cūṇiyam, vaṇcanai, ēval, tīṅku, pakai, tunpam, nōy mutaliya caṅkaṭaṅkaḷ yāvum  
ivvantātiyai tūyatāy uṟṟuppaṭikkir tīntu viṭum enpataṟku yātoru cantēkamum illai ivai yuṇmai  
yenṟu evarkaḷum aṟivīrkaḷāka.'

<sup>264</sup> The meaning of the work *ajal* is unclear.

Śri Patmanāpavilāca in Chennai, and a 1931 edition, printed in Colombo, and uploaded to the internet, which is the version I have most relied upon for my reading of the text.<sup>265</sup>

The *Nākaiyantāti* was thus printed and published on eight different occasions, and perhaps more,<sup>266</sup> well into the period in which, as we shall see, prose had become the dominant literary form, even for hagiographical texts pertaining to Nagore and Shahul Hamid. While it would be useful to undertake a short study comparing all these editions of the *Nākaiyantāti* to see how the printing and presentation of the text evolved, the lack of access to all these editions makes such an undertaking impossible at present. We shall have to restrict ourselves for the moment, therefore, to comparing just two print editions: the 1878 edition from Chennai and the 1931 edition from Colombo to try and see how the two texts present themselves, construct their authority, and what changes and continuities they index in doing so, given both difference in location as well as time; it is unfortunate that we do not possess even a descriptive records of what the original 1843 edition looked like.

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<sup>265</sup> <http://tamildigitallibrary.in/book-detail.php?id=jZY9lup2kZl6TuXGlZQdjZl8lJpy&tag=நாகையந்தாதி%20%20%20மூலமுடம்%20-%20உரையும்#book1/>

<sup>266</sup> For instance, there is a 1914 edition of Kācim Pulavar's *Tiruppukal*, published by Chennai's Kalāratnākara Accukūṭam, also contains the *Nākaiyantāti*.

Image 4.1: Title page of the 1878 edition of the Nākaiyantāti, published by Kaṇṇakumatu Makutūmukammatu at Vānivilāca Accukūṭam

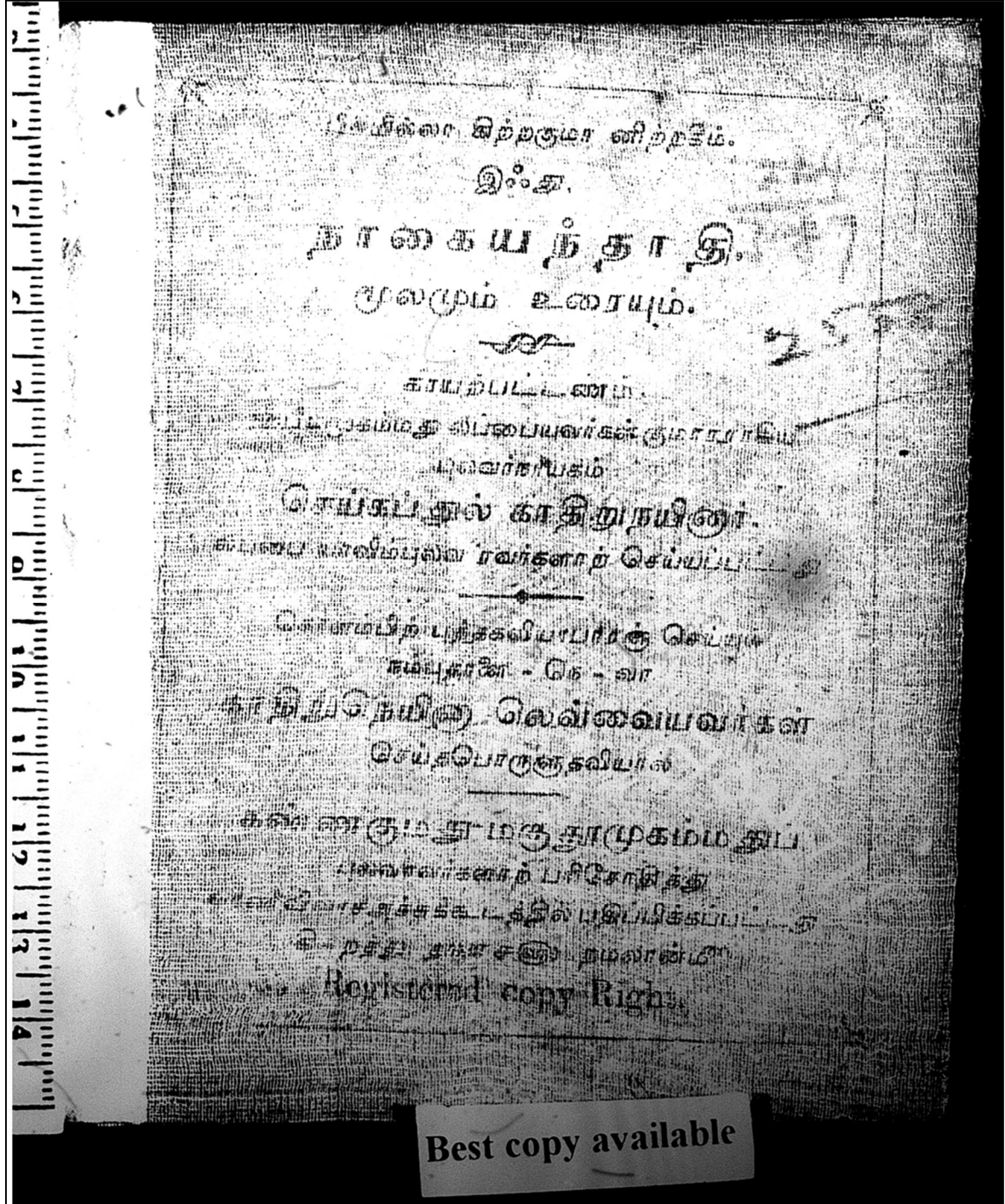
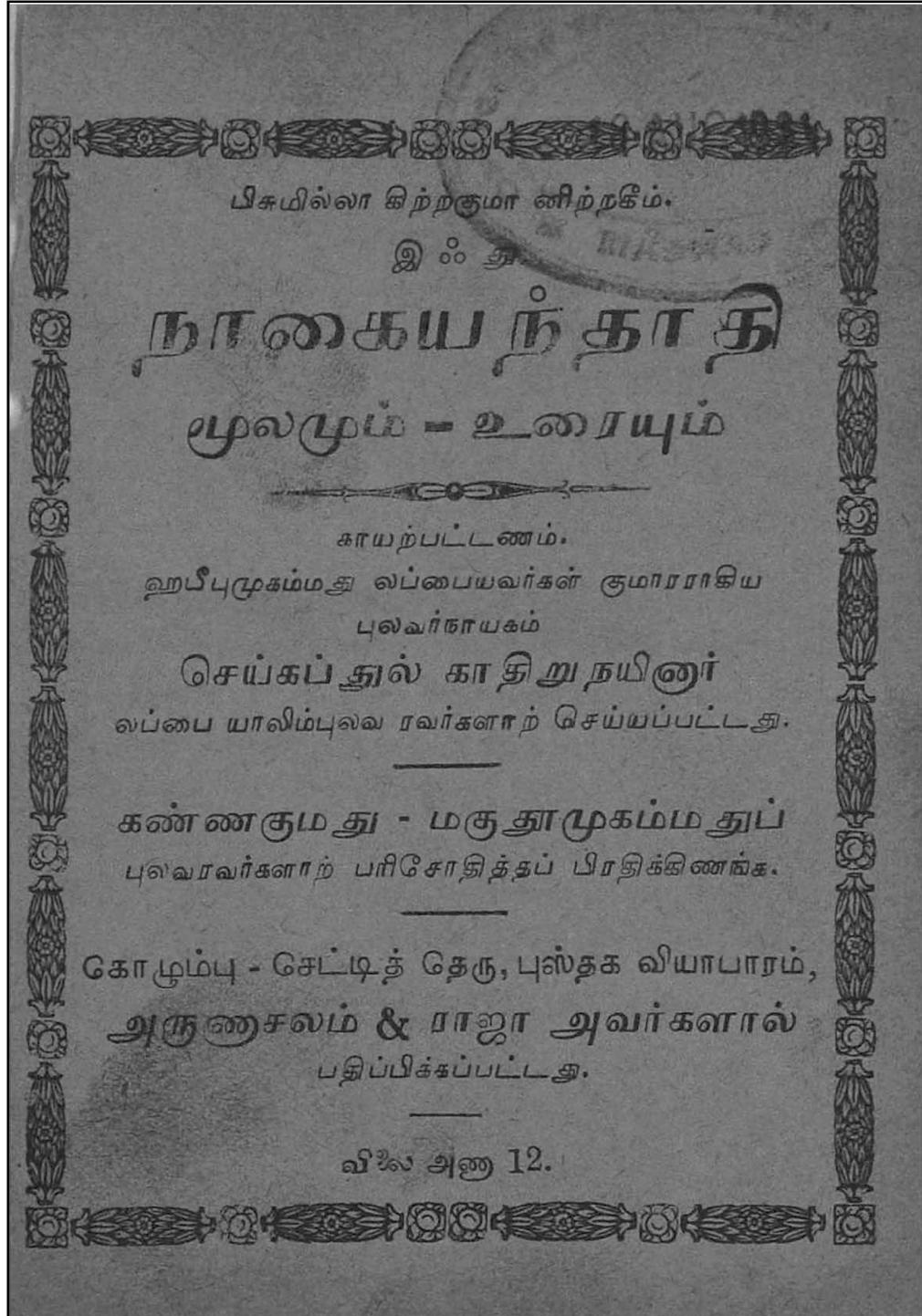


Image 4.2: Title Page of the 1931 Colombo edition of the Nākaiyantāti, based on Kaṇṇakamatu Makutūmukammatu Pulavar's version



As we can see from the two images shown, publishers of the *Nākaiyantāti* have sought to maintain a certain continuity in the visual and paratextual presentation of the work, while also making sure to include new information, when necessary, and in ways that serve to highlight the connections between these two imprints that are separated from each by a gap of almost fifty years. As we look at the top half of the title page, where the title of the work – ‘Nākaiyantāti, Mūlamum Uraiyum’ (original/source and commentary) -- and author’s name – ‘Kāyarpaṭṭaṇam Hapīpumukammatu Lappaiyavarkaḷ kumārārākiya Pulavarṇāyakam Ceykaptul Kāṭirunayinār Lappai Yālimpulavaravarkaḷār ceyyappaṭṭatu’ (composed by Pulavar Nāyakam Ceyku Aptul Kāṭiru Nayinār Lappai Ālim Pulavar, son of Kayalpatnam Hapīpu Mukammatu Lappai) – are printed, we can see that the 1931 edition imitates, verbatim, the older edition. In the bottom half we begin to notice changes. In the 1878 edition, after the author’s name, we learn about the person who gave *poruḷutavi* (material help) for the publication of the text, its patron. In this case, rather interestingly, it was a bookseller in Colombo, one Ne.Lā. Kāṭiruneyinā Leppai, originally from Nampūtālai, near Thondi, in Ramanathapuram. In the later ‘Colombo’ edition, we find no mention of any such sponsor or patron. Instead, emphasis is given to the fact that this particular edition was ‘*paricōtitta piratikkināṅka*’, that is, it based on an earlier edition that had been examined and published by Kaṇṇakumatu. We may compare this with the way in which Kaṇṇakamatu finds mention in the 1878 edition, which he is credited with having edited and published: ‘*Kaṇṇakamatu Makutūmukammatu Pulavar avarkaḷāl paricōtittu Vānivilāca Accukūṭattil patipikkappaṭṭatu*’ (‘was examined by Kaṇṇakamatu Makutūmukammatu Pulavar and published by Vānivilāca Press’). In the later edition, the ‘publisher’ of the work is no longer a person, but a commercial



establishment -- ‘Columpu, Ceṭṭi Teru, Pustaka Viyāpāram, Rājā & Aruṇācalam’. And perhaps for that reason, at the bottom of the title page, rather than copyright status, we find that the book’s price is mentioned.<sup>267</sup>

Clearly, the publishers of the later edition of *Nākaiyantāti* were keen on maintaining visual similarity and continuity with the older editions of the text. By detailing how their edition related and yet differed from an older, authoritative print edition of the work, it is clear that the publishers were not trying to pass off a new edition as merely a reprint, and given that the publishers mention their name and address, nor was this a case of piracy, even if it is not clear who possessed copyright of the work. Here it may also be pointed out that on the verso of the next page of the 1878 edition we find a bilingual stamp, bearing the name of Kaṇṇakamatu in both Tamil and Arabic; this stamp is not reproduced in the 1931 edition. Fidelity to the older printed edition extends beyond the title page into the body of the text as well. The 1931 edition reproduces, verbatim, both a *viḷamparam* (advertisement) as well as the editor’s preface of the 1878 version. The composition itself, too, is printed in exactly the same manner. However, the typesetting, as we can see, was different. Given that we do not know the exact edition that the 1931 version follows, this is rather striking, leading us to presume either that it was in fact based on the 1878 edition, or that other editions of the *Nākaiyantāti* too had come to use a very standardized form of the text, given to it by Kaṇṇakamatu Makutūmukammatu.

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<sup>267</sup> The title-page of the 1912 edition thus reads: ‘Kāyaṛpaṭṭaṇam Hap̄pumukammatu Lappaiyavarkaḷ kumārarākiya Pulavarṇāyakam Ceykaptul Kāṭirunayinār Lappai Yālimpulava ravarkaḷār ceyyappaṭṭatu; Mī. Mukammaturāvuttaravarkaḷ kēṭṭukkoṇṭamaiyāl Kolampu Ceṭṭitteruvir puttakaṣāppu Kā. Utumāṇkaṇi Rāvuttaravarkaḷ ceytaporuḷutaviyāl Kaṇṇakamatu Makutū Mukammatup Pulavaravarkaḷār paricōtittap piratikkiṇaṅka ... patippikkappaṭṭatu.’

### Tamil Muslims and the Growth of Print Culture, 1865-1900

It is interesting to note, that the *Nākaiyantāti*, given what we know about its social and historical location, does not find mention among the thirty-six ‘Books published by Muslims’ in Reverend John Murdoch’s *Classified Catalogue of Tamil Printed Books*, published in 1865 and intended as a representative record of all Tamil texts printed to date.<sup>268</sup> This is all the more striking given Murdoch’s own acknowledgment in the preface to that volume that ‘The Muhammadans, in proportion to their number and compared with the other natives of Southern India, display a fair amount of literary activity’. Not just that, he also compared Islamic Tamil literary works favorably to the ‘Musalmani Bengali’ literature discussed by Reverend James Long.<sup>269</sup> In order to understand this lapse, we must firstly take on board Murdoch’s own admission that there were many omissions in his work and that the end result could perhaps more accurately be titled a ‘Contribution towards a Catalogue of Tamil Printed Books.’<sup>270</sup> But more important than this factor, and perhaps underlying it, is the fact that as a Scottish missionary associated with the Christian Vernacular Education Society for India, Murdoch’s objective in compiling the catalogue was to determine a publication strategy for the society’s own missionary publishing program. ‘An acquaintance with native literature’ was given importance with this end in mind.<sup>271</sup>

Murdoch’s sectarian interest in Tamil literature shaped the catalogue in three ways: first, the largest number of works were classed under the catch-all rubric ‘religion’;

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<sup>268</sup> John Murdoch, *Classified Catalogue of Tamil Printed Books with Introductory Notices* (Madras: The Christian vernacular Education Society, 1865). Due to the fact that we still do not have access to the 1843 edition, it is only through later editions of the work that we know of its early print history.

<sup>269</sup> Murdoch, *Classified Catalogue*, lxxv.

<sup>270</sup> *Ibid.*, vi.

<sup>271</sup> *Ibid.*, iv.

second, these were sorted and hierarchized on the basis of their affiliation with a sect;<sup>272</sup> and finally, within each sect's literary output there is a further classification that prioritizes theological or religio-philosophical works (rather than devotional and literary works) in each tradition.<sup>273</sup> Added to this preoccupation with theological works and sectarian hierarchies, one finds in Murdoch's justification for his work an emphasis on understanding 'native' literature, conceptualized not simply as the work of people deemed to be autochthonous to the region, but as works whose ideological content too was understood to have natal ties with the region.<sup>274</sup> Thus, Islamic Tamil literature, though not absent from Murdoch's *Catalogue* could not have received the same kind of attention as Tamil Saivite and Vaishnavite literature, nor even Tamil Catholic or Protestant literature. And the popularity of print among Tamil Muslims thus does not elicit any comment at all.<sup>275</sup> It is important to keep in mind the historical purpose of the Murdoch *Catalogue*, when using it as a source about nineteenth century print publishing.

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<sup>272</sup> Thus, 'Religion' became the very first and most elaborately structured overall 'class' used to organize the Catalogue, with the order of succession of the sectarian 'divisions' therein being 'Protestant Theology', 'Roman Catholic Theology', 'Hinduism', and - rather interestingly - 'Books published by Muhammadans'.

<sup>273</sup> This subject, in fact Murdoch's 'Introductory Notices' as a whole, merits greater discussion. As a starting point, the reader may be referred simply to the contents pages of the Catalogue, where the depth of internal sub-categorization for each 'division' as well their ordering, reveals clearly the cataloguer's intentions in compiling his work (see Murdoch, *Classified Catalogue*, i-v). This is not to deny of course the usefulness of Murdoch's work, but to alert us to the politics of the project and the problem of using it uncritically as a 'source'.

<sup>274</sup> In fact, Murdoch cites German Romanticist Friedrich Schlegel's ideas on the 'History of Literature' based on the love of the 'mother tongue', but who that language belongs to becomes clearer in the 6 areas he outlines for such a literary history: in order of importance, they are, The Rise of the Saiva system in South India', 'Vaishnava System', 'Philosophical Hinduism', 'Astrology, Divination, and Magic', 'Tamil Medicine', 'Tamil Poetry. By this calculation, Tamil Islamic literature did not find any room at all in the literary history of the region. See Murdoch, *Classified Catalogue*, vi-vii.

<sup>275</sup> In his desultory two-line comparison between Tamil Muslim and Bengali Muslim printed works discussed by Long, Murdoch simply notes the numbers being 36 and 41, respectively, with no remark on the wide difference in the two regions' Muslim population or demography, an aspect that was not alien to his framework of understanding when it came to comparing Christian publications.

The period that followed the publication of Murdoch's catalogue is known by scholars of print culture in South Asia as the 'post-incunabula' phase of print.<sup>276</sup> Spanning the period 1867-1900, the period is characterized by a dramatic rise in the production, circulation, and consumption of printed works in the region.<sup>277</sup> The visibility of this expansion can be traced to Act XXV of the Governor General of India in Council, promulgated in the year 1867. Following the events of 1857, the colonial government had identified the native press as having been an important contributor to public disaffection during the disturbances and sought to effect greater control of it. To this end, in 1867, Act XXV of the Governor General of India in Council was passed, making it mandatory for all publishers to register each and every one of their publications or face the prospect of hefty fines and imprisonment.<sup>278</sup> As per the Act, it was the publisher's responsibility to furnish the government with details regarding all publications -- including language, author, subject, place of printing and publication, number of pages, format, edition, press run, print by movable type or lithography, price, owner of copyright -- and also deposit three copies with the state. Failure to meet with these guidelines was an offence punishable with steep fines and even imprisonment. In addition to the books themselves, a prodigious volume of information was thus gathered by the state and periodically made

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<sup>276</sup> This follows the classification of the history of Indian print culture devised by A.K. Priolkar, who divided the early history of printing in the region into three phases: pre-incunabula (1556-1800), incunabular (1800-1865), and post-incunabula (1865-1900). The term 'incunabula', used in the Western European context to refer to 'early' printed books, dating to the period before 1501, is thus reinterpreted by Priolkar to suit the different timeline of the emergence and development of print culture in the Indian context. A. K. Priolkar, "Indian Incunabula," in D. N. Marshall and N. N. Gidwani, eds, *Comparative Librarianship: Essays in Honour of Professor D. N. Marshall* (Delhi: Vikas Publishers, 1973), 129–35.

<sup>277</sup> Despite the early arrival of print technology, especially in South India, across the Indian subcontinent it is only in the latter half of the nineteenth that we see its popularization and penetration into Indian society. Although education and literacy rates were still very low, a much larger number of books were being printed, circulated, read, and heard, in a variety of vernacular languages.

<sup>278</sup> Robert Darnton, 'Book Production in British India, 1850-1900', *Book History* 5 (2002): 239-262.

public in the form of a 'report' published four times a year. It is through these records that we now know that between 1868 and 1905, an estimated 200,000 books were printed in British India, a number that exceeds, as one scholar has noted, the print output of Enlightenment-era France.<sup>279</sup>

While many scholars have remarked on the prodigious volume of information collected and collated by colonial officials in this process, no attempt has been made hitherto to analyze this data critically in an attempt to reconstruct a picture of late nineteenth-century print culture in South India.<sup>280</sup> Rather, the focus of discussion has been on determining the extent to which these catalogue-like reports represented and reflected the effective surveillance of vernacular literary and print cultures by the colonial state. It has been pointed out, for instance, that these catalogues were not exhaustive; a large number of works deemed 'bazaar trash' by colonial officials did not make their way into these catalogues at all and may have well have comprised twenty-five per cent of the proportion of printed texts.<sup>281</sup> Opinions differ on the degree to which the state was actually successful in shaping textual production through the practice of surveillance, but there is agreement on the fact that these ostensibly bureaucratic 'reports' carried with them a lot of editorial commentary, much of which was unsympathetic to the literary and print culture being recorded and represented colonial rather than native perspectives on the subject.<sup>282</sup> Subsequently, similar appraisals came to be given by native literary critics

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<sup>279</sup> Darnton, 'Literary Surveillance in the British Raj: The Contradictions of Liberal Imperialism,' *Book History* 4 (2001): 134.

<sup>280</sup> For West Bengal we have Anindita Ghosh's *Power in Print: Popular Publishing and the Politics of Language and Culture in a Colonial Society, 1778-1905* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006).

<sup>281</sup> Darnton, 'Literary Surveillance,' 147. This, notwithstanding the disincentive to not ensuring the registration of printed work by their publishers, which as noted above, was a punishable offence.

<sup>282</sup> While Darnton acknowledges 'peculiarly British' 'disenchantment' with Indian print culture, Roy finds that in the case of Bengal the task of policing literary tastes was successfully taken up and sought to be enforced by the Bengali bourgeoisie itself.

emerging out of the colonial administrative and educational system. It was this native intelligentsia that surveilled and shaped print culture more profoundly, it has been suggested, in addition to authorizing discourses about it. Discourses that continue to exercise a powerful hold even on the scholarly imagination.

### **The Development of Islamic Tamil Print Culture and Nagore**

Returning to Murdoch's Catalogue for moment, while neither the *Nākaiyantāti* nor Pulavar Nāyakam's edition of the *Cīrāppurāṇam* are included in it, one composition about Nagore does still find mention in Murdoch's list of 36 'Tamil books published by Muhammadans.' Titled *Nākūr patikam* Murdoch provides only a brief description of the work. Eight pages long, modestly sized and priced at 16 mo and 6 pie, respectively, the work is described as being 'In praise of a Muhammadan Saint at Nagore'. He mentions neither the date nor place of publication, nor the press involved - information that is lacking for many if not most of the works listed in the *Catalogue*. Today we do not have access to this work itself, but we do know a great deal more the person who authored it – Kaṇṇakumatu Makutūm Mukammatu Pulavar - the same person who published the second edition of the *Nākaiyantāti* in 1878. In this section, I discuss the important roles played by Makutūm Mukammatu and, his successor in some ways, 'Catāvatāni' Ceyku Tampi Pāvalar, two figures whose important contributions to the world of Islamic Tamil print culture, and Tamil print culture more broadly speaking, have remained largely hidden.

We have few details about Kaṇṇakumatu Makutūm Mukammatu's life, including his dates of birth and death. According to a local historian of Kāyalpaṭṭinam, Aptul Latīp, Makutūm was the son of Makutūm Pillai of Necavu Street in Kāyalpaṭṭinam. This detail

is confirmed by the frequent mention of his father's name in the texts edited and published by Makutūm, but we do not know if he too was a literary figure or if the family was engaged in weaving, as suggested by the name of the street. Susan Schomburg has described Makutūm Mukammatu as 'the last major figure to appear on the Kāyalpaṭṭinam historical horizon', the last of the 'Kāyalār' literati whose contribution to Islamic Tamil literature she has systematically discussed.<sup>283</sup> Indeed, in striking contrast with the paucity of biographical information regarding Makutūm Mukammatu's life there is rich and extensive secondary 'archive' of his life as an editor and author of Islamic Tamil printed texts. Here I only present a brief overview of his work, a full examination of these works for a better understanding of Makutūm Mukammatu's contribution to the nineteenth-century Tamil literary world, remains a *desideratum*.

On the basis of details presented by Latīp and M.M. Uvais, Schomburg suggests that Makutūm Mukammatu's career spanned the period of 1872-1948. Latīp claims that Makutūm restored, edited, and published over sixty Islamic Tamil texts, but does not furnish us with any details regarding these works. For this information Schomburg turns to Uvais, collating from his multi-volume history of Islamic Tamil literature a list of works with which Makutūm Mukammatu was associated as an editor of sorts. My research suggests, however, the earliest printed text with which Makutūm Mukammatu was associated and of which we have knowledge, dates to the year 1857. In that year, at the insistence of Kī. Ceyyitu Mukammatu Maraikkār and with the assistance of Cāṇuttīn Pulavar, Makutūm brought out Pulavar Nāyakam's longest *kāppiyam* entitled

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<sup>283</sup> Susan Schomburg, "Reviving Religion": The Qadiri Sufi Order, Popular Devotion to Sufi Saint Muhyiuddin 'Abdul Qadir al-Gilani, and Processes of Islamization in Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka, PhD thesis, Harvard University, 2003, 345.

*Putūkuccāmenkinra purāṇam*.<sup>284</sup> In so doing, in many ways Makutūm was actually carrying forward the legacy of Pulavar Nāyakam not just as poet but also editor-publisher, as discussed earlier. The work was more than 700 pages in length and was published by a press called Muttamiḷviḷakka Accukkūṭam, which appears to have been active for a short while in the 1850s-60s, and responsible for publishing handful of other Tamil non-Islamic works.<sup>285</sup>

Judging by the extant printed works, Makutūm's career spanned an incredible eight-decade long period, from 1857 to 1936. During this time he published Kuñṇu Mūcuppulavar's *Caiyitattup paṭaippōr* (1863), Ceyyitakumatu Maraikkāyar's *Nūru nāmā* (1877), Ceyku Pīrmukammatu's *Tītārumālai* (1883), Kāṭīru Mukiyittīn Pulavar's *Pañcarattinavoḷivaṭṭam* (1885), Pulavar Nāyakam's *Nākaiyantāti* (1887, 1912), Pālakkāṭu Makāvittuvān Pavāni Pulavar's *Apturakumānarapiccatamakam* (1895), Mukammatu Mīrān Mastān Cākīpu's *Ñānarattinākaram* (1896), Mukammatunākūr Muttuppulavar's *Mukiyittīncatakam* (1901), Muttupēṭṭai Ceyku Aptul Kāṭīru Pulavar's *Payhāmpar avatāra pala vaṇṇaccintu* (1901), Aḷakaṇkuḷam Ta. Cī. Pakkīrkanippulavar's *Peṇmati yīnālankāram* (1902), Umaruppulavar's *Cīrāppurāṇam* (1904, 1929), Aptulkāṭircāyapu's *Javāhirulatītu* (1907), Tarkalai Pīrumukammatu Cākīpu's *Maharipattumālai* (1920) and *Pismil Kuṛam* (date unknown), Ceyitumīrāppulavar's *Papparattiyārammānai* (1923), Varicaimukiyittīnpulavar's *Cakkūn paṭaippōr* (1929); Kottalahān's *Palulūnacuhāpimālai* (1929); Mīrāṇkaṇi Yaṇṇāviyar's

<sup>284</sup> Ceykaptul Kāṭir Nayingār, *Putūkuccām-enkinra purāṇam* (Ceṇṇai, Muttamiḷviḷakka Accukkūṭam, 1857). Microfilm NEH 3568, available from University of Chicago.

<sup>285</sup> Another notable Tamil scholar-printer who was associated with this press was Kañcipuram Makāvittuvān Capāpati Mutaliyār, who was the main teacher of Mīnāṭcicuntaram Piḷḷai. For more about him see, Zvelebil, *Lexicon of Tamil Literature* (New York: Brill, 1995), 121.



*Kurāmātu* (1909, 1929), and Mukammatu Hamcāleppai’s *Meyññāna rattinālaṅkāraḥ* *kīrttaṇam* (1926, 1936). In addition to these texts, to which we have access today, there are a number of other works mention by Schomburg on the basis of Uvais’ survey of Islamic Tamil literature. These include Ceyku Aptul Hasan Maunamani Mastan’s *Ñānarattina Mālai* (date unknown), Nūh Valiyullah’s *Vēta Purāṇam* (date unknown), Ceyyatu Mukiyittīn Kavirāyar’s *Mukiyittīn Āṇṭakai Tiruppukal* (date unknown), Sāmunā Leppai’s *Irṣātu Nāma* (date unknown), the third and fourth editions of the *Nākaiyaṇṭāti* (1872, 1895), Miran Kani Annāviyar’s *Kurāmātu* (1880, 1883, 1887, 1890), Umaruppulavar’s *Mutumoli Mālai* (1890), Kanakkavirāyar’s *Kanakāpiṣēka Mālai* (1891), Kōṭṭāru Ceyyitu Apupakkar Pulavar’s *Cīrākkīrttaṇam* (1896), Umaruppulavar’s *Cīrāppurāṇam* (1900/1902), Minnā Nūruttīn Pulavar’s *Ponnariya Mālai* (1906), Varicaimukiyittīnpulavar’s *Cakkūn Paṭaippōr* (1908), the *Mi’raj Nāma* (1915) and the *Nūru Macala* (1929, 1948).

In addition to this diverse portfolio of edited works in different genres, Makutūm also composed and published a number of his own works. The most notable among these was a prose iteration of the *Cīrā*, titled ‘*Cīrā vacana kāvīyam*’. This was a massive three-volume work, published in 1887 by the Maṇōṇmaṇivīlāca Accukkūṭam press in Chennai. According to the title page of the work, he composed this prose commentary on the *Cīrā* at the insistence of Ceyyitu Mukammatu Maraikkāyar and Ke.Pi.Em.Es. Mukammatu Kācim Maraikkāyar, who appear to have been responsible also for the final publication, perhaps in the capacity of sponsors. Also involved in the process was Ceytaptulkāṭiru Lappai Ālim (grandson of ‘Āripupillā, Kāmiloliyullā Taikkā Umarulappai, Ālim, Hājiyār, Cākip’), who examined Makutūm’s works for errors – in a manner reminiscent of the

original composition of this as well as other Islamic Tamil *kāppiyam*- and presumably approved its publication. Makutūm's other authored works include another vacana *kāppiyam*, for Kuñcumūcu Pulavar's *Iravuculkūl Paṭaippōr* (1878, 1883), and the *Nacīhattul Iculām Hanapiyya* (1884), *Cupuhāna Maulitu* (1887), *Tirumuṭiyirakkina Hatītu* (1887, 1939), *Upakāra Cañciīvi* (1892), and the *Periya Kacācullanpiyā* (1892). We may add to this list, the *Nākūr Patikam*, whose existence is recorded by Murdoch in 1865, but to which we do not have access today. Schomburg also lists a number of other works in 'minor' genres Makutūm is credited with having composed - *Pathul Misru*, *Hakku Pēril Pukaḷpāṭṭu*, *Makkāppatikam*, *Pakutātup Patikam*, *Muhiyyitīn Aṇṭavarkaḷ*, *Pēril Tiruppukaḷ*, *Tiruñānappāṭṭu* – several of them, as we can see, of a venerative, hagiographical nature.

The reason why this elaborate account of Makutūm's literary activities and contributions to print is called for is so as to better situate, socially as well as intellectually, a work like the *Nākūr Patikam*. In the absence of access to the work, it is difficult to assess the significance of this work on literary terms. From the title of the work we can deduce two things. First, formally speaking, being a *patikam*, the composition would be grouped into decads of ten stanzas.<sup>286</sup> And second, we notice is that, like the *Nākaiyantāti*, here too it is the site – Nākūr or Nagore – that becomes the ostensible subject of the work, as opposed to Shahul Hamid himself. In this respect, the *Nākūr Patikam*, as well as the other *patikams* attributed to Makutūm Mukammatu, mark

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<sup>286</sup> The term *patikam* refers to two discrete things: 1) compositions that are collected in groups of ten stanzas, derived from the Sanskrit term 'padya', and 2) 'a poetic preface or an epilogue for some poems or groups of poems usually provided by a person other than the author.' Neither constitutes a true 'pirapantam' according to Zvelebil (1974: 206), but the form was used extensively in *bhakti* poetry, especially Śaiva canon (ibid., 92, 106). It is this form that the *Nākūr Patikam* is likely to have taken.

an interesting contrast to the ‘Hindu’ *patikams* composed during this period, wherein, typically, the subject is a god or goddess. This brings us to a third aspect of the *Nākūr Patikam* that makes the work interesting. An inspection of library holdings of old Tamil printed texts suggests that the *patikam* form was consistently used by poets and publishers throughout the nineteenth century as well as in the twentieth century, with Śiva and Murukan being especially popular subjects of praise. In contrast, less than half a dozen *patikams* attributed to Tamil Muslim poets show up in these same collections. While present library catalogues and collections cannot necessarily be deemed representative of the genre’s actual historical use, it is significant that we do not find any mention or discussion of the *patikam* form in Ma.Mu. Mu. Uvais’s survey of Islamic Tamil literature. We might conclude from this evidence that the genre was not popular among Tamil Muslim poets. This in turn raises the question as to why, given the genre’s relative lack of popularity among Tamil Muslims, Makutūm Mukammatu should have chosen to compose not one but multiple *patikams*. Whatever the specific motivations of the poet, the contextual novelty of the *Nākūr Patikam* as a literary form, its association with a literary figure of high repute, as well as its participation in an elite literary and scholastic print sphere forces us to reconsider the received scholarly wisdom regarding hagiography in the age of print, that it was either straightforward carry-over from the pre-print period or that it directly indexed non-elite or ‘popular’ social class and religious consciousness.

Indeed, scholarship on the subject of Tamil literary activity in the late nineteenth century has been so fixated on the people and processes involved in the ‘rediscovery’ of *caṅkam* literature, that figures like Makutūm Mukammatu, who were active in the same

time period either as poets themselves or as the editors and publishers of the work of other or prior works, do not even make their way into the discussion. What this has done is to indirectly reaffirm a rather skewed picture of the nineteenth century world of literary production and publication, one in which Muslim participation has the appearance of being more of an exception than the norm, despite there being plenty of evidence to indicate the contrary. This marginalization also means that we know very little still about the social and institutional networks and processes through which Islamic texts came to be printed by a variety of different presses owned by Hindus, and what relations the Tamil Muslim litterateurs shared with their peers from other communities. One figure through whom we get a glimpse of the degree to which the world of Tamil print culture was multi-sectarian is ‘Catāvatāni’ Ceyku Tampi Pāvalar.

Ceyku Tampi Pāvalar (1876-1950) has the unique distinction of being the subject of not one but five biographies in Tamil, in addition to a commemorative postage stamp issued in 2008.<sup>287</sup> According to these accounts, Ceyku Tampi was born in 1874 in a small town close to Kōttāru (in modern day Nagercoil district), in what was then the princely state of Travancore. Ceyku Tampi’s early education took place in Arabic and Malayalam, but such was his love for Tamil that he taught himself to read the Tamil script and improved his vocabulary by reading printed advertisements. It was Ceyku Tampi’s Hindu neighbors who, observing his keenness for Tamil, lent him such books as the *Ātticūṭi*,

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<sup>287</sup> Much of what we know about his life comes, however, from a commemorative volume that was brought out jointly by a number of his friends and associates, in 1961. See Ci. Cuppiramaṇiyan, ed., *Catāvatāni Ceykutampip Pāvalar Ninaivu Malar* (Iṭalākkūṭi, Nākarkōvil: Catāvatānip Pāvalar Maṇṇam, 1961). In addition, there are Ci. Kumarēca Piḷḷai’s *Centamiḷ Vaḷartta Ceyku Tampi* (Cucīntira, Kumari Māvattam: Kumaran Patippakam, 1986), C. Paculu Mukiyitīn, *Makāmatip Pāvalar* (Cennai: Ulaka Tamiḷārāycci Niruvanam, 1986), Aruḷnampi, *Paintamiḷ Vaḷartta Pāvalar* (Ceṇṇai: Maṇimēkaḷai Piracuram, 1997), Mu. Aptulkarīm, *Ceykuttampip Pāvalar* (Putu Tilli: Cākittiya Akkātemi, 2001). Even B.S. Kesavan offers a brief profile of Ceyku Tampi in his *History of Printing and Publishing India*, 134-135.

*Konraivēṇṭaṇ*, *Tēcinkurāṇkatakai*, and *Alli Aracāṇi katai* – all available at this time in printed form -- to read. He eventually approached Caṅkaranārāyaṇa Aṇṇāviyār, a Tamil teacher who lived in the next town and was accepted as a student. Under Aṇṇāviyār's tutelage Ceyku Tampi studied Tamil grammar and prosody, and became intimately familiar with several key non-Islamic Tamil literary works, including the *Periyapurāṇam*, the *Tiruvilaiyāṭṭapurāṇam*, and the *Kamparāmāyaṇam*.<sup>288</sup> Given this training, it is interesting to observe that the work that brought Ceyku Tampi into the world of Tamil publishing was a collection of songs composed by his ancestor, the famous eighteenth-century *sufi* of Kōṭṭāru, Ceyku Mukaitīn Malukku Mutaliyar 'Ñāniyār Appa'.

Through an oft repeated story we learn that, desirous of publishing Ñāniyār Appa's songs in the form of a book at Iṭṭā Pārttacārati Nāyūṭu's Patmanāpavilāca Accukkūṭam, Hacarattu Ceyyitu Tākāleppai (also a descendant of the *sufi*) and Mēlappālaiyam Camucutācin (the project's sponsor) approached Ceyku Tampi to perform the job of editing the work. Ill health initially prevented Ceyku Tampi from taking up the offer, for it would entail moving to Chennai for the duration of the project. In his stead one Kaṇuppaiyya Pāvalar was chosen to perform the role of editor, who, unfamiliar with the tenets of Islam, struggled to perform the task. Fortuitously, in the meantime, Ceyku Tampi's health had improved and he was thus able to relocate to Chennai and take up the project, bringing it to fruition in a few months' time. So impressed was Iṭṭā Parttacārati Nāyūṭu by his work as an editor that he immediately offered him the position of chief editor along with a generous salary, an offer that Ceyku Tampi couldn't refuse. And thus, began Ceyku Tampi's long career associated with the

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<sup>288</sup> Paculumukiyitīn, *Makāmati Pāvalar*, 4.

Śrī Patmanāpavilāca Accukūṭam. According to the biographers, he was twenty-one years old at the time, so the year would have been 1895.<sup>289</sup>

When commenting on Ceyku Tampi's literary accomplishments, the focus of his biographers has tended to be on the feats that allowed him to acquire the titles *cōṭacāvatāni* and *catāvatāni* (the art of performing sixteen and hundred different acts at the same time, respectively).<sup>290</sup> Important though these were in contributing to Pāvalar's overall literary standing, our interest in him relates specifically to his work as an editor and a poet. Available records suggest that the Śrī Patmanāpavilāca Accukkūṭam (also referred to as the Patmanāpavilāca Accukkūṭam) was active from roughly 1890 to 1920. Assuming that for much of this period Ceyku Tampi was affiliated with the press, what is interesting to note is that the vast majority of the works printed there were not associated with Islam. While acknowledging once again that surviving records cannot give us an exhaustive account of actual print production, but assuming that it may be seen as being representative, we find only half a dozen Muslim names in a list of almost a hundred authors. Among the 'Islamic' works published were Kunaṅkuṭi Mastān's *Tiruppāṭal Tiraṭṭu* (1902, 1906), Aptul Kāṭiru Cāyapu's *Javāhirul Aṭṭu* (1907; edited by Makutūm Mukammatu), and Pulavar Nāyakam's *Nākaiyantāti* (1912). Interestingly, Iṭṭā Pārttacārati Nāyūṭu had been associated with the publishing of Islamic Tamil works well before the arrival of Ceyku Tampi.<sup>291</sup> In the Śrī Patmanāpavilāca Accukkūṭam, what we get to see are such rare instances as two editions of the *Periya Vikkiramātittan Katai*,

<sup>289</sup> Ci. Kumarēcapillai, Centamiḷ Vaṭartta Ceyku Tampi, 25.

<sup>290</sup> His other claim to fame, and quite possibly the reason why he has come to be recognized and commemorated by the state, as well as scholars, was his participation in the nationalist movement, from 1920 onwards.

<sup>291</sup> These included multiple major works by Makutūm Mukammatu, including *Tīneri viḷakka vacaṇa kāviyam* (1892; 412 pages), *Upakāra cañcīvi* (1892; 535 pages), and *Periya kacācullaṇṇpiyā* (1892, 964 pages).

published in 1911 and 1913, in which Ceyku Tampi is categorically acknowledged as editor.<sup>292</sup> The more crucial point is that by the closing decade of the nineteenth century, a Muslim literary figure had come to occupy a prominent position in the world of mainstream Tamil print publishing.

When it comes to his own compositions, the picture we get from Ceyku Tampi's biographers is more detailed but it is also quite different from what extant print publications of that period seem to indicate.<sup>293</sup> Thus, while the biographers attribute a number of poetic compositions to Ceyku Tampi, among the Tamil printed books from that period that we have access to today, we find only two works where Ceyku Tampi is listed as author and both of them instances of fiction written in prose form. Both these works, titled rather interestingly *Ellārkkum pārkkattakunta eṭṭuk kiriminal kēs* ('Eight Criminal Cases that Merit Everyone's Attention', 1907) and *Tēvalōk kiriminalkēs* ('A Criminal Cases in the Land of Gods', 1908), saw multiple reprints but, interestingly, were not published by Śrī Patmanāpavilāca Accukkūṭam. The most consequential prose work composed by Ceyku Tampi was the commentary he wrote for the *Cīrāppurāṇam*. A monumental two-volume work published in two parts in 1903 and 1908, it contains both the original work and the prose commentary (*mūlamum polippuraiyum*) and has come to be seen as the definitive interpretation of the work. While these three non-traditional (fiction and prose) works appear to have left a more lasting impression, these were not the only works Ceyku Tampi wrote. In fact, striking an interesting contrast with these, Ceyku Tampi's other works – some of which were published, others not – include a

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<sup>292</sup> Both editions were substantial works, 560 and 632 pages long respectively and containing traditional illustrations ('aitika paṭaṅka'), as advertised on their title pages.

<sup>293</sup> In part at least, it seems, this was because many of his compositions were not published at all.

number of poetic composition in traditional minor genres like *antāti*, *kōvai*, and *ārruppaṭai*, as well as several stand-alone songs, including *cittiraikkavis* and *cārrukkavi*.<sup>294</sup> Among the more well-known of these works, and a composition that did find its way to print at the Śrī Patmanāpavilāca Accukkūṭam was an *antāti* on Nagore, titled *Tirunākūrttiripantāti* (1900).

The reason why I have presented such a detailed picture of the literary activities of both Kaṇṇakumatu Makutūm Mukammatu Pulavar and Ceyku Tampi Pāvalar, given that both figures composed only one ‘minor’ work on Nagore (in addition to each having overseen the publication of new editions of the *Nākaiyantāti*), is to better place those two works within the worlds of Tamil Muslim literary activity and print publishing, about which we still know very little. As we can see, notwithstanding the overlap in time, Makutūm Mukammatu and Ceyku Tampi played very different kinds of roles in the arena of print. Whereas the former figure was much more closely tied up with the process of preserving Islamic Tamil print traditions by introducing them to print technologies, the latter had a much more ‘mainstream’ engagement with late nineteenth century print culture, one that extended well beyond the Tamil Muslim literary community, yet not exclusive of it. In Pāvalar, we also see a transition to more modern forms of writing, most notably, fiction. As poets and litterateurs, however, we see in both figures, as well, a persistent commitment to participating in and contributing to traditional Islamic Tamil literary and venerative practices. One side of that commitment is manifest in erudite and ‘elite’ *vacana kāppiyams* and *polippurais*, the other comes across via works in minor

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<sup>294</sup> Some of the works attributed to Ceyku Tampi are *Ṣamcuttāsīnkōvai* (1919), *Napikaḷ nāyaka mānmiya mañcari* (published posthumously in a journal by the name *Muslim*, *Kalvattu nāyakam innicai pāmālai* (1940), *Tirukkōṭṭārruppatirruppattantāti* (1900), and *Nītivenpā* (also published posthumously).



genres, such as the *patikam* and the *antāti*. As hagiographical compositions in minor genres, works such as these have often uncritically and simplistically understood as representing either the weight of an unchanging literary ‘tradition’ or as reflecting a non-elite ‘popular’ religiosity, prone to being taken in by miracle stories and either unaware of or unable to grapple with the subtleties of Islamic mysticism. Yet, neither understanding fits Makutūm and Pāvalar, and nor were they outliers in this field as will become clear from our discussion of Kulām Kāṭiṟu Nāvalar, another late nineteenth-century Tamil Muslim literary elite whose career, more than anyone else, shows how elite and lettered social classes, sources and forces of ‘enchantment’, and modernity’s self-professed rationality interact in ways contrary to the established scholarly common sense.

Before we turn to discuss Kulām Kāṭiṟu, however, we may round off the present discussion about the involvement of Muslims in nineteenth-century Tamil print culture by turning briefly to the Straits Settlements of Penang and Singapore, which were home to another theater of Tamil print culture, one in which Muslims played a much more crucial role. In fact, the earliest known Tamil work printed in these parts is a collection of Islamic Tamil venerative poetry entitled *Munājāttutiraṭṭu*, composed by Muhammatu Aptul Kāṭiṟu Pulavar of Nagore.<sup>295</sup> Published in Singapore in 1872 by an English-owned press, the work was a compilation of four *munājāttus* and a number of other compositions (including song genres like *patam* and *cint*) in praise of a number of Islamic figures,

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<sup>295</sup> Torsten Tschacher, ‘Witnessing Fun: Tamil-speaking Muslims and the Imagination of Ritual in colonial Southeast Asia’, in Michael Bergunder, Heiko Frese, and Ulrike Schroder, eds, *Ritual, Caste, and Religion in Colonial South India* (Halle: Franckesche Stiftungen zu Halle, 2010), 191.

prominent among them the Prophet, Abdul Qadir Jīlāni, and Shahul Hamid.<sup>296</sup> Once again we find that both Nagore and Shahul Hamid were, in more ways than one, right at the heart of Islamic Tamil print culture, this time on the other side of the Bay of Bengal.

While Tamil connections with the region are age old, print technology arrived only in 1870, well after the founding of the British colonial settlements in Penang (1786) and Singapore (1819), and it is only from this time onwards that we start get a sense of what Tamil society and culture looked like in these cosmopolitan and colonial port-cities.<sup>297</sup> Remarkably, Tamil Muslims were at forefront of the adoption and use of print technology in this region -- they were its pioneers.<sup>298</sup> Unlike what we have seen in the case of South India, in Southeast Asia we find that the earliest non-European owned printing presses were actually owned and run by Tamil Muslims. What makes their involvement in this business all the more interesting is that their presses played a very important role in the formation of a Malay print culture as well. In 1873, for instance, Makutūm Cāyapu set up the Denodaya Press in Singapore, which printed both Malay and non-Muslim Tamil texts. He also set up the *Cinkai Varttamani* (also known as ‘Singapore Commercial News’), the first Tamil newspaper of Southeast Asia, published on a weekly

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<sup>296</sup> The *Munājāttirattu* is the oldest Tamil printed work in the possession of the National Library of Singapore. As a stand-alone work, too, it merits great attention. One interesting aspect of the work is the large number of people whose subscriptions made its printing possible and whose names are systematically listed in the beginning of the work, sorted on the basis of the region they belonged to, which included places in South India, Sri Lanka, and Southeast Asia. Another striking element of the work, given its avowedly Muslim character, is that the editor and proofreader of the manuscript, who the poet refers to as his ‘preceptor’ and to whom the work is dedicated, is a non-Muslim figure – one ‘S.V. Narayanasamy Nayagar, Tamil Pandit Singapore’.

<sup>297</sup> Sunil S. Amrith, ‘Tamil Diasporas across the Bay of Bengal,’ *The American Historical Review* 114.3 (June 2009): 547-572. See also Amrith, ‘Indians Overseas? Governing Tamil Migration to Malaya, 1870–1941,’ *Past and Present* 208 (August 2010): 231-261, and *Crossing the Bay of Bengal: The Furies of Nature and the Fortunes of Migrants* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013).

<sup>298</sup> Tschacher, ‘Witnessing Fun,’ 191.

basis from 1875 onwards.<sup>299</sup> Crucially, like the press itself, the *Cinkai Varttamani* was not a 'Muslim' newspaper, in that it carried news aimed at a broader Tamil readership. Another pioneering press was the Jawi Peranakan Company, started by Munsyi Muhammad Said bin Dada Muhyiddin, a philanthropist from Penang born to Tamil-Jawi Peranakan parents.<sup>300</sup> Not only did this press publish the first Malay language newspaper of the region -- also called *Jawi Peranakan* and edited by Munsyi Muhammad himself, from its founding in 1876 until his death in 1888<sup>301</sup> -- it was also responsible for publishing the *Taṅkai Necan*, a Tamil fortnightly publication in operation between 1878 and 1880.

Given the pioneering role played by the Tamil Muslims of the Straits Settlements in the arena of newspaper publishing, both in Tamil and in Malay, it perhaps not surprising that the earliest known Islamic Tamil periodical, too, was published from here, not South India. The periodical, called *Vittiyā Vicāriṇi*, was issued from Penang and began in 1883.<sup>302</sup> It was edited by none other than Kulām Kāṭiru Nāvalar himself, who,

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<sup>299</sup> S.M.A.K. Fakhri, 'Print Culture amongst Tamils and Tamil Muslims in Southeast Asia, c. 1860-1960,' *Madras Institute of Development Studies Working Paper* 167 (December 2001), 7. I am not certain about its exact print run.

<sup>300</sup> For a detailed study of this fascinating community, comprising South Indian Muslim émigrés who married local Malay women and have come to be seen as incorporated into the Malay community, see Helen Fujimoto, *The South Indian Muslim community and the evolution of the Jawi Peranakan in Penang up to 1948* (Tokyo: Institute for the Study of Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa, 1989).

<sup>301</sup> Jan van der Putten, 'Wayang Parsi, Bangsawan and Printing: Commercial Cultural Exchange between South Asia and the Malay World', in Michael Feener and Terenjit Sevea, eds, *Islamic Connections: Muslim Societies in South and Southeast Asia* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2009), 92.

<sup>302</sup> Prior to this, as early as 1869, an Islamic Tamil periodical called *Alamat Ilankapuri* had commenced publication in Sri Lanka, but the script it deployed was Arabu-Tamil, that is Tamil printed using modified Arabic letters. Interestingly, it was in 1883 once again that a Tamil Islamic newspaper (in Tamil script) began being published in Sri Lanka too, named 'Muslim Nēcan', under the direction of M.C. Siddi Lebbe (d. 1898), a lawyer, writer and educational reformer of formidable repute. Indeed, both editors, Kulām Kāṭiru Nāvalar and Siddi Lebbe enjoyed positions of eminence in the society of that time, and their papers, *Vittiyā Vicāriṇi* and *Muslim Nēcan* frequently debated with the writings and positions of the other. Cf. A. Mā. Cāmi, *Tamiḻil Islāmiya Italkaḻ* (Cennai: Navamanṇi Patippakam, 1994), 343-356, 380-384, cited in Fakhri, 'Print Culture amongst Tamils and Tamil Muslims,' 9. On Siddi Lebbe, see Alexander McKinley & Merin Shobhana Xavier, 'The Mysteries of the Universe: The Tamil Muslim Intellectualism of M.C.

upon his return to India in 1888, continued to publish the paper from a new location, his hometown, Nagore.<sup>303</sup> In fact, the India edition of the *Vittiyā Vicāriṇi*, along with two other Tamil Muslim periodicals issued in the same year, were the earliest Islamic Tamil newspapers to be printed in South India.<sup>304</sup>

### **Kulām Kāṭiṟu Nāvalar (1833-1908) and the Mature Nagore Tradition**

We turn now to Kulām Kāṭiṟu's contribution to the development of the Nagore hagiographical tradition. Born in 1833, Kulām Kāṭiṟu was a native of Nagore. We know about his life a from a number of secondary sources, which in turn rely on his own writings as well as those of his son, Āṟipu Nāvalar, a well-recognized poet in his own right. Kulām Kāṭiṟu's father, Āyurvēta Pāskara Paṇṭita Vāppu Rāvuttar, as the name suggests was a practitioner of ayurveda and the family also owned a money-changing business. According to his biographers, at age seven Kulām Kāṭiṟu began to read the Quran and after two years commenced regular schooling in Tamil. By age 12, he had read the *Tivākaram* and *Piṅkalam*, among other traditional Tamil glossaries. Upon his father's passing, Kulām Kāṭiṟu's family's fortunes declined and his education suffered. Observing his love for literature, however, his paternal uncle Pakkīr Tampi Cākipu, a Tamil scholar in his own right, stepped in to find young Kulām Kāṭiṟu a job and steady income, in addition personally tutoring him in Tamil literature the mornings and evenings. Biographers also mention two other teachers. The first, Nārāyaṇa Cuvāmi, also of Nagore, is described as a well-known local Tamil scholar-teacher as well as a friend of

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Siddi Lebbe', *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 41.1 (2018): 51-68. (Sami 1994: 343-356 and 380-384).

<sup>303</sup> No copies of this paper, either from Penang or Nagore, appear to have survived.

<sup>304</sup> Fakhri, 'Print Culture amongst Tamils and Tamil Muslims,' 6.

Vāppu Rāvuttar, who took Kulām Kāṭīru under his wing.<sup>305</sup> And the other teacher, it has been suggested, was none other than the illustrious Mīnāṭcicuntaram Piḷḷai, with whom he is described as having studied Caiva Cittānta, *itihāsa*, grammars, and other literary works.<sup>306</sup> With training from these preceptors – both Muslim and non-Muslim – began Kulām Kāṭīru’s own long and illustrious literary career.

In his early years, Kulām Kāṭīru is believed to have composed a number of standalone verses and *kīrttanais*. His first publication was titled *Pirapanta Tiraṭṭu*, a collection of 109 compositions, published in Kāraikkāl in 1875. We do not know when exactly Kulām Kāṭīru went to Penang, where, as mentioned earlier, he published the *Vittiyā Vicāriṇi* starting in 1883, at which point he would have already been 50 years old. By this time, the poet is believed to have composed a number of compositions in minor genres. These include, for instance, a *kōvai* about the Prophet, titled *Mummaṇi Kōvai* as well as one in praise of one Maturai Piḷḷai of Rangoon, titled *Maturai Kōvai*. According to the poet’s biographers, the latter work was in fact inaugurated publicly via an *arankēṛram* held in Rangoon, where the poet was felicitated and honored by Madurai Piḷḷai and accorded the title ‘Nāvalar’. It was in this pre-*Vittiyā Vicāriṇi* period, too, that Kulām Kāṭīru composed two *kalampakams*, on and around Nākūr. The first of these, the Nākūr *Kalampakam*, appears to have been published from Madras in 1878. The second, titled *Kuvālīr Kalampakam* is the first work that we know of that was composed about Shahul Hamid’s teacher and preceptor, Shattari sufi Muhammad Ghawth of Gwalior. Records suggest that this work was published in 1882, in Kāraikkāl. The poet is believed

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<sup>305</sup> There is some difference of opinion on the historicity of this claim. See, Mu. I. Akamatu Maraikkāyar, “Kulām Kāṭīru Nāvalar: Varalarril Cila Muraṇpāṭukaḷ,” in Mu. Cayapu Maraikkayar, ed., *Islamiya tamililakkiya ayvukkuvai* (Mayiladuthurai: Association for Tamil Islamic Literature, 1993), 54-65.

<sup>306</sup> Kamil Zvelebil, *Lexicon of Tamil Literature*, 370.

to have returned to Nagore in 1888, from where he continued to publish the *Vittiya Vicāriṇi*. It is from this later stage of Kulām Kāṭiṟu Nāvalar's career, that we get the maximum number of printed works. Below is a table with information regarding all the works Kulām Kāṭiṟu authored. Interestingly, compared to the publications of Makutūm Mukammatu Pulavar and Ceyku Tampi Pāvalar, we see only a couple of Kulām Kāṭiṟu's writings were published from Madras -- most were issued by presses in smaller towns like Karaikkal, Nagapattinam, Trichy, and even Nagore. The poet used a number of different traditional Tamil literary forms, writing both original works and commentaries.

Outside Tamil Muslim literary circles, Kulām Kāṭiṟu Nāvalar is perhaps best known for his association with the Madurai Tamil Sangam of 1901. Established by Pāṇṭittuṟai Tēvar, the erstwhile *zamindar* of Palavanatham (a small estate in the vicinity of the Ramnad zamindari), the 'fourth' Tamil Sangam, as it came to be known, was seen as emulating and recreating the literary academies of Tamil's distant past. Its patrons in turn saw themselves as fulfilling the role of the great Tamil kings of yore, who had actively patronized and fostered the arts at their courts.<sup>307</sup> Kulām Kāṭiṟu Nāvalar was one among the leading Tamil scholars, litterateurs, and patrons of the age who participated in this inaugural meeting of the Madurai Tamil Sangam, where he was given the title 'Nakkīrar', the name of a poet of the ancient Tamil *caṅkams*, to whom the famous *Tirumukārruppaṭai* ('The Guide to Lord Murukan', c. 250 AD) is attributed.<sup>308</sup> Perhaps it was in honor of that title and emulating the poet who originally bore that name, that

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<sup>307</sup> Sumathy Ramaswamy, *Passions of the Tongue*, 220-222.

<sup>308</sup> Zvelebil, *Tamil Lexicon*, 461-463. Nakkīrar is a name that has been used by so many poets that it has come to take on the character of legendary poet in Tamil literary history.

Kulām Kāṭīru, too, composed his *Pulavar Āṛruppaṭai*, a poem guiding a wandering poet to the Madurai Tamil Sangam.<sup>309</sup>

**Table 4.1: Works Composed by Kulām Kāṭīru Nāvalar**

Year	Title	Publication Place	Subject	NBIL 310
1875	Pirapantattiraṭṭu	Karaikkal	Devotional poetry	4049 8
<b>1878</b>	<b>Nakur Kalampakam</b>	<b>Madras</b>		<b>4049 4</b>
<b>1882</b>	<b>Kuvālir Kalampakam</b>	<b>Kāraikkāl</b>	<b>101 songs in praise of Muhammad Ghawth, the preceptor of the Saint of Nagore</b>	<b>4049 3</b>
1888	Maturaikkovai	Madras		4204 2
1892	Ciranabi avatārappaṭala urai kitelike Nir Karanam	Karaikkal	Reply to K. Katiracana Maraikkayar's criticism of Ciranabi avatarappatala urai.	4173 4
<b>1893</b>	<b>Nākūrppurāṇa m</b>	<b>Tiruchirappa lli</b>		
1893	Urai for Tirucci Kā. Piccai Ipuṛāhīm Pulavar's <i>Tiru Matinattantāti</i>			
1894	Pakutātu Kalampakam	Chennai	101 songs describing Baghdad, where the Sufi Abdul Qadir Jilani is buried.	
1895	Tirumakka Tirippantāti	Jaffna	Antāti about Mecca	
1896	Āṛipu Nāyakam	Tiruchirappalli	Adaptation of Arabic text <i>Nūr-ul Ahmatīyyā</i> ,	4412 7

<sup>309</sup> Tschacher, 'Drowning in the Ocean of Tamil,' 56. An āṛruppaṭai is a poem in which one of the community of itinerant artistes and poets, having received gifts from a generous patron, sends his colleagues to the same patron. Cf. Zvelebil, *Lexicon of Tamil Literature*, 63. The *Pulavarāṛruppaṭai* was published in 1903, by the Madurai Tamil Sangam itself. Mā. Mu. Uvais later went on to write a conventional *urai* for the work. See Uvais, Ma. Mukammatu. *Madurai Tamilccaṅkattup Pulavarāṛruppaṭai, Mūlamum Uraiym. Ācīriyar Makāvittuvān Vā. Kulām Kāṭīru Nāvalar*. Pāṇantuṛai, Ilaṅkai: Islāmiya Ilakkiya Maṇṇam, 1968).

<sup>310</sup> NBIL refers to the The National Bibliography of Indian Literature.

			detailing the biography of Halarat Ceyyitu Ahamatu Kapīr Ripāyi (Rifayi).	
<b>1899</b>	<b>Mukāṣapā Mālai</b>	<b>Kāraikkāl</b>	<b>Describes Shahul Hamid's <i>mihraj</i> or dream journey, comprising 13 chapters and 300 songs. Reprinted in 1983, by Em. Ceyyatu Muhammadu 'Hasan'</b>	
1900	Patāyiku Kalampakam		101 songs in praise of Shaikh Ahmed Rifayi	
1900	Porutta viḷakkam	Karaikkal	On poetics	4173 5
1900	Patāyikuk Kalampakam	Karaikkal	On the greatness of saint Arif	4049 7
1901	Apinaya vottu	Tirunelveli	On music and dance	4157 6
1901	Icai nunukka inpam	Nagore	On music	4157 7
1902	Araputtamiḷ Akarāti	Kāraikkāl	Four-volume dictionary	4015 9
<b>1902</b>	<b>Kaṇjul Karāmāttu</b>	<b>Cennai</b>	<b>Prose hagiography on Shahul Hamid</b>	
1902	Pakutātu Yamakavantāti	Kāraikkāl	On Baghdad and Muhiyuddīn Abdul Qadir Jilani	4049 6
1902	Saccidānanda mālai	Ramnad	Devotional poetry	4049 9
1903	Tirumaṇimālai Vacanam	Kāraikkāl	On the achievement of Prophet Ibrahim	4412 8
1903	Maturaiṭṭamiḷcca nkattuppulavar Āruppaṭai	Maturai	Āruppaṭai about the poets of the 1901 'Fourth' Tamil Caṅkam	4204 3
1904	Āripu Nāyaka Vacanam	Madras	Prose rendering of Raipur Nāyakam, purāṇam on the life of Saint Arif by the same author	4049 2
N.D.	Camuttira Mālai	Nagapattinam		4204 4
<b>1928</b>	<b>Taṛukā Mālai</b>		<b>100 songs on the Nagore dargah. Details of first two prints</b>	



			<b>unknown. Third reprint issued by his son, Āripu Nāvalar.</b>	
1951	Nannūḷ viḷakkam	Nagapattinam	Explanation of the Nannūḷ, a grammatical work by Pavananti Munivar.	4150 4
1990	Urai for Kāṭiṟu Muhyittīn Aṇṇāviyār's <i>Pikhu Mālai</i>		Second reprint. First published, 1890.	

As we can see from the table above, Kulām Kāṭiṟu wrote at least six different works on Nagore. It is possible that there are more compositions by the poet of which a print edition or proper record does not survive. While two of the above-mentioned works date to the period prior to his return to Nagore from Penang in 1888, the remaining four date to period after. It is likely that it was in this later period that the poet also came to occupy the position of *camastānam vittuvān* or ‘resident poet’ of the dargah, but biographers do not provide us an exact date for this appointment. What this means is that it is difficult to establish the exact nature of the relationship between the hagiographical works composed by Kulām Kāṭiṟu and the dargah establishment. Links certainly existed, as we shall see, but to what extent Kāṭiṟu’s writings can be seen as being officially commissioned hagiographies remains an open question. We shall be taking a closer look at two of these hagiographical works here, the *Nākūrpurāṇam* (1893) and the *Kaṇḍul Karāmāttu* (1902).

### The *Nākūrpurāṇam*

The *Nākūrpurāṇam* is the second Islamic Tamil *purāṇam* to have been composed about Shahul Hamid, making him the only local sufi saint to have the honor of having two such works to his name. It is also the only Islamic Tamil *purāṇam* whose title includes the

name of a geographical site, which gives the work the appearance of a *talappurāṇam* (Skt. *sthalapurāṇam*).<sup>311</sup> Indeed, some Tamil Muslim scholars have categorized the work as a *talappurāṇam* – the first and only one of its kind. To what extent such a classification holds remains open to debate, but there are important differences that distinguish this work from all the prior Islamic Tamil *purāṇams*. The latter works, which may be understood as being categorically hagiographical in nature, were focused on retelling stories from the lives of various important founding figures of Islam. In the *Nākūrpurāṇam*, on the other hand, even though praise and glorification of Shahul Hamid the person remain the central purpose, this is not done by narrativizing episodes from the *shaikh*'s life but focusing on events that postdated his death.

Before we examine the contents of the work more closely, a brief account may be given of its composition and publication history. The first print edition of the work dates to 1893, and was published by Mukammatu Nayinā Maraikkāyar, with material assistance from one Cikkantar Rāvuttar, son of Pāvā Rāvuttar of Nagore. The latter figure also appears as a subject of the one of the chapters of the work, for the birth of Cikkantar Rāvuttar is attributed to a miracle performed by the Nagore saint. This might also explain his reasons for patronizing the publication of the work. For this generosity he is praised by the editor, Mukammatu Nayinā, in one of the six *cirappu pāyiram* poems written by other Tamil Muslim poets and scholars that serve as a kind of preface to the larger work. After these *pāyiram* poems and a handful of praise poems (*pukaḷ kavikaḷ*) we arrive at the poet's own prefatory *pāyiram*, in which we learn a few key details regarding the purpose,

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<sup>311</sup> One of three sub-types of Tamil *purāṇams* as identified by Kamil Zvelebil (1974: 170), a categorization that David Shulman suggests inadequately captures the complexity of the genre's themes. A key work in Tamil is Vē. Kirusṇacāmi, *Tamiḷil talapurāṇa Ilakkiyam* (Nākarkōvil: Kirusṇā Accakam, 1974).

authorship, and date of the composition. The poet announces that unlike Pulavar Nāyakam's work (which he glosses as *Kāraṇappurāṇam*) this work would relate stories that belonged to the period *after* Shahul Hamid's passing (*maṛaintu pinnān caritam*). He credits Mukammatu Couto Cākipu -- son of Vāñcūr Pakkīr Cākipu, a descendant of Yūcupu, spritual son of Shahul Hamid – with having provided the *urai* with which he composed the work.<sup>312</sup> Significantly, there is neither any mention of a patron responsible for commissioning the work, nor any credit given to the his descendants with that role in the *pāyiram*. In the very last verse of this section, in addition to his name, the poet states that he finished composing the work in 1882/83 – ten years prior to its print publication and around the same time as when he began publishing the *Vittiyā Vicāriṇi* from Penang. While the print edition does not make evident what specific role the poet might have had in the printing of his work, it is important to keep in mind that, unlike all of the prior Islamic Tamil *purāṇams*, the *Nākūrpurāṇam* was printed during the lifetime of the poet.

Turning now to the work itself, the *Nākūrpurāṇam* is made up 31 *paṭalams* or chapters, and along with *kāppu*, *kaṭavuḷ vāḷttu*, and *pāyiram*, is comprised of a total of 1350 verses. The story begins, as it were, where the *Tirukkāraṇappurāṇam* ended – with the final moments of Shahul Hamid's life. After the customary *nāṭṭu* and *nakara paṭalams*, in the *uttaravu alitta paṭalam* the poet highlights the order given by the shaikh to his adopted son Yusuf to continue to reside in Nagore. After this, according to the *tapōtanar puṛapāṭṭu paṭalam*, the shaikh's 404 bandit-turned-followers were released from their attachment, with the instruction that they were to return annually to the dargah,

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<sup>312</sup> Here we note the absence of an Arabic mediating text, unlike in the case of most other Islamic Tamil *kāppiyams*, or even a person knowledgeable in Arabic scriptures and texts, as was the case in the *Tirukkāraṇappurāṇam*.

to commemorate his passing. We then have an account of the construction of the dargah's initial wooden structure by local fisher devotees (*paḷḷi kaṭṭiya paṭalam*), the commencing of the annual *kantūri* (*tiruvilā paṭalam*), the marriages of Yūcupu's progeny (*vivāka paṭalam*), and his own passing away (*Ceyku Yūcupu Nāyakar upāttu paṭalam*). While these eight initial chapters speak principally of Shahul Hamid's corporeal descendants and spiritual successors, creating intimate and indelible links between them, Nagore, the dargah, and its rituals, most of the remaining chapters are dedicated to retelling stories of miraculous events, whose occurrence is traced not to the intercession of these latterday figures, but to Shahul Hamid himself.

While we cannot present all of these miracle stories here, a few recurring themes may be highlighted. One of these themes is the shaikh's fame on foreign shores, in parts of Southeast Asia, as well as over the Bay of Bengal -- the waterway connecting that part of the world with the Coromandel Coast and the port town of Nagore. The principle protagonists of the first two miracle stories -- apart from Sufi shaikh and his shrine -- are the king of Bantem and a Tamil Hindu banker in Dutch Malacca. Very briefly, in both cases, albeit for different reasons, we find valuable offerings being made by grateful devotees sent on merchant ships across the Bay of Bengal. In the case of the Bantem king's gifts, specifically an exquisitely woven shawl (hence the name, *uttarīya paṭalam*) even though a storm caused the whole ship to capsize, the chest miraculously found its way to the shores of Nagore. In the *marakkalam aḷaitta paṭalam*, we are informed that Tirumala Ceṭṭi's gifts, which consisted of the cargo of a whole ship, miraculously sailed -- unmanned - across the sea and successfully arrived at their intended destination. All gifts made to Sufi shaikh, thus, were able to find their way to his shrine, no matter what the

circumstances. The sea and the movement of goods and vessels across it, were thus controlled by Sufi shaikh, especially those intended for him and his shrine. A second, related theme is the harm incurred by anyone who dared to interfere with the dargah's properties, as we learn from the story of the man who tried to cut trees from the dargah's courtyard and had his throat sliced instead (*arputavāṭpaṭalam*) or the case of the snake-bite that killed the subedar who tried to commandeer the *uṇṭiyals* containing the monetary offerings made to the dargah (*arputa nāka paṭalam*). Then, there are the more common variety of miracles that bring rain to drought-hit areas, restore vision, speech and hearing, and cure chronic ailments. The last theme forming the subject of a number of the text's chapters pertains to the dargah's physical space. Towards the latter part of the work the poet gives us a detailed account of the construction of the five *manōras* or minarets that distinguish the Nagore dargah's architectural scheme, as well as the villages it received as *māniyam* grants from the rulers of the Tanjore.

As we try to consider the significance of the *Nākūrpurāṇam* in the wider context of the development of the Shahul Hamid hagiography, a few important points need to be noted. As mentioned earlier, the *Nākūrpurāṇam* begins its narrative from the point where the *Tirukkāraṇappurāṇam* left off. Indeed, the poet categorically places his work in relation to Pulavar Nāyakam's composition. That said, the internal ordering of the *Nākūrpurāṇam* is quite different; unlike its predecessor, the *paṭalams* do not follow a chronological order, nor is there a tripartite *kāṇṭam* structure based on the peripatetic life of Sufi shaikh. What we see instead, as suggested in the discussion above, is a kind of thematic grouping of chapters: first, Sufi shaikh's family, followed by important miracles posthumously attributed to him, and, finally, the patronage and construction of the

dargah's physical structures. Clearly, all three aspects were important to the work, which makes it difficult to deduce from its thematic focus any immediate reason for its composition. Nor does the poet himself provide us with the pretext. Taking a step back, then, we may perhaps see the work as marking an important milestone in the on-going life of the shrine, propelled jointly by the shrine's own dynamics and by the momentum of historical change—one that would be succeeded by yet another monumental literary work by the author, the *Kaṇḍul Karāmāttu*, a prose hagiography about Shahul Hamid's life and all the miracles attributed to him, both before and after his passing.

### *Kaṇḍul Karāmāttu*

First published in 1902, *Kaṇḍul Karāmāttu* was the last major work written by Kulām Kāṭiru on the subject of Shahul Hamid's life, the miracles he performed, and the history of the Nagore dargah. Interestingly, it was also the first one in which he was officially designated as the dargah's poet laureate (*Nākūr tarkā makāvittuvān*).<sup>313</sup> Written as an easy to read work of Tamil prose, the *Kaṇḍul Karāmāttu* is stated by the author himself as being not just a more readily accessible work but also the most exhaustive account of Sufi shaikh's miraculous life hitherto published, with 131 *attiyāyams* or chapters taking up as many as 554 pages of printed text. Usefully for us, the poet wrote not one but two

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<sup>313</sup> Perhaps the most famous Tamil poet 'makāvittuvān' of that age was Mīnāṭcicuntaram Piḷḷai, who had been accorded that position by the Dharmapuram *atīnam*. While this chapter does not take up the comparison explicitly, in the *Kaṇḍul Karāmāttu* we see the use of certain terms – *makāvittuvān* and *atīnastar* – being two important instances, that index a similarity in structure between the Nagore dargah and the Tanjore region's many non-Brahmin Saivite *maṭhas* and *atīnams*. On the subject of the career of the latter institutions, see G.A. Oddie, 'The Character, Role and Significance of Non-Brahman Saivite Maths in Tanjore District in the Nineteenth Century,' in Kenneth Ballhatchet and David Taylor, eds, *Changing South Asia, Vol.1: Religion and Society* (Hong Kong: Published for the Center of South Asian Studies in the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, by Asian Research Service, 1984), 37-50, and Nambi Arooran, 'The Changing Role of Three Saiva Maths in Tanjore District from the Beginning of the Twentieth Century,' in Ballhatchet and Taylors, eds, *Changing South Asia*, 51-58.

prefatory introductions (*mukavurai* and *pīṭikai*), providing valuable information regarding the context that necessitated this work as well as the process that allowed its composition and subsequent publication. In what follows, I first briefly explore the contents of the work and then return to the author's prefaces, to understand how (differently) these have sought to frame the work.

Knowing what we do now about the *Tirukkāraṇappurāṇam* and the *Nākūrpurāṇam*, especially their narrative structure and contents, when we examine the table of contents of the *Kaṇḍul Kaṛāmāttu*, a few things stand out in sharp relief. Beginning with a genealogical account of Shahul Hamid's links with the Prophet Muhammad and Abdul Qadir Jilani and ending with a description of the *māṇiyam* grants enjoyed by the dargah, at first glance the contents of the *Kaṇḍul* appear to resemble a composite of the two older hagiographies. Like the *Nākūrpurāṇam* (but unlike the *Tirukkāraṇappurāṇam*), there are no *kāṇṭams* in this work, and each of the 131 chapters serially succeed one another and with no distinction made between miracles from Sufi's lifetime and those that came after. Instead, each of the *attiyāyams* has the appearance of presenting regular episodes of more or less equal importance from Sufi's life. The exception are four chapters -- the story of the Shahul Hamid's birth, the history of his teacher (Muhammad Ghawth of Gwalior), the birth of Yusuf (his adopted son), and his death -- which stand out because of their comparatively greater length, suggesting they were more significant moments, both in Sufi's life and in his hagiography. There is one important difference that makes the *Kaṇḍul Kaṛāmāttu* more than merely the sum of its two parts. When examining the number of chapters that make up the work, it becomes clear that whereas the two older hagiographies only amount to 87 (56 and 31,

respectively) chapters, the *Karāmattu* has as many as 131, which raises the questions of where did these additional chapters come from and what kinds of stories they contain? Rather counter-intuitively, a comparative look at the contents of these three works reveals that the growth in the number of miracle stories, and resulting expansion in the hagiographical narrative, did not take place through miracles attributed to Sufi shaikh posthumously – where there was greater scope for new additions -- but via miracles attributed to him during his lifetime. Thus, while the latter part of the text (chapters 104 to 131), exactly mirrors the organization of the *Nākūrpurāṇam*, the case is very different for the first 103 chapters of the work, which ostensibly cover the same ground as the *Tirukkāraṇappurāṇam*'s 56 *paṭalams*. There is, in a manner of speaking, a virtual doubling of the 'contents' of Sufi shaikh's life in the *Kaṇḍul Karāmāttu*. Only a close comparative reading of the *Tirukkāraṇappurāṇam* and the *Kaṇḍul Karāmāttu* can allow us to know for certain if the newly minted chapters of the latter work also contain new stories that cannot be found in the older work, or if they were simply a rearrangement of the existing stories. While that task remains a desideratum at this point, what can be said is that the significance of an empirical increase in the number of miracles attributed to Shahul Hamid notwithstanding, is that the limits of each fundamental narrative unit of the new hagiography were defined by the story of a miracle. For the *Kaṇḍul Karāmāttu* – even more so than was the case with the *Tirukkāraṇappurāṇam* – miracles constituted the most significant aspect of the story of Shahul Hamid's life. Hence, the name *Kaṇḍul Karāmāttu* or *Ganj-i Karāmāt* -- 'A Treasury of Miracles'.

This brings us back to the two prefaces to the text written by Kulām Kāṭiru that frame the *Kaṇḍul Karāmāttu*. , They begin by offering a rationale for the naming of the



work. For an easy to read Tamil prose hagiography that the author himself notes would now be accessible to all those devotees of Sufi shaikh who were not Muslim and therefore unfamiliar with the Arabic script needed to read the printed Arwi hagiographies, the decision to give the text such a decidedly Perso-Arabic name likely required explanation. And it is in the explanation for this choice that we learn that while we were correct presume that two important works that would have served as sources for the *Kaṇḍul Kaṛāmāttu* must have been the *Tirukkāraṇappurāṇam* and the *Nākūrpurāṇam* -- both of which were by then available in print – these were not the only sources Kulām Kāṭiru used. In fact, it would seem from the author's discussion of his sources, nor were they the most 'important'. And perhaps here we may find our reasons for the expansion in the number of miracles stories in the *Kaṇḍul Kaṛāmāttu*.

In the preface, Kulām Kāṭiru makes a distinction between two types of sources he relied upon in order to compose the *Kaṇḍul Kaṛāmāttu*: *pūrvam* and *apūrvam*, and while he does not explain exactly what he meant by these terms, there is a suggestion that the key difference here was the relative age of these 'sources', but as we shall see, further considerations appear to have been at play. Thus, in his discussion of *pūrvam* or older/prior texts he includes a number of works that had hitherto never been published, and are described as being either in Arabic, Persian, or 'Hindi'. He lists some of these works, for instance, Ceyku Muṇuttīn's *Kaṇḍul Kaṛāmāttu*, Ceyku Makumūtu Ārippillāhi's *Nupatul Hikāyattul Maṣhūrattu*, Ceyku Kalantar Ali Mavulavi's *Kaṇḍul Kaṛāmāttu Pañcukunūj*, Ceyku Mukammatu Najīp's *Sa'ātattulmuktavi Kaṛāmattul Kātiri*, Ceyku Pīr Mukammatu Cuttāri's *Nupatul Hakāyattu*, and Ceytumukammatu Ālim's *Manākipu*, and more. Without any other details about these work it is difficult to

ascertain who these figures were and when these works were written, however, the various honorifics and titles used in their names and those of the works – ceyku, mavulavi, pīr, ālim, Kātiri, Cuttāri – suggest that, in addition to being members of Sufi tariqas, they were teachers and scholars in their own right. Resembling, in some ways, the Arabic-knowing authors of the *mūlanūls* used to compose Islamic Tamil *kāppiyams*, one may speculate that it was their privileged social location within the Tamil Muslim literary and scholarly world that gave to their texts the stature of being *pūrvam* and being cited first among all the various sources Kulām Kāṭiṟu relied upon.<sup>314</sup> And it is a connection with these particular prior works that the name ‘Kaṇṇjul Kaṇāmāttu’ was arguably meant to underscore. It may be noted that the Tamil *kāppiyam Tirukkāraṇappurāṇam* is not included within this class of texts, and that none of the above-mentioned prior texts are mentioned by the author of that work.

Contrasted with this careful recounting of the ‘*pūrvam*’ works stands Kulām Kāṭiṟu’s desultory description of ‘*apūrvam*’ or novel/new works. From his description of these works it appears that it was this class of texts that Kulām Kāṭiṟu sought to improve upon, perhaps even supersede and replace, with his iteration of Shahul Hamid’s hagiography. In this category of ‘sources’, he includes, firstly, Arapu-Tamil or Arwi texts, only one of which, he tells us -- without providing any names -- had as yet been put into print. He also points out that, being in the Arabic script, the work was of no use to those who were not familiar with it, which included both Muslims and non-Muslims. He mentions only one printed Tamil text, the *Kāraṇa Carittiram*, a prose hagiography like

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<sup>314</sup> The absence of Ganj-I Qudrat in this list of works is striking. The work, first composed in 1817, was published in 1874. It is not clear why this is not cited by Kulām Kāṭiṟu. Was it simply a question of availability or could it have been a fallout of the social location of the poet?

the *Kanjul*, but, as Kulām Kāṭiṟu highlights, an incomplete account of Sufi shaikh's miraculous life. According to him, there existed only one work in Tamil that offered a complete account of shaikh's life and *all* his miracles, and that was the *Kulāsattul Kaṟāmāttu*, a work that, unfortunately, had hitherto never been printed and of which, therefore, there existed only a single *kara likita* (handwritten) copy. This latter work appears to have been of some importance in Kulām Kāṭiṟu's process of composition because the author refers to it once again when discussing one of the patrons of his work, who was responsible for making this rare work available to him.

This brings us to yet another aspect of the prefaces, the poet's discussion of the process by which the *Kanjul Kaṟāmāttu* came to be composed. Unlike how it had been in the case of the *Tirukkāraṇappurāṇam* and *Nākūrpurāṇam*, the people involved in commissioning and sponsoring the *Kanjul Kaṟāmāttu* were not individual private benefactors, rather they were the descendants of Shahul Hamid and, therefore, managers and direct stakeholders of the Nagore dargah. This marked an important departure from the practices of patronage that poets and patrons had been part of hitherto, wherein the role of the dargah in the composition process itself appears to have been indirect. Now, the dargah took the lead in composing hagiographies, by charging the 'in-house' poet with the task of composing such a workand, and in so doing, authorizing an account of Shahul Hamid's life that better met the needs of its everyday clientele.

Notwithstanding the changes in patronage structures and other vicissitudes that lay beyond the control of our principle actors, the *Kanjul Kaṟāmāttu* enjoyed a long and successful career in print – more so than any other hagiographical work ever composed about Shahul Hamid. Its original 1902 iteration, saw at least four more reprints, issued in

1922, 1939, 1949, and 1957. In the editorial prefaces attached to the later editions, we are informed of the urgency felt to reissue the work owing to popular demand. From the preface to the 1922 edition, we learn that copies of the first edition were sold out soon after publication, finding buyers not just in South India but also abroad, in Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia. The process of meeting that demand, straightforward as it may appear, was not one without obstacles. An act of extraordinary individual generosity on the part of ‘Nākaṭṭinam Śrīmān Hānarapil Kānpahātur Sir Akamatu Tampi Maraikkāyar, Member, Council of State’ thus enabled the printing of the 1922 edition, that had been stalled by shortages of materials and other exigencies created by the First World War.<sup>315</sup> Clearly there existed a strong demand for the work; the 1922 and 1939 editions tell us that 1000 copies of the work had been issued, which, priced at five rupees in 1922, was not an inexpensive book to buy. The *Kaṇḍul Kaṛāmāttu* would be reprinted in that form two more times before being replaced, in 1963, by a more abridged version of itself, titled *Karuṇai Kaṭal* or ‘an ocean of compassion’, written by A. Ra. Ceyyatu Hājā Mukaitīn, a resident of Nagore, but more importantly, a well-known screenwriter in Tamil cinema.<sup>316</sup> Hājā Muaktīn’s work deliberately underscores its links with *Kaṇḍul Kaṛāmāttu*, rather than claim for itself a distinct identity. This is made clear in the preface but is also visible on the title page itself, where we find, for instance, the title *Karuṇai Kaṭal* being followed immediately after by *Kaṇḍul Kaṛāmāttu* in parentheses. The order is reversed but to the same effect when it comes to indicating the author, as Kulām Kāṭiṟu’s name appears first

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<sup>315</sup> On Ahmed Thambi Marakayar’s social standing and political career, see C.J. Baker and D.A. Washbrook, *South India: Political Institutions and Political Change, 1880-1940* (Delhi: Macmillan, 1975), 54.

<sup>316</sup> He is remembered as being a close confidant of M.G. Ramachandran and also wrote about his life. In fact, the name ‘Ravīntar’ by which he is much better known in the world of Tamil cinema is believed to have been given to by M.G.R. and it is interesting to note, therefore, its inclusion -- in parentheses -- on the title page of the printed text.

as the author of the original iteration (*mūlappaṭaippu*), followed by Hājā Mukaitīn's name as the author of the new version (*putiya amaippu*).<sup>317</sup>

Thus, the *Kanjul Kaṛāmāttu*, a work that finds no mention in typical discussions of Islamic Tamil literature, came to be by far the most popular and widely cited iteration of the Shahul Hamid story. The arrival of this work and its popularity also changed the field of literary production that had hitherto existed on the theme of venerating Shahul Hamid. With the arrival of the *Kanjul Kaṛāmāttu* a new era of prose-based hagiographies was inaugurated. Although it was not the first prose hagiography, it certainly was the most authoritative, and that aspect of the work underscored, I would argue, the its style of presentation, namely prose. Unlike what we saw in the late nineteenth century, where verse was the dominant mode of writing hagiographies and praise poetry, over the course of the twentieth century hagiographical accounts of the life of Shahul Hamid came to be written almost exclusively in prose.<sup>318</sup> The notable exception to this were the various 'minor' song genres in which Tamil verse continued to be used, which form the subject of the next chapter. That practice, too, however, gradually petered out by the middle of the twentieth century, at least in so far as the active composition and publication of songs is concerned.

## Conclusion

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<sup>317</sup> The first edition of this work, only 114-pages long, had a print run of 5000 copies. Subsequent editions, issued in 1969, 1972, 1974 and 1977, had a print run of 3000 copies, indicating the steady and continuing popularity of the work. In 2012, the year I first visited Nagore, the 23rd edition of this work had been published and was available for purchase in one of the 'souvenir' shops located inside the dargah's precinct.

<sup>318</sup> We know only of one or two exceptions, including a *piḷḷaittamiḷ* composed by Āripu Nāvalar, son of Kulām Kāṭiṟu Nāvalar.

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, scholars of Islam in modern South Asia have hitherto identified principally two modes in which Muslims of the region related to and engaged with the modern technology of print. In the old centers of Muslim power in North India such as Lucknow, print was first received with much suspicion by the lettered class of the *ulama*, whose religious authority, it has been argued, was challenged by the easy access to knowledge enabled by the mass reproduction of printed texts. Later, the same group took the lead in adopting this technology and used it as part of a revivalist strategy deemed necessary to shore up the fortunes of the Muslim community now living in a land where political authority had passed out of their hands. The defense against the loss of power was understood to lie in becoming better Muslims, which in turn required access to better knowledge, and to which end print could be deployed. Practices of saint veneration and shrine visitation were sharply critiqued for being not just alien but antithetical to ‘proper’ Islam. A condemnation of Sufism – especially certain aspects of it -- was a key component of this reformist discourse, which print helped to popularize.

In marked contrast with this world of reformist ‘Protestant’ Islam, stands the eclectic and competitive religious marketplace of late colonial Bombay, the most industrialized and ‘modern’ city of the erstwhile Islamic world. Instead of the familiar narrative of ‘global, deracinated, rational, individualist, disenchanted and ‘Protestant’’ Muslim modernity that is often found in scholarly writing, it has been argued that what we find, if we look beyond the colonial archive, is a Bombay that ‘produced and exported a bewildering supply of Muslim cults and services, whose chief attractions were the promise of miracles, intercession, and patronage’. The reason for the success of these forms of Islam, it is argued, was their popularity among the city’s burgeoning population

of dock workers and industrial laborers, for instance, whose need for moral, emotional, and psychological succor they met, in what was an unpredictable and precarious age of massive social and economic transformation. In this context, Muslim print culture often took the form of cheaply printed hagiographies and advertisements for miraculous cures, allowing the suppliers of these cures to find and meet the needs of their subaltern clientele.

In contrast with the trends observed in the above two scenarios, an examination of Islamic printed materials in Tamil from the nineteenth century shows that not only were hagiographical and venerative works about Sufi saints widely published, the lead in this regard was taken by none other than the region's elite Muslim scholars and poets. Shahul Hamid, as we saw, was the subject of the second earliest printed work composed and published by a Tamil Muslim, preceded only by the region's most celebrated Islamic Tamil literary composition, the *Cīrāppurāṇam*. As the popularity of print grew, Tamil Muslims came to be avid participants in the process -- even pioneers in the case of Southeast Asia and Ceylon -- yet have remained hidden from discussions of nineteenth-century Tamil literary and print culture. While a fuller profile of that world remains to be sketched out and is beyond the scope of this chapter, what I wish to emphasize is that composing new works about Shahul Hamid and Nagore as well as publishing older works on the same themes by well-known poets of the community was given priority by the key figures involved in the world of Tamil Muslim print and publishing. While an exhaustive look at the print output of Tamil Muslims to see what genres were used and to what extent remains a desideratum at present, our survey shows that while minor *pirapantam* formats continued to be favored for the purpose of writing new works throughout the

century, prose too had made any early appearance, albeit in the form of commentary. Remarkably, it was a figure associated with the prosaic world of newspapers who would compose the period's only Islamic tamil *kāppiyam*, the *Nākūrpurāṇam*, about miracles attributed to Shahul Hamid after his passing. The same figure, Kulām Kāṭiṟu Nāvalar, an important figure of the Tamil literary world and member of the newly constituted Madurai Tamil Sangam, would also go on to compose an exhaustive prose hagiography of shaikh, in his official capacity as the dargah's resident poet.

Reformist discourses did exist, but made their presence felt in this region much later than in the north,<sup>319</sup> with figures like P. Daud Shah emerging on the public stage only in the post-First World War period.<sup>320</sup> And it was in that very period, as we shall see in the next chapter, that a large number of hagiographical and venerative compositions in song format were being composed and published by Tamil Muslims in South India. It is only in the 1963 first edition of *Karuṇai Kaṭal*, the abridged account of Shahul Hamid's life and miraculous deeds, that we find a counter critique being offered of the condemnation of saint veneration, identified as a product of Wahabism, by none other than Āripu Nāvalar himself. Clearly then the popularity of hagiographic literary composition and publishing, pertaining not only to Nagore and Shahul Hamid but involving other local and translocal Islamic figures, was neither taboo nor irrelevant for

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<sup>319</sup> This period of Tamil Muslim political and social reformist activity, in the context of the nationalist and Dravidian movements, has received more attention from scholars. See, J.B.P. More, *The Political Evolution of Muslims in Tamilnadu and Madras, 1930-1947* (London: Sangam Books, 1997); S.M. Abdul Khader Fakhri, *Dravidian Sahibs and Brahmin Maulanas: The Politics of the Muslims of Tamil Nadu, 1930-1967* (Delhi: Manohar, 2008). See also Kenneth McPherson, 'The Social Background and Politics of the Muslims of Tamil Nad, 1901-1937,' *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 6.4 (1969): 381-402, an old but still useful article that in many ways provides the framework for the above-mentioned books.

<sup>320</sup> In his discussion of Tamil print culture in late nineteenth century Singapore, Torsten Tschacher, too, notes the absence of a reformist discourse among Tamil Muslims in print. See Tschacher, 'Witnessing Fun', 211.



the Tamil Muslim world of the nineteenth century, especially for the literary and scholarly community.

## CHAPTER 5

### Songs for Shahul Hamid: South Indian Music in an Islamic Mode

*caraṇam taruvīr ippōtē vaḷḷal // give me shelter now, oh lord*  
*ceyku ṣākul hamītē // Shaikh Shahul Hamid*  
*puviyōrkaḷ pukaḷntiṭu vōrē nala // whom the people of the world praise, O beneficent*  
*punya cirōmaṇi mērē // sacred jewel of mine,*  
*kavipāṭuvōruk karuḷvīrē miku // showering grace on poets and singers, the great*  
*kāraṇa carkuru nīrē // divine teacher you are*

The above verses, written in praise of ‘ceyku’ or Shaikh Shahul Hamid, were published in a text in the year 1903. They may appear to be much like some of the other poetic forms discussed in chapters two and three, on the *Tirukkāraṇappurāṇam* and the *Nākūrppurāṇam*, but in fact belong to a *patam*, an important ‘classical’ song genre popularity associated today with the field of Karnatak music.<sup>321</sup> While today neither of these fields appear to have much to do with Tamil Muslims,<sup>322</sup> the *patam* cited above was

<sup>321</sup> The term used to designate the theory and practice of art music, widely believed to be South India’s ‘classical’ music. Alternate spellings are sometimes used, including the older and still more popular ‘Carnatic’, as well as Karnatik.

<sup>322</sup> Given the general absence of Muslims from discussions of Karnatak music, it is important to at least mention briefly, the exceptions that break the rule. One such figure was Sheik Chinna Moulana (1924-1999), a celebrated exponent of the *nāgasvaram*. Chinna Moulana came into the spotlight in the 1960s, he was descended from a family of musicians that had a 300-year-long associations with the *nāgasvaram*, a wind instrument that is especially associated with ritual contexts in South India. Although Chinna Moulana came to settle in Tamil Nadu and play in the Tanjore style, his hereditary ties were with the region around Guntur, in Andhra Pradesh, where there has been a long-standing tradition of Muslims playing the *nāgasvaram*. Interestingly, the *nāgasvaram* is played in the inner courtyard of the Nagore dargah on the inaugural evening of the kantūri (the shrine’s annual festival, commemorates the day of Sufi’s passing away), mirroring their deployment in other cultural contexts - including weddings - to mark the auspicious nature of the event.

On Sheik Chinna Moulana and his successors, see <http://www.thehindu.com/features/metroplus/confluence-of-ragas/article5901200.ece> and <http://www.thehindu.com/features/friday-review/music/Breathing-music/article16206234.ece> (accessed 13 February 2018). On the place of the *nāgasvaram* in temple musical traditions, see Yoshitaka Terada, ‘Temple Music Traditions in Hindu South India: *Periya Mēḷam* and Its Performance Practice’, *Asian Music* 39.2 (2008): 108-151.

in fact the work of a Tamil Muslim poet, himself called Şākul Hamītu. At first sight, the song may appear to be unique, or indeed odd, because Sufi saints hardly figure as subjects in the kind of songs that form part of the typical repertoire of Karnatak music performance. However, this *patam* too is not an isolated instance; it appears in an anthology of songs, in a variety of Tamil genres, all of them composed by Tamil Muslim poets. Indeed, the work itself is titled, rather significantly, *Caṅkīta Cintāmaṇi* — ‘precious jewel of music’.<sup>323</sup>

At the time of doing fieldwork, as I hunted for primary sources that I hoped would pertain to the material histories of the Nagore dargah, I found myself repeatedly running into texts like the *Cintāmaṇi*, printed works that I have chosen to call here ‘Islamic Tamil songbooks’. Physical decay and social neglect have indeed caused these texts to be forgotten, if not in fact altogether lost. But, the instances that remain, of which some I have been able to gather and that I analyze through this chapter, bear traces of having been part both popular and significant Tamil Muslim cultural practice, not too long ago. An examination of these printed Islamic Tamil songbooks and their contents strongly suggests that Tamil Muslims were well familiar with both the theory and practice of Karnatak music, deploying it extensively as part of their literary and religious practice. These songbooks and the songs they contain, then, not only constitute an important aspect of the venerative tradition surrounding Shahul Hamid, they help us also to reconstruct the participation of Tamil Muslims in the world of Karnatak music. And in so doing, prompt us rethink the social boundaries that have hitherto been assumed for the history of Karnatak music.

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<sup>323</sup> See figure 3, title page of the *Caṅkīta Cintāmaṇi*.

### **Sources for the Study Islamic Tamil Music**

One reason why we know so little about the history of Muslim participation in the practice of Karnatak music, is due to the difficulty of finding and locating the relevant ‘archive’. Now out of print, very little initiative has been taken to find and preserve these songbooks. The Annual World Islamic Tamil Literary Conference, under whose auspices the older works have been republished, thus far, has not taken up the task of reprinting Islamic Tamil songbooks. Even the Roja Muthiah Research Library (RMRL), in Chennai, which specializes in the acquisition and/or digitization of Tamil early print culture, offers only a few examples of similar printed works by Tamil Muslims.<sup>324</sup> Odd instances of early Tamil printed texts are preserved in the library of the French Institute of Pondicherry as well as the National Library of Singapore. In Tamil Nadu, the one institution that has been steadily collecting Islamic Tamil printed materials is the Anjuman Nusrathul Islam Public Library, a library established in Kottakkuppam, a small Muslim town near Pondicherry. Many Islamic Tamil works that are hard to find even in the bigger libraries of Tamil Nadu, can be located in this library. However, having been established in 1929, its collection of works from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is comparatively small and patchy, and their physical condition is appallingly poor.<sup>325</sup> The other bibliographic resource, unsurprisingly, is the British Library in

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<sup>324</sup> The bulk of RMRL’s ‘Islamic’ print archive dates to the latter part of the first half of the twentieth century, and the thematic focus, interestingly, is on prose works of an explicitly theological or political bent, often polemical and bearing Arabic titles.

<sup>325</sup> With inadequate resources and expertise, the Anjuman’s valuable collection suffers due to the ad hoc nature of its collection and arrangement, the lack of a catalogue, as well as a steady deterioration and loss of materials.

London, which has been expanding access to its collections of older Tamil Islamic print materials. This is where I found the largest number of Islamic Tamil songbooks.

Most of the songbooks that I was able to locate during the course of my research, date from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. However, it is likely that these works had a longer past. In John Murdoch's *Classified Catalogue of Tamil Printed Books*, published in 1865, we find recorded the existence of one such Islamic Tamil songbook, title *Cīrā Kīrttanam*.<sup>326</sup> The *Catalogue* provides the author's name, the physical extent and layout of the book (520 pages, divided into three books), and describes it - simply and briefly - as a 'history of Muhammad, interspersed with numerous miracles. Wolves and tigers speak; a bunch of dates is miraculously obtained; the moon is called down to the earth, &c.'<sup>327</sup> The fact that the work was made up of songs does not appear to have caught Murdoch's attention. For a more details about this work we must turn to Ma. Mu. Uvais, for the *Cīrā Kīrttanam* forms the heart of the scholar's discussion of Islamic Tamil literary compositions in song genres.<sup>328</sup> The prominence of this work, according to Uvais, stems from the fact that it was based on the *Cīrāppurāṇam*, the seventeenth-century *kāppiyam* attributed to Umaru Pulavar, and widely thought to constitute the cynosure of Islamic Tamil literature.<sup>329</sup> Originally composed in 1812, it is perhaps for this reason that the *Cīrā Kīrttanam* found its way to

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<sup>326</sup> John Murdoch, *Classified Catalogue of Tamil Printed Books, with Introductory Notices* (Madras: The Christian Vernacular Education Society, 1865), 154.

<sup>327</sup> Murdoch, *Classified Catalogue of Tamil Printed Books*.

<sup>328</sup> Ma. Mu. Uvais, *Islāmiya Tamil Ilakkiya Varalāru, Vol. 3* (Maturai: Maturai Kāmarācar Palkalai Kaḷakam, 1994), 453-467.

<sup>329</sup> Kamil Zvelebil, *Tamil Literature* (Otto Harrassowitz: Weisbaden, 1974), 163; Vasudha Narayanan, 'Religious Vocabulary and Regional Identity: A Study of the Tamil Cirappuranam,' in David Gilmartin and Bruce B. Lawrence (eds), *Beyond Turk and Hindu: Rethinking Religious Identities in Islamicate South Asia* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000), 74-97; M.M. Uvais, *Muslim Epics in Tamil Literature* (Madras: Semmal Publications, 1976).

print not once but twice, first in 1863 - when it found its way into the Murdoch Catalogue - and then in 1896, the edition that Uvais uses for his discussion.<sup>330</sup> The added importance of the *Cīrā Kīrttanam* for us lies in the fact that it suggests that the tradition of composing *kīrttanams* has a history that preceded the advent and popularization of print in South India<sup>331</sup> and that ought to be kept in mind when talking about the printed songbooks as well.

In what follows, then, I analyze an assortment of songbooks, printed texts containing songs written in praise of Shahul Hamid. Starting with their physical form and paratextual traces, I go on to discuss their song content from a thematic point of view. I then turn to the question of musical aspect of these song, concluding my consideration of the songbooks with a discussion of the *patam* form and the unique manner in which it came to be deployed by Tamil Muslims. These discussions, focused primarily on analyzing the songbooks, form the body of the present chapter. Thereafter, I come to concluding section of the chapter, an attempt at trying to locate the world of Islamic Tamil music, at the intersection of - heuristically speaking - Islam and Karnatak music, two worlds typically understood to be unconnected to each other.

### **Islamic Tamil Songbooks as Printed Texts**

Although the focus of this chapter is on Islamic Tamil songs and music, our access to these subjects is mediated by the form of the printed text. Extant scholarship on the

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<sup>330</sup> Uvais, *Islāmiya Tamil Ilakkiya Varalāru*, 454.

<sup>331</sup> On the history of print in South India, see A.R. Venkatachalapathy, *The Province of the Book: Scholars, Scribes, and Scribblers in Colonial Tamilnadu* (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2012). An earlier work, that pays greater attention to the contribution of missionaries, but also contains a brief chapter on 'Printing of Literature on Karnataka Music', is B.S. Kesavan, *History of Printing and Publishing in India: A Story of Cultural Re-awakening, Vol. 1: South Indian Origins of Printing* (New Delhi: National Book Trust, 1984), 113-120.

history of Tamil print culture has been useful in telling us about the key players involved, the impact of print technology on traditional literary practice, as well as print's entanglements with political and social movements and ideologies. Evidence of the early involvement of Tamil Muslims has been proven but continues to not be part of the 'mainstream' discourse on the subject. A.R. Venkatachalapathy, whose recent work on the subject of the Tamil printed book makes only a passing reference to the popularity of print among Muslims,<sup>332</sup> does, however, quite rightly draw attention to the process of the production of these texts, especially the collaboration it entailed between authors, publishers, printers, and others.<sup>333</sup> In this section, I too focus on these aspects of the songbooks, in attempt to reconstruct and understand of the social contours of the world of Islamic Tamil musical practice. I also use this discussion introduce the specific texts and familiarize the reader with their style and content, highlighting the fact of the variety musical genres that they index.

Given that systematic statistical information on the publication, circulation, and consumption of Islamic Tamil printed texts is at present not available to us for the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, to be able to arrive at an estimation of the extent to which Islamic Tamil music - text and practice - was deemed significant is not easy. The very existence of songbooks as a type of Islamic Tamil printed text, it could be argued, is indicative of the fact musical compositions occupied a place of some importance in the cultural life of Tamil Muslims. An examination of the title pages of these texts, and other paratextual materials contained in the songbooks elaborate title pages these works contained, provides us with a wealth of information regarding the

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<sup>332</sup> Venkatachalapathy, *The Province of the Book*, 148.

<sup>333</sup> Venkatachalapathy, *The Province of the Book*, 148.

people and groups involved in the composition of Islamic Tamil musical forms. And it allows us to contend that musical compositions were both popular and highly regarded in the wider Tamil Muslim community, for even a cursory examination of these elements of the text tells us that Tamil Muslim poets not only used a wide variety of genres for their compositions, they also composed songs for *all* the key figures of the Islamic pantheon — not just for a Sufi shaykh like Shahul Hamid. Also, several different poets — many of them of high repute — participated in this literary field, is proof of the fact that song and music were neither unorthodox nor uncommon to Tamil Islamic society.

From the title page of the *Caṅkīta Cintāmaṇi* (1903)<sup>334</sup> - the text containing the *patam* quoted at the start of this chapter — is replete with interesting information regarding the work, its poets, the publisher, and more. We learn thus, the work contains ‘munājāttus and patams’ composed by composed by Ṣākul Hamītu Pulavar, ‘son of Miṛāncākipu Pulavar of Mēḷappālaiyam, near Tirunelvēli,’ and Acanali Pulavar, ‘grandson of Kanta Pulavar of Cīruṭaiyārpuram’, alongwith other *patams* sung by earlier generations (‘munnōrkaḷ pāṭiya pataṅkaḷ’). Both men were poets of repute, with several other works to their name, giving the *Cintāmaṇi* a high social standing of its own. This is also attested to by the fact that the work had been published in Chennai, by Iṭṭā Pārtacārati Nāyūṭu’s Śrīpatmanāpa Vilāca accukūṭam or press, which in enjoyed the reputation of being an important press for publication of Islamic Tamil literature. This becomes clear from the long list of other Islamic Tamil literary works that are advertized on one of the preliminary pages, including such exalted works as the *Cīrāppurāṇam*.<sup>335</sup> It

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<sup>334</sup> Figure 5.3a.

<sup>335</sup> Figure 5.3b.



is important to note here that while the title page of the text does carry the crescent moon and star, as well as the Arabic phrase ‘bismillāh’ (in the name of Allah) transcribed in Tamil and it is clear from the names of the poets what their religious affiliations are, the title of the work itself is remarkably generic, and does not index any explicit connection with Islam. Indeed, in addition to its literal meaning, the title of the work recalls other works with similar titles, including one with the exact same name, published in very different sectarian context, namely the Sanskrit work titled *Sangīta Chintamani*, composed by Vēmabhūpāla, a Komati king of Andhra — or his court poet, Vāmana Bhatta — in the late fourteenth or fifteenth century.<sup>336</sup>

Interestingly, the oldest songbook to which I have thus far gained access, was printed not in South India, but in Singapore — an important center of Tamil Islamic print, including newspapers.<sup>337</sup> Titled *Kīrttanattiraṭṭu*, as the name indicates, this text is a compilation of *kīrttana* songs composed by Nā. Mu. Mukammatu Aptul Kāṭiru Pulavar, published with his permission by Ceyku Mukammatu Rāvuttar, son of Camcu Rāvuttar of Kūttānallūr, at the Jawi Peranakan Press in 1896.<sup>338</sup> Interestingly, the title page of this work informs us that its publication took place at the request (*kēṭṭukkoṇṭavarkaḷ*) of 25 men (all of them Muslim) whose names are listed, as well as others whose names had

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<sup>336</sup> V. Raghavan, ‘Later Sangita Literature’, *Sangeet Natak Akademi Bulletin* 17 (July 1960), 9.

<sup>337</sup> On Tamil publishing in Southeast Asia, Torsten Tschacher, ‘Circulating Islam: Understanding Convergence and Divergence in the Islamic Traditions of Ma’bar and Nusantara’, in Michael Feener and Terenjit Sevea (eds), *Islamic Connections: Muslim Societies in South and Southeast Asia* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2009), 48-67.

<sup>338</sup> It is likely that this is the same press that published the first and longest-running Malay-language newspaper of the region, also named Jawi Peranakan. Cf. William Roff, *Bibliography of Malay and Arabic Periodicals published in the Straits Settlements and Peninsular Malay States, 1876-1941* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), 29. On the history of Jawi Peranakan community Helen Fujimoto, *The South Indian Muslim Community and the Evolution of the Jawi Peranakan in Penang up to 1948* (Tokyo: Research Institute for Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa, 1988).

been lost due to oversight.<sup>339</sup> These appear to have been the ‘subscriber’s for this particular work, a system of financing print publication that we progressively declines.<sup>340</sup> The work contains a number of compositions -- most of them *patams* -- and for each song the author has carefully prescribed both a *rāga* and a *tāla*, the melodic and rhythmic structure according to which these songs were intended to be sung. Like the *Cankīta Cintāmaṇi*, the songs contained in the *Kīrttanattiraṭṭu* are devoted to a whole host of Islamic figures. Both works retain, as well, the hierarchy of figures that we see in other traditional Islamic Tamil poetic works as well, where by the songs contained in the text, apart from being organized by poet, are arranged such that songs for Prophet Muhammad, are followed by songs for Abdul Qadir Jilani, who is in turn succeeded by Shahul Hamid. In the case of the *Cintāmaṇi*, the poets’ songs for the other prophets, the four caliphs and the *imāms* are organized in such a manner as to precede Abdul Qadir. On the other hand, all other Sufi saints associated with the Tamil region, follow Shahul Hamid, and in no particular fixed order.

These two works are instances of anthologies comprising a large number of songs, and there are more examples of such substantial works, addressed, for instance, to the veneration of the prophet, or the explication of esoteric ideas of Islamic mysticism.<sup>341</sup> Entailing substantial outlays of expenditure and the use, therefore, of printers and publishers located in major centers of publishing — forms, however, only one end of the spectrum of printed Islamic Tamil songbooks. Marking an interesting contrast to these

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<sup>339</sup> Figure 5.1a and 5.1b.

<sup>340</sup> On the ‘subscription’ system of print publishing, see Venkatachalapathy, *The Province of the Book*, 30-34.

<sup>341</sup> The *Kīrtana Majītu* (1906-07) is an example of the former type, and the *Meyñāna Irattinalaṅkāra Kīrttanam* (1927; see Figure 5.10) of the latter.

works are the meagre pamphlet-like publications that resemble the world of print ‘ephemera’. Printed at presses in the smaller towns of Madras Presidency, from cover to cover, each of these texts extends to a maximum of eight pages, or four folios in octavo, giving them a meagre and therefore fragile form. The physical form thus decidedly bestowed on them the characteristic traits of printed ephemera, especially easy disposal and difficulty in preservation. The texts also have the appearance of being ‘occasional’ publications, appearing each year around the time of a festival, for instance, the Nagore kantūri. This comes through in their physical form as well as their content — the focus of being the veneration of one particular figures. In the case of the six such texts that I was able to locate, given the focus of my research, the object of veneration is solely Shahul Hamid. The texts I am referring to are thus named: *Nākūr Kātar Avuliyā pēril Patamum Cantakūṭṭin Cīrappum* (Trichy, 1910),<sup>342</sup> *Nākūr Cākul Hamītu Āṇṭavarkaḷ Kāraṇa Alankāra Temmāṅku* (Nagapattinam, 1910), *Nākūr Hajarattu Śāhul Hamītu Āṇṭavarkaḷ tiruppeyarāl Pukaḷāṇantak Kīrttanam* (Nagore, 1916),<sup>343</sup> *Nākūr Kātirolī Āṇṭavarkaḷ Stōttira Jāvaḷi* (Nagapattinam, 1917), *Nākūr Kātir Oli Kaṇṇacavāy Kaṇṇapakṣ Pāttuṣā Śāhul Hamītu Āṇṭavar avarkaḷ pēril Kāraṇa Alankārap Pataṅkaḷ* (Nagapattinam, 1923),<sup>344</sup> and, the very interestingly titled *Śrīraṅkam Peṇṇum Tiruccikkōṭṭai Māpiḷḷaiyum Cērntu Nākūr Tiruviḷā Pārkkappōṇa ‘Valīnaṭai Cīṅkāram’* (1924, Trichy).<sup>345</sup> It is important to keep in mind here, though, that contrary to our expectations, it is precisely the occasional and ephemeral character of the texts — made available to the hundred and thousands of people gathered during festival periods at a negligible price — also

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<sup>342</sup> Figure 5.4.

<sup>343</sup> Figure 5.6.

<sup>344</sup> Figure 5.8.

<sup>345</sup> Figure 5.9.

provided for a much wider circulation (compared to the anthologies mentioned above) and consumption, as perhaps more than just pilgrimage memorabilia or keepsakes.<sup>346</sup>

The title pages of these texts too, not unlike the more substantial works, present the reader with valuable information regarding the people involved in their production. Notwithstanding their more modest size, these works also required the collaborative participation of poets, editor/examiner, publisher/sponsor, printers, the particular press, and praise poets. All the more noteworthy is the participation of non-Muslim in the composition process. Indeed, based on the research that I did it appears that it is only in the praise and veneration of this particular Sufi that we find the literary participation of Tamil Hindu poets. The *Kāraṇa Alaṅkāra Temmāṅku* (1910)<sup>347</sup> mentioned above was composed by ‘Aṇantanārāyaṇacāmi Upāttiyāyar, son of A. Kuruṣṇacāmi Upāttiyāyar of Nākaḷiyampati’, and ‘examined by U. Kāṭarmeytīn Pulavar of Tīrumalairājanpaṭṭaṇam.’ Similarly, the *Stōttira Jāvaḷi* (1917) is attributed to ‘Nākalīṅkam Piḷḷai, disciple of Pettaperumāḷ Tācar of Nākūr.’<sup>348</sup> While it is not entirely clear from the poet’s name whether the composer of the *Valīṇaṭai Cīṅkāram* (1924) — ‘S. Cāpji Cāyappu, son of Perukamani Nāvalar Nannucāyappu’ of Trichy — was Hindu or Muslim, the fact of the presence of the Tamil character ‘உ’ at the head of the title page, which signals an affiliation with Saivism, as well as a woodcut of a man playing a bugle, dressed in a medieval style — a decidedly figural form that we typically do not come across in printed Islamic Tamil works. On the other hand, in the *temmāṅku* and *jāvaḷi*, the title pages

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<sup>346</sup> A useful essay on the various types, as well as significance of printed ephemera, albeit discussed in the context of England, is Michael Twyman, ‘The long-term significance of printed ephemera’, *RBM: A Journal of Rare Books, Manuscripts, and Cultural Heritage* 9.1 (2008): 19-57.

<sup>347</sup> Figure 5.5.

<sup>348</sup> Figure 5.7.

contain the iconic moon and star emblem of Islam, followed by the phrase ‘Pismillāhi’, despite the authors of these two works as well as their publishers, being non-Muslim. While the *temmāṅku* was printed at a press called ‘Eṭvart’, or Edward, and the *jāvaḷi* at the Scottish Branch Press (‘*Skāṭṭiṣ Pirāṇcu Piras*’). This brings us to another noteworthy aspect — all the pamphlet-like texts I have thus far encountered were printed outside Cennai, at presses that were not Muslim-owned. While some of the presses had missionary links, others were owned by Hindu publishers, such as the ‘Tirucci Kaṇapati Accēntiracālai’, and ‘Tirucci Lekṣmi Vilāca Piras Āpis’. The oldest surviving Muslim-owned printing press in Tamil Nadu today that is engaged in the publication of Islamic texts is Haji M.A. Shahul Hameed & Sons, located in Triplicane, Chennai. It is by this press, and Iṭṭa Ramacāmi Naidu’s *Sripaṭmanāpa Vilāca Accukkūṭam* that many of the more substantial Islamic Tamil literary works in this period were published.

### Genres and Themes

Coming to the question of the types of the songs that the songbooks contain, in both printed formats, we can find not only of the more ‘classical’ types of songs, namely the *patam*, *kīrttanais*, and *jāvaḷis*, but also forms like the *kummi*, *tālāṭṭu*, *cintu*, and *temmāṅku*, which are typically understood to be ‘popular’ or ‘folk’ genres. The latter type of song compositions is rarely discussed by scholars of Karnatak music, as it is often understood to be part of ‘folk’ or ‘popular’ culture; heuristic categories morphing into social ones. What we find in our printed texts, is neither the deployment of such separate categories nor indeed any unwillingness on the part of elite poets practicing in the composition and publication of works in these ‘lesser’ genres. Instead, what we find in these printed texts is incredible ease on the part of the poets to compose songs in multiple

modes, and the absence of any explicit characterization of a genre as ‘classical’, ‘popular’, or ‘folk. Thus, the *Caṅkīta Cintāmaṇi*, for instance, contains not only ‘classical’ *patams* but also the Arabic-influenced *munājāts*, and a variety of other genres simply referred to as *paṭalkaḷ*.’ The question that now arises is what do these songs say? What do they do? To answer this question, in this section I consider the song genres and venerative themes deployed in Tamil songs composed in praise of Shahul Hamid, and the products of these interactions. We will see, from the set of examples considered below, that while certain songs have a more straightforwardly hagiographical thrust, others bear a more didactic load. The theme of the kantūri festival appears to have been especially popular, attesting to its importance to the larger culture of veneration surrounding Shahul Hamid.

The first song we shall consider for its thematic content is a *tālāṭṭu* composed in honor of Shahul Hamid, titled ‘*Mirān Tālāṭṭu*’. Uvais has noted the popularity of the *tālāṭṭu* in Tamil Muslim society as a song type that is popularly sung by the women of the house when trying to rock a baby to sleep. This popular song form, based on its significance not just in the everyday but also at the time of important life cycle rituals, thus came to be held in high regard and acquired the status of a ‘pirapantam’, a minor literary form. It was thus no longer restricted to the inner domain of the household and womenfolk. and became a textual form that in that prominent poets would be invested in composing. One such set of *tālāṭṭu* songs were composed by poet Kālai Hasan Alippulavar of Mēlappālaiyam, and given the title *Pañcarattina Tālāṭṭu*,<sup>349</sup> it was published by Ṣāhul Hamītu Acciyantiracālai of Triplicane in the year 1903, with material

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<sup>349</sup> Figure 5.2.

support from Mo A. Şāhul Hamītu, the proprietor of the press. The ‘Mīrān Tālāṭṭu’ is one of the five tālāṭṭus that Kālai Hasan composed for the Pañcarattina. The order in which these songs appear is in itself interesting to note and therefore justifies being mentioned here. The songs are ordered in the following manner: 1) ‘Nānattālāṭṭu’, on the subject of the body; 2) ‘Sukānaṭa Tālāṭṭum’, in the name of Pāttima Nācciyār (Lady Fatima, the Prophet’s daughter); 3) ‘Maṇimaṇṭira Tālāṭṭum’, on Muhiyuddin Abdul Qadir Jilani; 4) Mīrān Tālāṭṭu, on Shahul Hamid of Nagore; 5) ‘Pālakar Tālāṭṭu’, deemed ‘praiseworthy for children’ (‘pālakarkaḷukku vāḷttukkūṭiya’). Thus, bookended by two songs on the more generic theme of raising children, the Pancarattina contains three songs on the three key figures of Islam venerated in the region, Shahul Hamid, Abdul Qadir Jilani, and Muhammad, except in this instant the Prophet’s daughter stands in for him. Fatima, in turn, is not just a female archetype, but also the person through whom Shahul Hamid and Abdul Qadir Jilani are deemed to descendants of the prophet. The importance of Fatima, and of women, by extension, to the production and reproduction of the Islamic community, gives the *tālāṭṭus* an significant didactic and ethical thrust. By looking at the tālāṭṭus in this manner, we are able to put song practices that are conventionally seen to be confined to the private domain of the women’s realm inside the household, into dialogue with wider discursive practices of the community, especially those that are typically identified as operating in the ‘public’ sphere. Taken together, these *tālāṭṭus* present us with an interesting instance where social hierarchies, considered from both a sectarian and gender point of view, are being maintained while simultaneously being re-calibrated and re-articulated in keeping with the demands of the genre itself.

A second example I wish to discuss here is that of the *temmāṅku*. Uvais does not discuss the *temmāṅku* at all in his history of Islamic Tamil literature when he discusses such other musical forms as the *kummi*, *ecal*, or *tālāṭṭu*. This suggests that it may not have been as widely used as some of the other ‘minor’ literary genres that Tamil Muslim poets deployed. And, in fact, the *temmāṅku*, in question - *Nākūr Ṣākul Hamītu Āṇṭavarkaḷ Kāraṇa Alaṅkāra Temmāṅku* - was composed by a Hindu poet. Kamil Zvelebil has defined the *temmāṅku* as ‘a kind of ditty particular to the rustics of Southern India’, following the definition provided in the Tamil Lexicon. In Johann Fabricius’ dictionary, the term is glossed as ‘the tune of a popular ballad.’ The common understanding of this song form, then, appears to be that its social context of both origin and subsequent use is the everyday life of the rural world of the countryside. The authorship of this particular *temmāṅku*, however, suggests a rather different social context, for, as noted earlier, the author of this work was a Tamil Hindu Brahmin poet, by the name Āṇanta Nārayaṇacāmi Upāttiyāyar. Indeed, this particular *temmāṅku* is one of only a couple of works that I have come across hitherto that are dedicated to the praise and veneration of a Muslim figure and have been authored by a Hindu poet. In fact, it is only in the instance of praise and venerative poetry and songs written for Shahul Hamid, that we see the participation of non-muslim Tamil poets. What is more, the poet was a Brahmin, as is indicated by the title ‘Upāttiyāyar’, and further emphasized by the inclusion of his father’s name to establish his social status, and his work had been examined for errors by a Muslim poet of Tirumalairāyapaṭṭinam, by the name U. Kāarmeytīn Pulavar. The place of this work, on these grounds at least, does not betray rustic social and cultural location. Nor indeed does the fact that the text was published in



Nāgapattinam, at a printing press called ‘Eṭvart’ (Edward), suggesting links with an Anglophone print world as well.

The content of the song is reminiscent of the *tālāṭṭu*, in that speaker is meant to be a woman, but the person being addressed in this case is not a baby, but a young girl. A daughter, or perhaps a grand daughter, is being instructed and cajoled into accompanying the older woman to witness Nagore dargah’s kantūri festival and its flag procession. While that is the overall frame given to the song, its lyrical content tends in a slightly different direction. Here, we find the poet presenting, in a language that is easy to follow, the life and works of Shahul Hamid. The song thus has the quality of the hagio-biographical works that we have already seen in the previous chapters. He thus begins:

- kaṇṇē yennōṭu naṭantuvāṭi nākūr*  
 dearest, come walk with me, Nakur’s  
*kantūri koṭiyūr-kōlam pārkkaṭ[ā]ṭi avarkaḷ*  
 kantūri’s flag procession around town to see, his  
*kāraṇattai colluvēn nīkēḷaṭi*  
 miracles, of them I shall tell you, listen!
- [1] *tiruniṟai campattum ciṟanta muppōkamum*  
 replete with wealth, gold, and three great yearly harvests  
*maruviya naṇṇakara māṇikkappūrāraṭi (kaṇ)*  
 sits the beautiful city of Māṇikkapūr
- [2] *aṟapī nal kōttirar kuṟasi kula nātar*  
 of good Arab descent, a lord of the Qureshi clan  
*hajankuttūs pāttimā yavarkaḷ tava pālar (kaṇ)*  
 Hasan Quddūs and Fatima, their special son

The song moves from presenting all the well-known details of shaikh’s life to the present, including within it a description of the physical space of the dargah itself as well as the kinds of boons and remedies that people obtain by visiting the shrine.

- [60] *añcu munārāvaṭi aṇi nakarāmēṭaiyum*  
 five minarets, adorned with a nakarā platform too  
*koñca alaṅkāravācal kuṟi maṇimēṭaiyum (kaṇ)*  
 the sweet alaṅkāra vācal and the clock that tells time
- [61] *kottuvā toḷu mēṭaiyum kuṇa navāpu mēṭaiyum*

- the khutba prayer mosque, the excellent Nawab's mosque  
*muttamiḷoṭu aṟapi moḷiyum tirumēṭaiyum (kaṇ)*  
 the Arabic language, along with Muttamiḷ, and the holy mound  
 [62] *kaccini maṇṭapamum, kāvimaṇṭapam tōṭṭam*  
 Ghazni maṇṭapam (hall) and the gardens of Kāvi maṇṭapam  
*iccai samastān tōṭṭam iraṇṭu turavaṭi (kaṇ)*  
 and the iccai samastāna garden, along with the large well  
 [63] *meccum pīr maṇṭapamum viḷaṅkum paḷḷikkūlamum*  
 the wonderful pīr maṇṭapam, the illustrious mosque tank as well  
*iccai nāvitan mēṭai eṅkum purākkūṭṭamē (kaṇ)*  
 the platform of the devoted barber, the pigeons everywhere  
 and,  
 [66] *vāta pitta cītacura maṇṭaiyiṭi kācam atum*  
 wind, bile, diarrhoea, headache, asthma  
*kāṭiṟoli eṇṟitavē kāṇāmal oṭiviṭum (kaṇ)*  
 [because of] Kāṭir Wali, ... they will disappear without a trace  
 [67] *kuttal kuṭacalōṭu kulaimār iṭikunmam*  
 with pain and kuṭacal in the intestines, dyspepsia  
*attan aptul kāṭir onṟāl arukil irukkumo-aṭi (kaṇ)*  
 by the father, Aptul Kāṭir, being near him  
 [68] *tīrāta nōykaḷum ceyvinai cūniyamum*  
 incurable diseases, the workings of black magic too  
*mīrā mukaiyatena virāḷumēy appoḷutē (kaṇ)*  
 when Mīrā Mukiyuddin's finger is raised, at that very moment  
 [69] *muppiṟappil ceyta vinai mūṇṭu iruntālum*  
 even if caught in evil deeds over three lives  
*aptul kāṭiṟu venṟāl aṇci oṭiṭum-aṭi (kaṇ)*  
 Aptul Kāṭiṟu is such that it [?] will run away in fear, my dear

The poet shows familiarity with the dargah and its practices, as well as with some of the non-Tamil vocabulary that is deployed therein. Thus, in two consecutive verses he writes:

- [77] *palavita vāttiyaṃum pallāṅku kappal koṭi*  
 different types of musical instrument, palanquins, boats, flags  
*naḷamāy veku janamkaḷ nāṭi tīn kūrivara (kaṇ)*  
 many desirous people, virtuously proclaiming their creed  
 [78] *kaṟkaṇṭu carkaraiyum kanacīni miṭṭāyūm*  
 [with] rock candy sugar and loads of confectionary sweets  
*pakkuva paḷavakaiyum pāttiya vōtuvārē (kaṇ)*  
 and types of ripe fruits, they recite the Fatiha

Thus, through his song, the Hindu poet conveys to his audience, two kinds of information: that which could be found in other hagiographical texts, and that which

specific to the kantūri festival. The temmāṅku thus gives to the listener/reader the story of shaikh's peripatetic life, key details regarding his familial descent and mystical lineage, shaikh's 'works' or miracles — performed both during his lifetime and after. Over and above this, it describes the experience of attending the opening day of the kantūri festival, when the flags to be hoisted atop the minarets and the sandalwood paste to be applied to shaikh's grave, is brought to the dargah as part of a procession that goes through the streets of the town, with much fanfare. The song thus uses the occasion of the festival, which that draws the largest number of visitors to the shrine, as both metaphor and means, to talk about shaikh and the shrine. It is important to note here that the work was examined by a Muslim poet, and cannot, in that sense, be seen to have been the work of solely the Hindu poet himself. Nonetheless, it is striking that the terms used by Upāttiyāyar to situate the Sufi pir and his dargah, are in no way different from those used by the Muslim poets, suggesting a kind of inter-sectarian engagement that does not require or entail the necessary sublimation of difference. Such a literary 'encounter', albeit one located on the margins of Tamil literary practice, reveals neither an inability to comprehend nor an impulse to 'localize' and domesticate a Muslim 'other' within a Hindu worldview.

As a final example for this section, I offer yet another instance of a work composed in honor of Shahul Hamid, by a Hindu poet, the very interestingly titled '*Śrīraṅkam Peṇṇum Tiruccikkōṭṭai Māpiḷḷaiyum cērtu Nākūr Tiruviḷā Pārkkappōna Vaḷinaṭai Cīnkāram*'.<sup>350</sup> While this text dates to a later period — having been published in 1924 — like the temmāṅku, it too was composed by a Hindu poet, and on the occasion

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<sup>350</sup> Figure 5.9.

of the Nagore dargah's kantūri. The song resembles a popular type of the *cintu* genre, the *vaḷinaṭaiccintu*, which has been characterized as comprising 'songs sung by travellers along the way to release them of the fatigue of the journey'. But whereas the *cintu* is a verse of two equal lines of four feet each, the verses in this *ciṅkāram* song are made of three lines that are not of equal length, making its meter *tripāṭippoli*. The song title in this case, does not tell us the genre or the meter to be expected. Instead, the poet tells us at the start of the composition that it is to be sung as per the *meṭṭu* or tune used by Mēl Aputulkātar Mōṭṭar of Ārupalam. It is important to take note of its use of colloquial usages and spellings.

The song begins, once again, with young woman being asked, in a playful manner, to accompany the poet to Nākūr,

*cemponṇira mēni ceṅkamalamātē*  
*ceṇṇiṭuvōm vāṭiyē — nāmīruvarum*  
*nākūrukkuccēraṭiē* [1]

After flattering her adequately by describing her beauty, the poet tries to hustle the young woman, tempting her with breakfast, so they can leave immediately,

*uṭpumā iṭṭali kāppiyuṭan jōccu*  
*ullācamāyaruntu — iniyē nām*  
*ceṇṇiṭuvōm naṭantu* [10]

The rest of the song goes on to describe the sites seen along the way, with a focus on urban spaces, especially shops and markets. A few examples of verses of this type are given below:

*mātapitātavira marṇratellāviṛkum*  
 apart from the parents, for everyone else  
*yūvininṅ pajār itaṭi — naṅkaiyē*  
 this is the evening bazar — lady,  
*pārṭtu tirumpaṭiyē*  
 look before turning! [32]

*eṅkumpukaḷperrā veṅkaṭācalam pāryar*  
 the well renowned Venkatachalam Bharyar's  
*ṣāppai nī pāraṭiyē — tañcāvūr rōṭṭil*  
 shop, look at it — on Tanjavur's road  
*irukkuṭē nēraṭiyē*  
 it is, straight ahead! [34]

*āttu pālam tāṇṭi appāl pōliṣṭēcan*  
 after crossing the bridge, on the other side is the police station  
*tuppākki pāraṭiyē — māmayilē*  
 see the gun — a beautiful peacock  
*ippātai nēraṭiyē*  
 straight ahead on this path [40]

*attar paṇṇīr cērtta vettilaiyām pāḱku*  
 perfume, rose water with betel leaf and nut,  
*ānantamāyppōṭṭukkō — cijarpāḱkaṭ*  
 have it with pleasure — packet of cigars,  
*cikirāṭ reṇṭu vāṅkikkō*  
 and two cigarettes, buy them! [45]

The song goes on in a similar vein, describing all the worldly vistas - mundane and pleasurable - that the groom and his wife would encounter en route to Nagore. The 51 verses that make up the song, do not, however, bring the readers to their final destination. The last few verses describe how the young woman ought to buy a railway ticket, and the poet announces the existence to a second part to the text, titled the 'Nākūr Rayilvēcīnkāram'. The materially oriented contents of this song, as well as the need to publish this work in two parts, are not unrelated. We see that the song, while being oriented towards the dargah as a site of pilgrimage, focuses its attention on the world just beyond it — the place from where all the pilgrims come. In so doing, the song situates the dargah within a very different kind of social space, one that emphasizes the material aspects of a pilgrimage. Indeed, the song contains very little that pertains directly to the dargah, especially when compared to the temmāṅku above. And this becomes even

clearer as we read the advertisement published by the poet at the very end of his work, which makes plain mutual implication of the economies of popular poetry and pilgrimage.

Advertisement [*viḷamparam*]

All the *caṇatanavāṅkaḷ* are hereby informed that several kinds of song books, *kīrttanai* books, drama and biographical books, *ammānai* books, reading books for school children, and beyond that, excellent [*osatti*] perfumed oils and bottles of scent [*centṭu pāṭṭalkaḷum*], Mysore incense sticks, excellent Madurai aravai sandalwood, civet perfume, high quality amber, sandalwood essential oil [*attar*], pandanus oil, jasmine oil, and wormwood oil [*marukkoḷuntu*] samples, perfumed oils for hair growth, *camapaṅki* and other perfumed oils are available at affordable prices [*caracam*].

Songs such as these would, if at all, typically be discussed within the rubric of ‘folk’ and/or ‘popular’ culture, occupying an unsteady place between these two discourses. The manner in which print and a bourgeoisie or ‘middle class’ public sphere contend with these cultural forms has typically been understood using the model of social conflict, whereby a middle-class morality — upper caste and conservative — attempts to discipline a recalcitrant and restive non-elite culture, both rural and urban. While the instances of forms like the *tālāṭṭu*, *temmāṅku*, and *cintu*, discussed above prevent us from making any broad generalization contrary to the ‘conflictual’ narrative, nevertheless it does prompt us to rethink the extent to which we rely on heuristic social groupings to also perform analytical tasks. To put it another way, printed textual evidence from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries from the Islamic Tamil literary world suggests that historical actors crossed these boundaries as often as they did not, bringing the so-called non-elite poetic ‘forms’ into elite realms of literary discourse and practice.

### ***Rāgas and Meṭṭus in Islamic Tamil Kṛtis***

An important notable absence in the song genres discussed above, is explicit mention - within the printed text - of how these songs ought to be sung. In all but one instance, the *Valīnaṭai Cīṅkāram*, the printed works provide no information to the reader in this regard. Uvais only mentions ritual occasions in the community when songs such as the *tālāṭṭu* or *kummi* would be sung, as part of childbirth and marriage rituals. It is possible that what gave these particular printed texts the ability to participate in the sphere of musical practice, without explicit mention of how they ought to be sung, was their specific generic quality. That is to say, the same tune could be used for songs of a particular type - say a *tālāṭṭu* - made possible by the poet's use of widely known poetic meter. This would enable the reader to render the lyric in a melodic form without having to learn a new tune. It would also enable others to participate in singing the refrain with ease and learning the words by and by. It is not necessary to assume, however, that these songs were only consumed inside the household. As discussed earlier in the chapter, these texts and the songs they contain, circulated and were received in different ways. In Uvais' account, for instance, these songs have been principally adjudged to be poetic composition, an part of a the world of the literary public sphere.<sup>351</sup> While this is clearly borne out by the social locations of those involved in the print publication of these texts, Uvais does not offer any clues about whether these songs were in fact performed in public. However, we know from other historical sources that singing songs such as these, with musical accompaniment — as distinct from the public 'performance' of literary

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<sup>351</sup> Here it becomes useful to keep in mind the subtle difference between singing and recitation, and to remember as well that these works were just as likely to be read, as they were to be simply bought and kept.

recitations — was neither off limits nor unheard of in Nagore.<sup>352</sup> Indeed, musical performances continue - with important and notable changes and transformations - to be part of Nagore's public ritual calendar.

Marking a striking contrast from the *cintus*, *temmāṅkus*, and *tālāṭṭus*, that were printed in these songbooks without any indication of how they were to be sung, are all the instances of *kīrttanais*, *patams* and *jāvaḷis*, at times printed in the same text. For each one of these songs, which, because of their distinctive tripartite structure are sometimes cumulatively referred to as *kṛtis*,<sup>353</sup> we find that the songbooks unfailingly convey to the reader information regarding the melodic mode that had been intended to be used by their composers. Typically, information regarding the melodic structure of any given composition, was given in one of two ways: either a *rāga* and *tāla* are prescribed, or a *meṭṭu* is mentioned. It appears that, in any given songbook, either one of the two systems was used, but exceptions also exist. What we find is that in the more substantial songbooks, that is, those containing a large number of compositions, the names of *rāgas* and *tālas* were mentioned. We see this in the *Cīrā Kīrttanam* (1812), where the poet Kōṭṭārru Ceyyitapūpakkar Pulavar, has provided a *rāga* and a *tāla* for each one of the 263 *kīrttanams* that the text contains.<sup>354</sup> We also see this in the *Kīrttana Tirattu* (1896, published in Singapore), the *Meyñāna Irattinalaṅkāra Kīrttanam* (c.1903), and the *Caṅkīta Cintāmaṇi* (1903), which contains the *patam* quoted at the start of the chapter, set to *rāga Nātanāmakriyā*. Indeed, one of the most striking aspects of these texts, is the variety of *rāgas* and *tālas* that the poets seem to be familiar with. The prescription of a

<sup>352</sup> Practice continues into the present day, with important changes and transformations.

<sup>353</sup> While there are, at times, typically, all three song types have the tripartite - *pallavi* (refrain), *anupallavi* (counter refrain), and *caranam* (exposition) - structure.

<sup>354</sup> Uvais, *Islāmiyat Tamil Ilakkiya Varalāru*, 453.



different melody for each successive composition, appears to have been one of one of the ways in which the poet established his reputation.

The less extensive songbooks, which contain only a handful of compositions, we find the tune of the composition tended to be indicated with reference to a *meṭṭu*, the tune of a song, but perhaps more accurately understood as ‘how a song goes’. Thus, in the five-page work from 1923, *Kāraṇa Alaṅkāra Pataṅkaḷ*, where we find a total of eight compositions - all devoted to Shahul Hamid - we find listed that for each song the poet has referenced another’s song’s tune. To give a few examples, the very first song, ‘*varalāccutē kantūri, varalāccute*’ is to be sung according to the tune of a pre-existing song, titled ‘*varalāccutē tarukā*’. For the second *patam*, ‘*atipatiyāna nākūr vācā*’, the tune is akin to a song titled ‘*ciriyar pukaḷṇtiyōrkum*’. The third *patam*, ‘*antamikum poḷil kantamāmalar pātā*’ follows the *meṭṭu* of ‘*karuṇaikaṇ pārum napi mustapa*,’ and so on. In all but two of the eight cases, the *meṭṭu* referenced, clearly belongs to another Islamic Tamil song. The case of *Pukaḷāṇanta Kīrttanam*, published in Nagapattinam in 1916, the manner in which *meṭṭus* are registered present interesting dissimilarities from the previous example. Here, we do not find direct references either to the Prophet, Nagore dargah, or Shahul Hamid. Instead, we find such *meṭṭus* as ‘*aḷḷi kuṭikkum icai*’, ‘*tātiyarē collum vārttai*’, and ‘*cāmiyē innum cālam*’, in addition to two composition to *meṭṭus* that betray the influence of north India music. Thus, one song, ‘*pāttuṣākē meyttuti*,’ is to be sung to the tune of ‘*kajal jarrattēpākkō*,’ while another ‘*centāmarai porkkamalaccīr*’, is set to to ‘*kāri pulpul tarīpul ki canam*’ — the former undoubtedly a *ghazal*, and the latter, likely to have been a *thumri*. Thus far, I have come across only one songbooks containing *jāvaḷis*. Titled ‘*Nākūr Kātiroli Āṇṭavarkaḷ Stōttira Jāvaḷi*’, the cover page of this work

tells us only it was published by one Nākalīṅkam Piḷḷai, once again in Nagapattinam, in 1917. In this meagre songbook of five *jāvaḷis*, on two occasions the tune is simply stated as ‘*jāvaḷi varṇameṭṭu*’, and lyrical cues are not provided. The three remaining songs mark an interesting contrast, with one being set to the tune of a Hindi song (‘*piyā vāvōṇā*’), one based on a song in praise of the Hindu deity Murugan (‘*kanta kaḷakumalai vācā*’), and the last one appears to be referencing a composition by another Hindu poet (‘*ummēlaiyin muttucāmi pāṭṭai*’).

To the extent that these printed texts allow us to conjecture, it appears that Tamil Muslim poets were both familiar with and comfortable using the *rāga* structures of Karnatak music. Further research, of an ethnographic variety, would be needed to know the extent of their knowledge, keeping in mind the requirement of musical knowledge entailed in the composition of song lyrics. It is clear nonetheless, that the prescription of a *rāga* and *tāla* for their *kṛti* compositions was a matter of some importance for these poets, perhaps even an arena in which they were expected to flaunt their skills. That being said, some might argue that the actual singing of these songs was not, still, a necessary outcome of this poetic poetic. Here, our encounter with the use of *meṭṭus* pushes us to reconsider such a stance. The *meṭṭu* served, I think, to situate the compositions of these poets within an ongoing field of musical practice. What is fascinating about this field, is that even while deploying the ‘classical’ Karnatak tripartite *kṛti* song structure, it makes use of melodic patterns drawn from the world Parsi theatre, as well as Hindustani musical forms like the *ghazal* and *thumri*. Furthermore, examples like the songs contained in the *Kāraṇa Alaṅkāra Patāṅkaḷ*, by almost exclusively relying on the *meṭṭus* of Tamil songs

composed on Islamic themes, these ‘intertextual’ references can be seen as bringing into view, as well, of a field of specifically Islamic Tamil music practice.

Indeed, the question of what - if anything - distinguishes Islamic Tamil *kṛtis* from other their counterparts from other sectarian traditions is an important one. For while clearly being participants in the world of South Indian music, certain specificities do come to light when we examine the compositions of Tamil Muslim poets. One such difference is that Tamil Muslims composed all their *kṛtis* in Tamil; Sanskrit and Telugu — languages that were not alien to Tamil Muslim poets — were not deployed at all, aligning the historical development of these *patams* with the Tamil *patam* tradition that is traced to the seventeenth-century figure of Muttutāṇṭavar.<sup>355</sup> Another important point of contrast, is the ‘vector of address’ deployed in the song by the poet. Mathew Harp Allen has discussed the ‘vectors of address’ that are typically deployed within a Tamil *patam*. Typically, he finds a triadic relation at work, involving a hero (*nāyaka*), a heroin (*nāyaki*), and her confidant friend (*sakhī*), who often acts as a messenger or go-between.<sup>356</sup> Allen has borrowed this triadic model from Norman Cutler’s discussion of the structure of Tamil Bhakti poetics.<sup>357</sup> Cutler uses the permutations in the vectors of address - between poet, God, and audience (or devotees) - to understand the reception and experience of Tamil *bhakti* poetry.<sup>358</sup> Using the same model, Harp finds that in Tamil *patams* — unlike what Cutler had found to be typical of *bhakti* poetry — the most commonly used vector of address was ‘indirect’.<sup>359</sup> That is, in the majority of the *patams*

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<sup>355</sup> Matthew Harp Allen, ‘The Tamil Patam: A Dance Music Genre of South India’ (PhD Thesis., Wesleyan University, 1992), 94-113.

<sup>356</sup> Allen, ‘The Tamil Patam’, 297-339.

<sup>357</sup> Allen, ‘The Tamil Patam’, p. 285, n. 18.

<sup>358</sup> Norman Cutler, *Songs of Experience: The Poetics of Tamil devotion* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987), 19-38.

<sup>359</sup> Allen, ‘The Tamil Patam’, 337-339.

Allen considered, the *nāyaki* (heroine) speaks to the *nāyaka* (hero), indirectly, *via* her *sakhī* (friend), whereas according to Cutler's findings, the 'core' of *bhakti* poetry deployed a direct rhetorical stance, with the poet addressing the deity directly. In Allen's classification, this 'direct' address *patam* — 'Group D' — in which the poet-devotee (often in the female voice of the *nāyika*) directly addresses the lord (or the *nāyaka*), and which is in fact dyadic, forms the 'periphery' of the repertoire of well-known Tamil *patams*.<sup>360</sup> What is interesting to note for our purpose, is that like Cutler's *bhakti* hymns and unlike Allen's selection of Tamil *patams*, in Islamic Tamil *patams*, poets deployed a direct rhetorical stance. What is also to be noted, is that unlike other Tamil *patams*, the use of *ninda-stutis*, a kind of taunting praise poem, is eschewed, and the identity of the figure being praised or venerated is clearly stated in the song's *pallavi* or opening lines itself, leaving, as it were, no doubt in the listener's mind as to the identity of the figure being celebrated by the song.

To conclude this section, I present below the lyrics of a *patam*, dedicated to the praise of Shahul Hamid, in order to give the reader a sense of the kind of compositions being discussed.

Caraṇam taruvīr ippōtē vaḷḷal / Give me shelter now, lord  
 Ceyku ṣākul hamītē / O, Shaikh Shahul Hamid  
 Karuṇaipurintu ennaikkāttu aruḷvīrē  
 / Merciful and compassionate, become manifest to me

Puviyōrkaḷ pukaḷntiṭuvōrē - nala / Whom the people of the world praise,  
 Puṇya cirōmaṇi mērē / Beneficent sacred jewel of mine,  
 Kavipāṭu vōruk karuḷvīrē miku / Showering his grace on poets and singers, great

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<sup>360</sup> Allen, 'The Tamil Patam', 323-328.

Kāraṇa carkuru nīrē / teacher of the principle you are

kuvitanam āṛriyak kōlamāy alaittīr

kutupē mīrān cākip ōliyē / O, Qutub Mīrān Cākipu Wali

Oru tirumalaicēṭṭi enṛānē - ceyta / A Tirumalaicēṭṭi there was, for committing

Oru paḷutāl kaiti ānānē / a crime, he came to be jailed

Oru ninavāyumai nampinānē - ava / a thought of you through which he came to believe

Nurra tuyarnīnkinānē / all his suffering was set aside

Tiruvālūrānatil uruvāna tērai / The chariot that was made in Tiruvālūr

ciṇantu kaltēr ākkum oliyē / In rage he turned the chariot to stone

Vaḷamēvika lākūr ukantīr tīnōr / [To] the pious people of Lahore,

Vākkukku ukappāy maintīr / the promised son was born, joyfully

Paḷamaipōl uyirāy eḷuntīr nākaip / as per tradition, .... , to Nākai

Patiyinil vantu uṛaintīr / town, they came to live

Naḷam ēvum taṛukāviṛ paḷa paḷa paḷa ena / In the dargah that causes to prosper,

nanṛāy oḷi vilankum oliyē / O Wali! how beautifully lamps glimmer

Taṇcai rājan piṇi tīrttōrē - umai / You, who cured the disease of the Tanjore king

Cārntavarkku aruḷ ceykuvīrē / who offers benediction to those who approach him

Koṇcum pukaḷ māṇikkappūrē - hacan / Of praiseworthy Manikkapur,

Kuttūcu makavāna pīrē / O spiritual teacher, son of Hacan Kuttūcus

kencum paiyal ṣākul hamītukku uṇkaḷ /

this unworthy man entreats you, Shahul

Hamid

kirupai ceytu iraṅkiṭum oliyē / O Wali, be merciful and compassionate

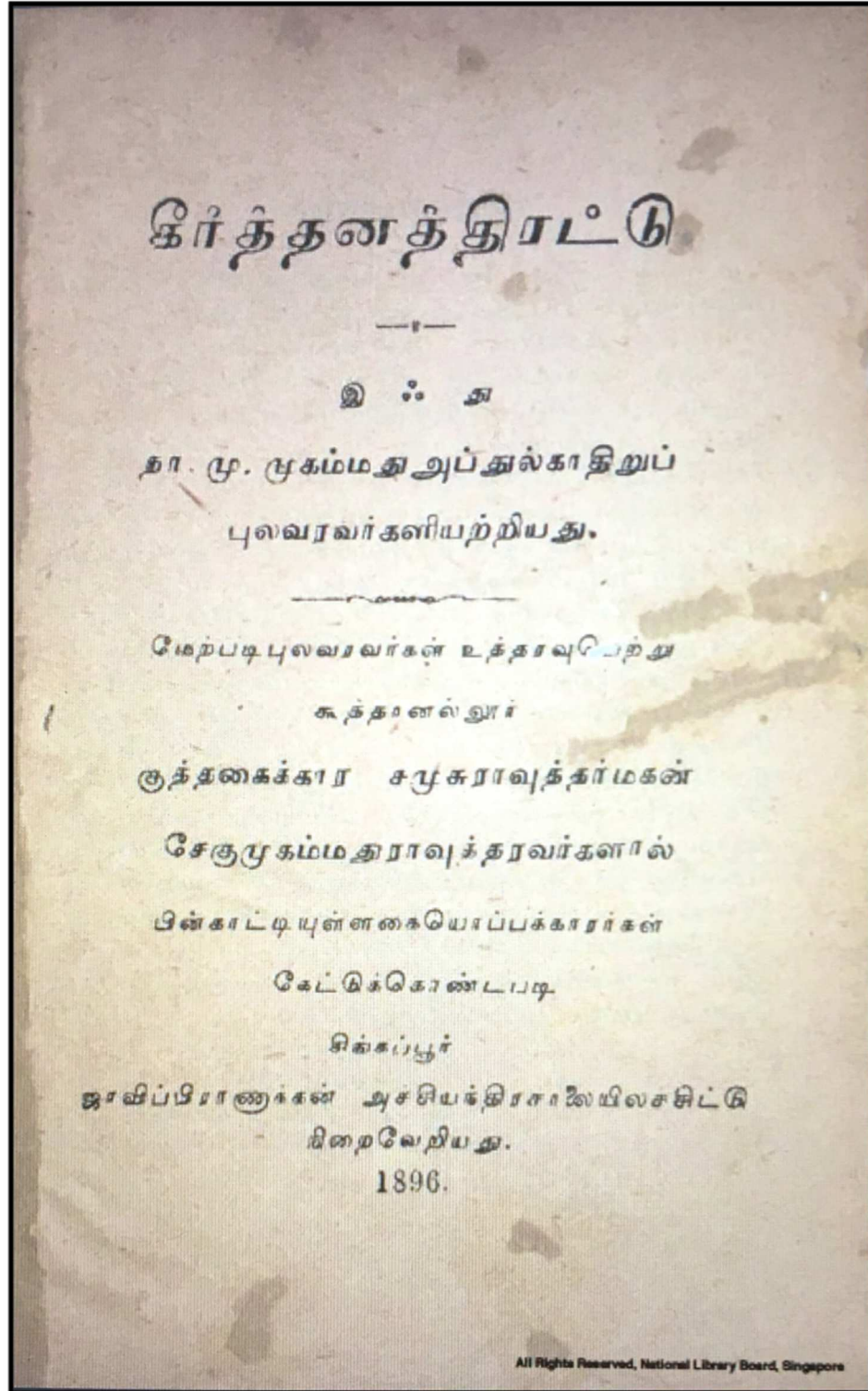
Figure 5.1a: *Kīrttanattiraṭṭu* (Singapore, 1896)

Figure 5.1b: Subscribers for the publication of the *Kīrttanattiraṭṭu*

### கேட்டுக்கொண்டவர்கள்

தா. ஜ. முகம்மதுமெய்தீன்  
 ம. சி. மு. நயினாமுசாயபு  
 வர. ஆ. சேஷகணி  
 பெர. அ. ஜமால்முகம்மது  
 த. ப. நயினாமுகம்மது  
 பெர. அ. முகம்மதுகாசிம்  
 கா. அ. அப்துல்காதிரு  
 க. ந. காதிலுபாசா  
 ந. கா. முகம்மதுமெய்தீன்  
 மா. சே. அசன்முகம்மது  
 கு. ம. பக்கிருமுகம்மது  
 கா. கா. அபுபக்கர்  
 சே. சே. சின்னத்தம்பி  
 தா. நெ. நகிமாச்சாயபு  
 கா. சி. நயினாமுகம்மது  
 க. இ. அபுபக்கர்  
 அ. மு. நத்தனசாயபு  
 ச. கா. அப்துல்காதிரு  
 ஆ. சே முகம்மது இசுமாயில்  
 ஆ. அ. அப்துல்லா  
 மொ. கா. முகம்மதுசுலுத்தான்  
 க. அ. குலாமெய்தீன்  
 கா. மி. முகம்மதுகாசின்  
 பெர. பெ. முகம்மதுசாகபு  
 பு. ச. ஹைதனசாயபு

இவையன்றிமிகுந்தவருளர், சரவைகைதப்பியபடியால்  
 கூடாதுபோனது. அவர்கள்மன்னிக்கவும்.



Figure 5.2: Pañcarattina Tālāṭṭu (Madras, 1899)

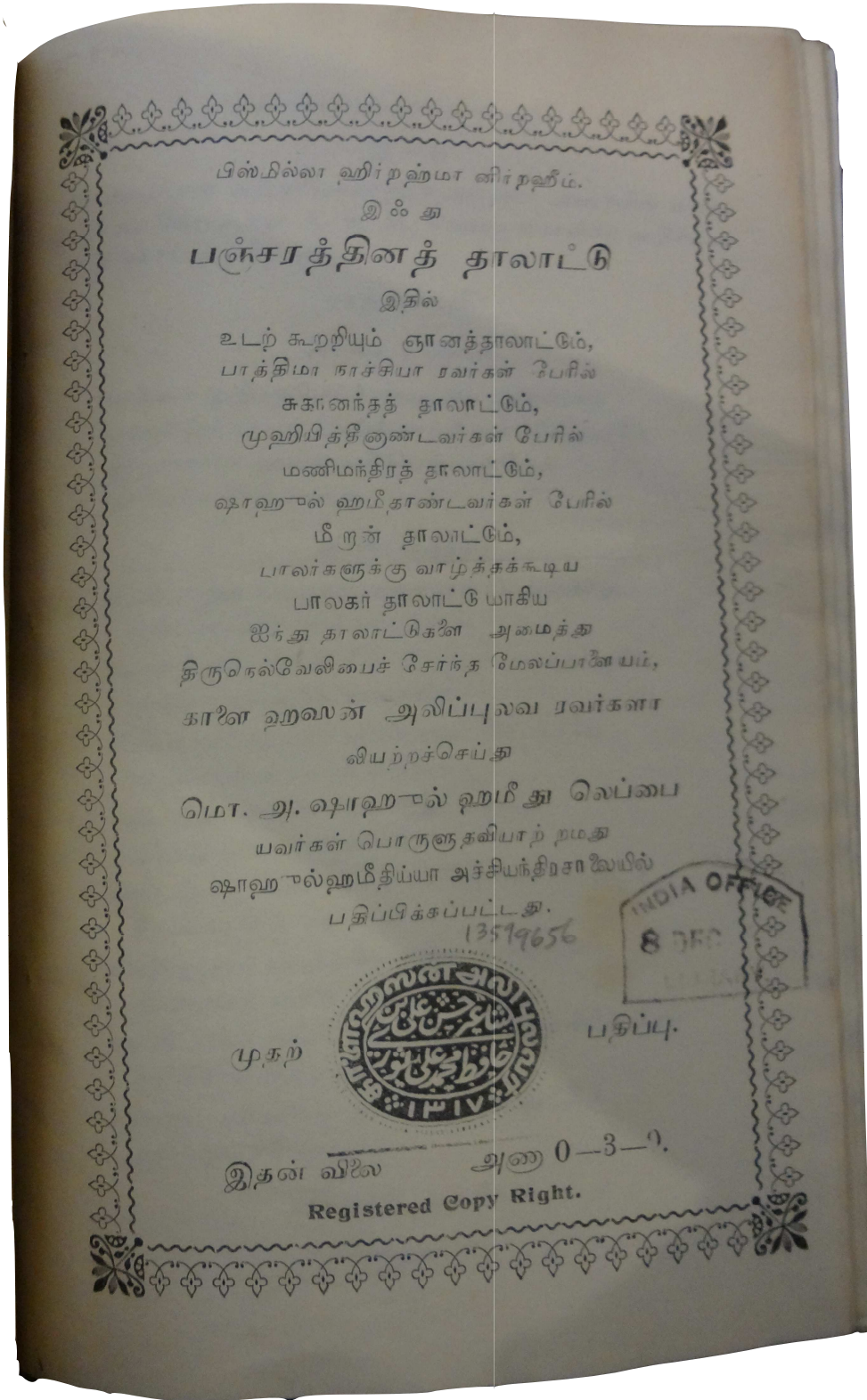




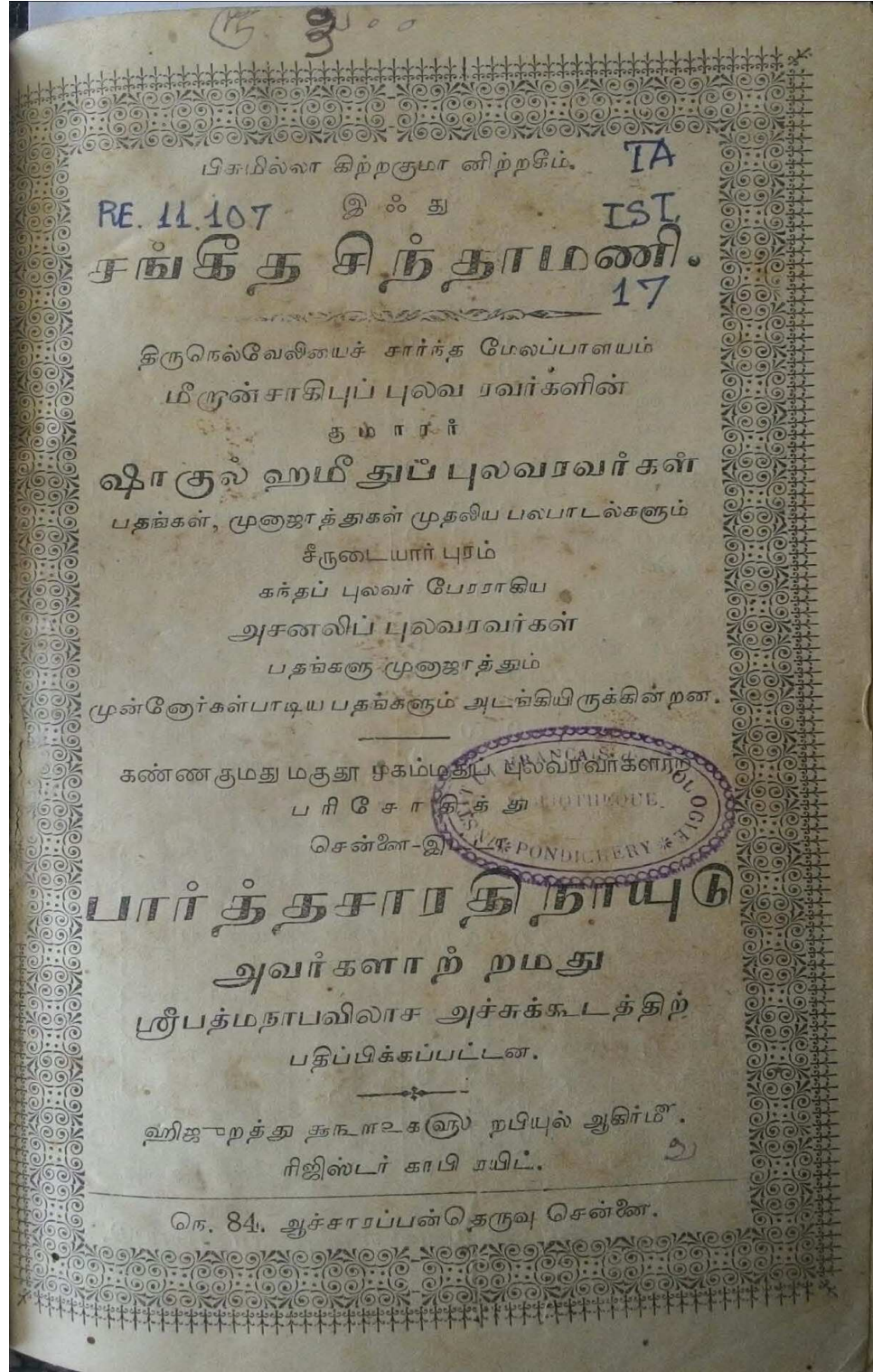
Figure 5.3a: *Caṅkīta Cintāmaṇi* (Madras, 1903)

Figure 5.3b: Advertisement on the verso of *Caṅkīta Cintāmaṇi*'s title page

சு த் த ப் ப தி ப் பு பு த் த க வி ள ம் ப ர ம்,			
	ரு.	அ.	ப.
சீருவனகாவியத்தோல்	8	0	
சீர்ப்பாட்டு	1	4	0
சீர்ப்பாட்டு உரை	3	8	0
சீருவண்ணம்	0	8	0
சீரு கீர்த்தனை	1	8	0
சீருவுல்லாசம்	0	8	0
பதுகுல்லன்ன	0	8	0
தர்குல்லன்ன	0	10	0
இராஜநாயகம்	1	0	0
சீதேவிதனத்தின்	}	0	8
பொக்கிஷம்			
கனகாபிஷேகமாலை	0	10	0
புதுகுஷ்டம் வசனம்	1	8	0
பதுகுல்மிசிரி	1	8	0
சித்திரகவிபலபாடல்	0	12	0
கசுசுலன்பியா	1	8	0
பெரியபலபாடத்திரட்டு	1	4	0
இரவுஸ்கு.ல்படைப்போ	0	10	0
வெள்ளாட்டிமசலா	0	5	0
சங்கீத சிந்தாமணி	0	10	0
நசியத்துழைன்மாலை	1	0	0
முகியித்திணைடவர்	}	0	10
கன்சத்துருசங்காரம்			
குலோபகாவலிராடகம்	0	8	0
கீர்த்தனலங்கிருதம்	0	4	0
வேதபுராணம்	0	10	0
மெய்ஞ்ஞான ரத்தின	}	0	8
உலங்காரகீர்த்தனை			
நேர்மொழிதின்மொழி			
விளக்கம்	0	12	0
முகியித்தின் புராணம்	1	12	0
செ. 2-வது	1	12	0
இருஷாதுராமா	0	2	0
துறைபத்துல் ஹிந்து	0	12	0
நாலுமாம்சரித்திரம்	1	6	0
மஸ்தான்பாடல்	0	12	
செ. 1-யம்	1	0	
வருநல் முஸ்லிமீன்	1	0	
ஹுஸைன்படைப்	}	1	8
போர் வசனம்			
குதுபுநாயகம்	1	0	
இராஜமணிமாலை	0	12	
முனையித்தின்மாலை	0	6	
நவ்பல்நாநக்நாநக்	}	1	0
சுந்தர்சரித்திரம்			
தர்கத்துல்அவுலியா	1	2	
பீவிமறியமுடையகிஸ்	0	4	
ஷம்சுல்இசலாம்	0	8	
மெய்ஞ்ஞானச்சிந்து	0	4	
ஷாபியா	0	2	
இருஷாதுல் இபாத்து	0	8	
அசன்பேகதை	0	8	
நவரீதபுஞ்சம்	0	10	
அதுகூலபுஞ்சம்	0	8	
ஞானேதயபுஞ்சம்	0	10	
ஆத்திங்கிஸ்ஸா	1	0	
தர்கத்துல்அவுலியா	1	2	
நூறுஷகாதத்து	0	4	
நாகூர்ஆண்டவர்கள்	}	1	0
காரணச்சரித்திரம்கி			
னேஸ்கடிதம்			
பீவிமறியமுடைய	}	0	4
கிஸ்ஸா			
மதியழைத்தகாரணக்	}	0	2
கும்மி			
நசியத்துல்யிசலாம்	}	0	2
ஹனபிய்யா			
அரிச்சந்திரவிலாசம்	1	4	
செ. கிளேஸ்	2	0	
விக்கிரமாதித்தன்கதை	1	8	

இங்ஙனம்.

இட்டா-பார்த்தசாரதிநாயுடு.

நெ. 84. ஆச்சாரப்பன்செருவு சென்னை.

½ அணஸ்டாம்பு அனுப்புவோர்களுக்கு ஒருகேட்டாக அனுப்பப்படும்.



Figure 5.4: *Nākūr Kātar Avuliyā pēril Patamum Cantanakūṭṭin Cīrappum*  
(Trichy, 1910)

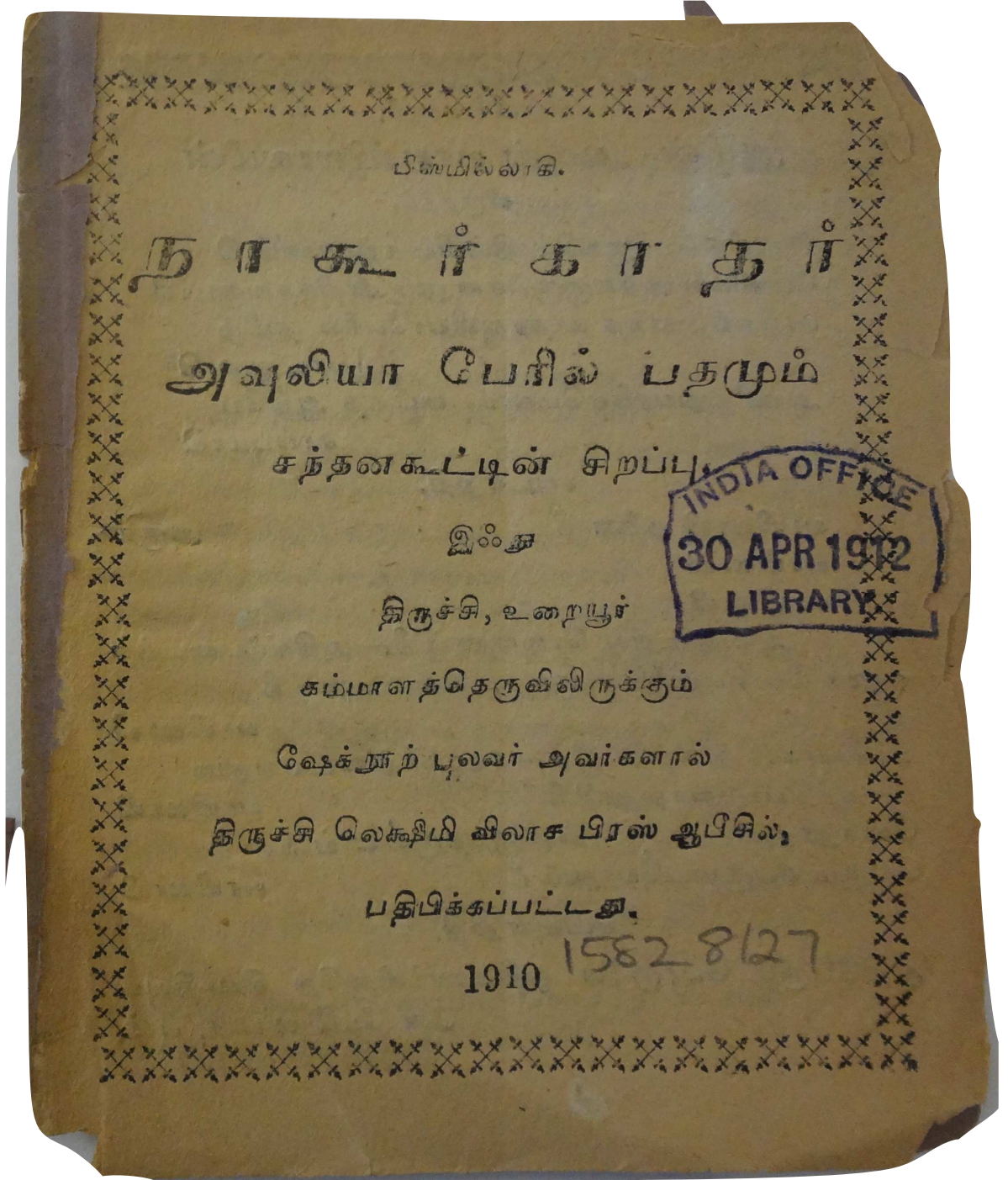


Figure 5.5: *Nākūr Ṣāhul Hamītu Āṇṭavarkaḷ Kāraṇa Alaṅkāra Temmāṅku*  
(Nagapattinam, 1910)





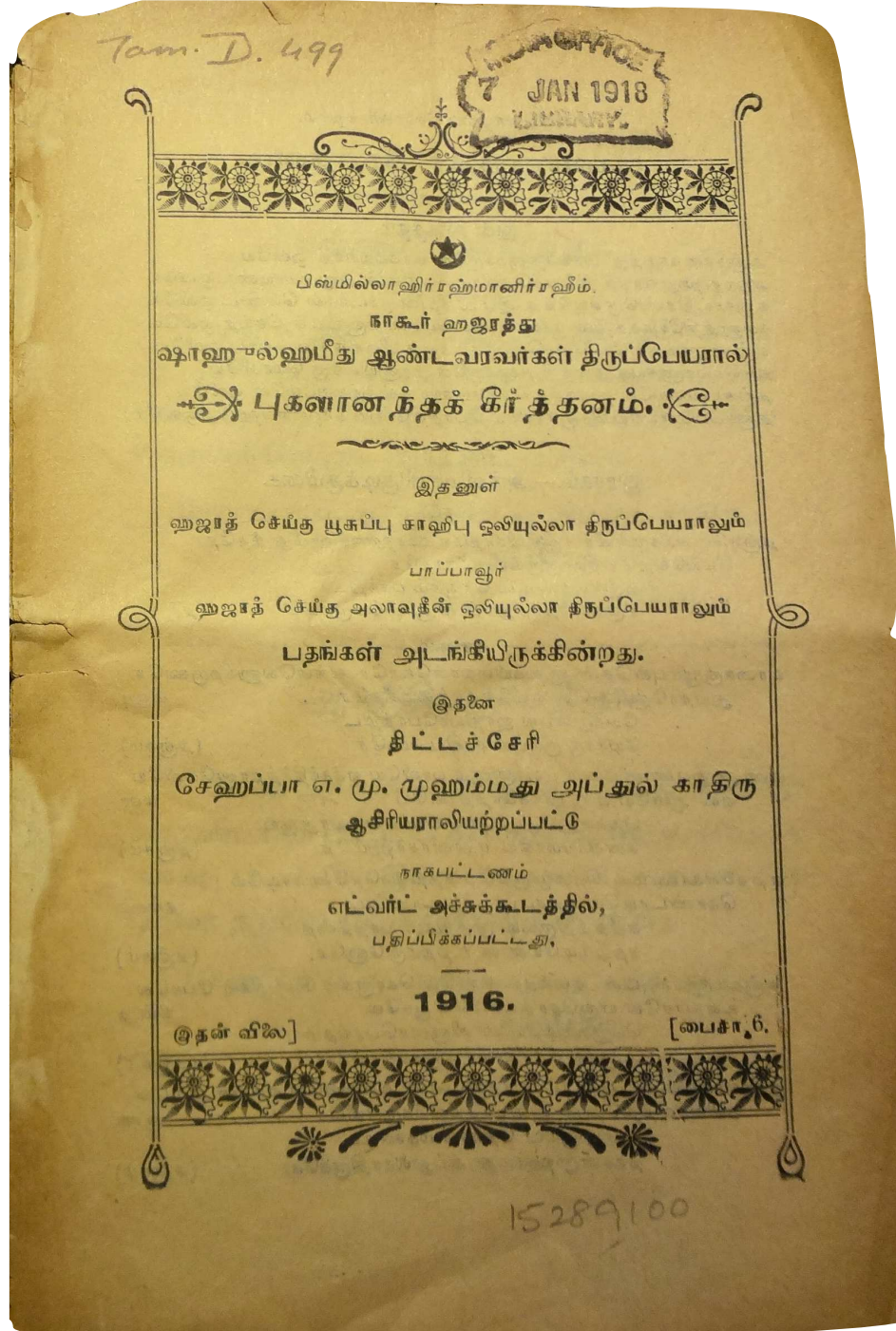
Figure 5.6: *Nākūr Hajarattu Ṣāhul Hamītu Āṇṭavaravarkaḷ Tiruppeyarāl Pukaḷāṇanta**Kīrttanam* (Nagapattinam, 1916)

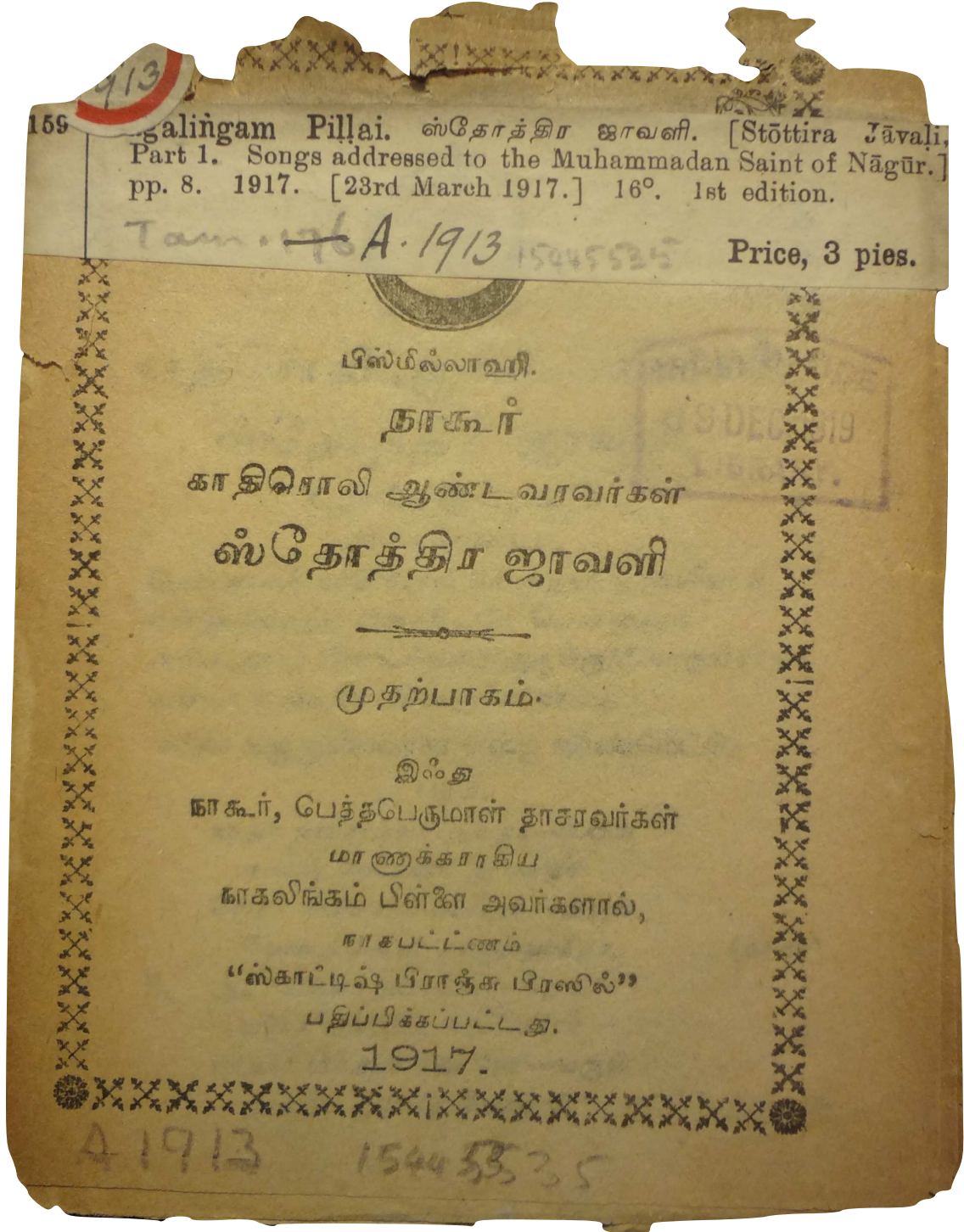
Figure 5.7: *Nākūr Kātirolī Āṇṭavarkaḷ Stōttira Jāvaḷi* (Nagapattinam, 1917)



Figure 5.8: *Nākūr Oli Kañjacavāy Kañjapakṣ Pāttuṣā Śāhul Hamītu Āṇṭavar avarkaḷ*  
*pēril Kāraṇa Alaṅkāra Pataṅkaḷ* (Nagapattinam, 1923)

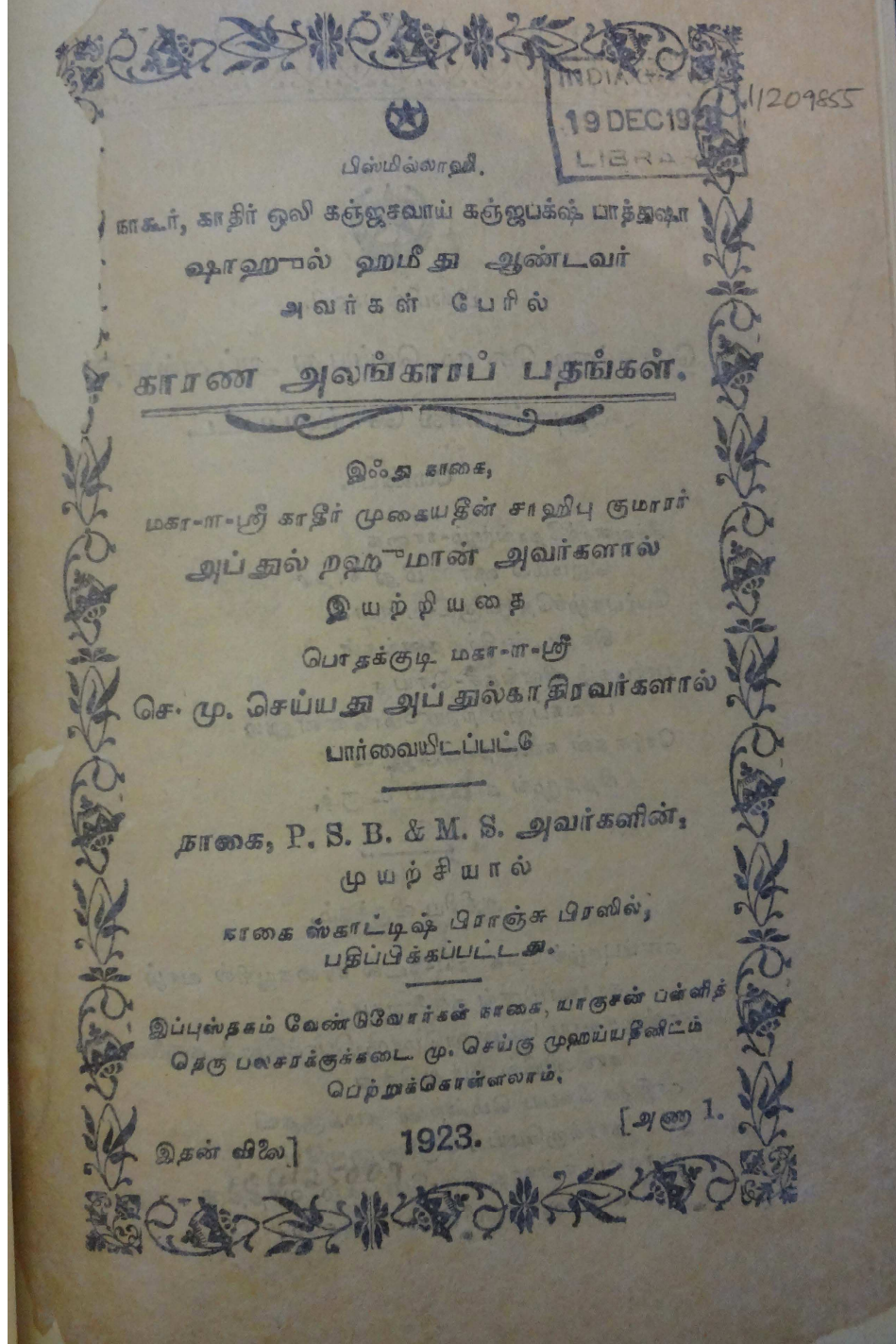


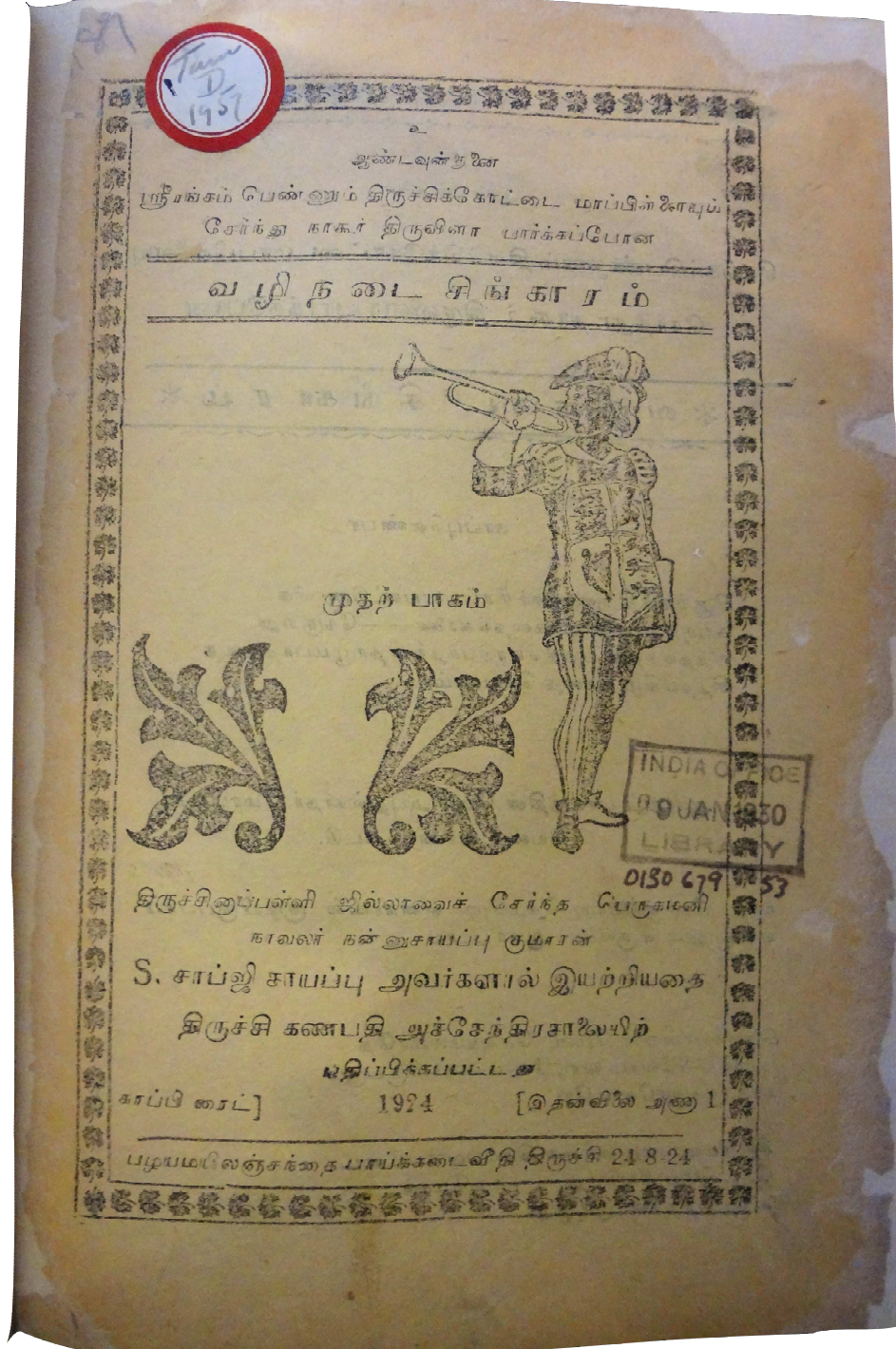
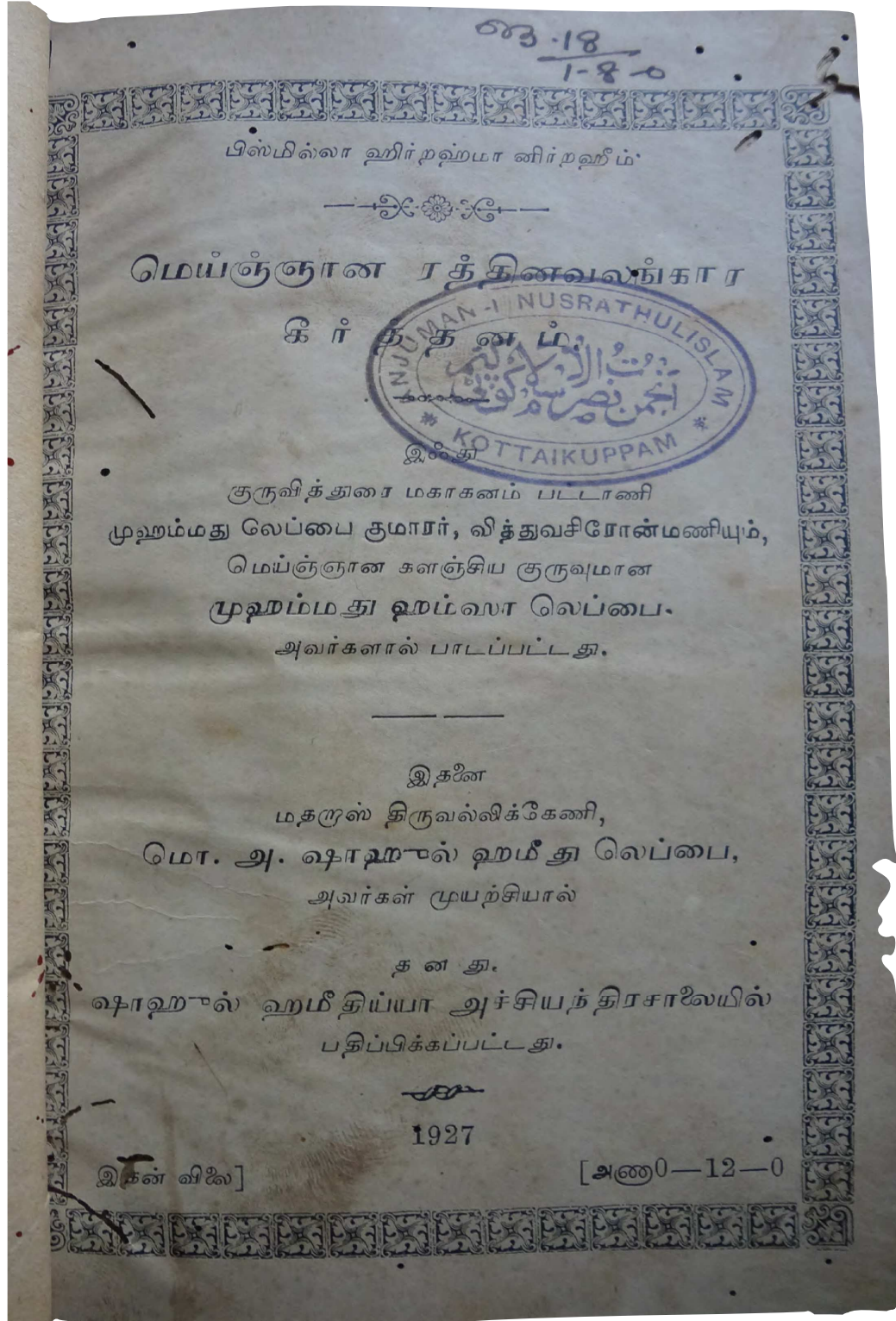
Figure 5.9: *Śrīraṅkam Peṇṇum Tiruccikkōṭṭai Māṭṭaiyūm cērtu Nākūr Tiruvilā**Pārkkappōṇa Vaḷinaṭai Ciṅkāram* (Trichy, 1924)



Figure 5.10: *Meyñāna Rattinañkāra Kīrttanam* (Madras, 1927)

### **Islam, Karnatak Music, and the Veneration of Shahul Hamid**

That the bulk of this chapter is aimed at highlighting the existence, variety, and contents of these songbooks rather than situating them historically is in equal measure a conscious choice and an imposition created by the available scholarship. Islamic Tamil musical practice is missing from scholarly conversation, both within the sphere of religious scholarship on Islam, and discussions on Karnatak music, especially in late colonial South India. In the last section of this chapter, I attempt to engage with these two bodies of scholarship, with a view to discussing why that should have been the case, as well as suggests possibilities whereby Islamic Tamil music may be rehabilitated in the appropriate scholarly debates. I begin with a discussion of scholarship on Islam's relationship with music, and the extension of that conversation in the context of Islam in South Asia. From there I move to a discussion of the historiography on Karnatak music, focusing on the ways in which *some* of the biases and silences of older scholarship — which served to demarcate the identity 'classical' of Karnatak music along particular religio-cultural social lines — have been inadvertently reproduced even by scholars investigating the modern trajectories of Karnatak music 'tradition' from a critical perspective. I conclude the chapter with a discussion of the prospects that have been offered by scholarship that has focused on Karnatak music's other, 'non-classical' trajectories, as they were developing within the courtly contexts of early colonial South India.

Writing about the history of the relationship between Islam and music even in just South Asia is no small task, complicated as it is by the fact that Islamic doctrinal discourses have been engaged in a debate about the permissibility of music in Islam right

from the religion's earliest days. Scholarship on music in the Islamic world at large, therefore, has to invariably contend with this debate, and Islamic studies scholars such as Arthur Gribetz and Leonard Lewisohn, as well as Arabic musicologist Shiloah Amnon have written extensively on the subject.<sup>361</sup> Their work introduces the reader to the range of views that have been put forth on the subject by various traditional figures of religious authority in the Islamic world, especially in the regions where Arabic and Persian was used. The perennial nature of the problem of establishing music's permissibility in Islam is underwritten by two factors: first, the absence of any clear verdict on the subject in the text of the Quran, and second, the resulting reliance of various commentators on divergent interpretations of the *hadīth*, or verified Prophetic traditions.<sup>362</sup> The principal contenders in these discussions were Sufi mystic 'advocates' on the one hand and 'adversarial' legalist clerics on the other, with others opting for a qualified, 'moderate' middle ground and the three most prominent figures associated with each of these positions are Al-Ghazzālī (d. 520), Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728), and Ibn al-Arabi (d. 638), respectively.<sup>363</sup>

'The controversy surrounding *samā*,' according to Gribetz, can be viewed as representative of the broader doctrinal conflict between the Sufis and the orthodox.'<sup>364</sup> He explains: 'Sufism conceptualizes a direct communion between God and man, which is a spiritual experience paralleling orthodoxy. The orthodox understandably dislike a doctrine which looks towards inner resources, rather than relying solely on the Qur'ān

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<sup>361</sup> Arthur Gribetz, 'The *samā*' Controversy: Sufi vs. Legalist', *Studia Islamica* 74 (1991): 43-62; Leonard Lewisohn, 'The sacred music of Islam: *Samā*' in the Persian Sufi tradition,' *British Journal of Ethnomusicology* 6 (1997): 1-33; Amnon Shiloah, 'Music and Religion in Islam,' *Acta Musicologica* 69.2 (1997): 143-155.

<sup>362</sup> Gribetz, 'The *samā*' Controversy,' 45-50.

<sup>363</sup> Gribetz, 'The *samā*' Controversy'; Lewisohn, 'The sacred music of Islam'.

<sup>364</sup> Gribetz, 'The *samā*' Controversy,' 58.

and *sharī'a*.<sup>365</sup> Speaking historically, then, Islamic studies scholar Leonard Lewisohn suggests, the *samā'* evolved 'in an *intra-Islamic* context as a kind of "counter-concert" deliberately set in contrast to profane musical gatherings,'<sup>366</sup> intimately associated with the practice of Sufism; its 'aesthetic depth leads to metaphysic penetration; the notes reflect, indeed, become, the divine harmony.'<sup>367</sup> It was, in other words, inseparable from 'the ambience of its ritual "sacred" discipline: the Sufi *tariqa*.'<sup>368</sup> This particular 'Sufi-centric' emphasis in discussions of music in the wider world of Islam also hold true, to a large extent, for the South Asian context. As a result, the *qawwālī*, a form of musical (and) mystical practice that originated in the subcontinent and is closely associated with the Chishti *tariqā* or Sufi order, has tended to be the focus of both historical and ethnomusicological scholarship.<sup>369</sup> Moreover, the category of 'music' itself has been understood to be a misfit for discussions pertaining to Islam, and other terms like - 'sonic practice' - have been suggested as more culture specific and accurate. To music, *as such*, the argument seems to be, Islam was (and is) antithetical.<sup>370</sup>

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<sup>365</sup> Gribetz, 'The *samā'* Controversy,' 58.

<sup>366</sup> Lewisohn, 'The sacred music of Islam,' 5. See also, Kenneth S. Avery, *A Psychology of Early Sufi Samā': Listening and Altered States* (London & New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004).

<sup>367</sup> Lewisohn, 'The sacred music of Islam,' 15.

<sup>368</sup> Lewisohn, 'The sacred music of Islam,' 7.

<sup>369</sup> Regula Qureshi, 'Indo-Muslim Religious Music, An Overview', *Asian Music* 3.2 (1972):15-22; Qureshi, *Sufi Music of India and Pakistan: Sound, Context and Meaning in Qawwālī* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Qureshi, 'Islam and Music', in Guy L. Beck, *Sacred Sound: Experiencing Music in World Religions* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2006), 89-111; Raziuddin Aquil, 'Music and Related Practices in Chishti Sufism: Celebrations and Contestations', *Social Scientist* 40.3/4 (2012): 17-32.

<sup>370</sup> Even Hindustani, or North Indian 'classical' music, with its rich and visible history of Persian poetic and musical influence, and Muslim participation, was sought to be understood as originally Indic, and, therefore, essentially Hindu — not Islamic. See Janaki Bakhle's discussion of Vishnu Narayan Bhatkhande in, *Two Men and Music: Nationalism and the Making of an Indian Classical Tradition* (Oxford, New York: New York University Press, 2005) and Lakshmi Subramanian, 'Faith and the Musician: "Ustads" in Modern India', *Economic and Political Weekly* 41.45 (2006): 4648-4650. For alternative and little known 'counternarratives' provided by Muslim musicians, regarding the role of Muslims - not only to the practice but also the intellectual history of Hindustani music, see Max Katz, *Lineage of Loss: Counternarratives of North Indian music* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2017), esp. 136-141.

Discussions on South Indian music, among scholars as well as practitioners, too, tend to distance themselves from Islam or Muslim influence even further by presenting ‘Carnatic’ music as a cultural counterpoint to Hindustani music. As a corollary to South India’s ‘resistance’ of Muslim rule, the region had maintained its purity in the realm of music too. It had managed to successfully avoid the kind of ‘Islamization’ that traditional Indian music had undergone in the North, and was, therefore, the true inheritor of the India’s ancient musical traditions.<sup>371</sup> Scholars thus narrowed their focus on three things — key theoretical treatises (ancient and medieval), composers (medieval and early modern), and performers (modern and contemporary) — all three working cumulatively to suggest the unbroken continuity of an ‘ancient’ tradition.<sup>372</sup> On the question of the role of ‘outsiders’, these scholars greatly appreciated the role of two ruling groups - the Nayakas and Marathas - to the cultural efflorescence of the Tamil-speaking region, especially in the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, but Muslims were still nowhere to be seen.<sup>373</sup> Indeed, even when it comes to making sense of history of the entry of Hindustani ragas into the Karnatak world, the credit is given to Muttuswami Dikshitar, who, it is argued, having traveled to the North in his youth, upon his return stewarded the process of incorporating the Northern influences in a manner best suited to the South, thereby

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<sup>371</sup> For instance, in his monumental historical work on Karnatak music, R. Rangaramanuja Ayyangar, himself a practitioner, writes about the difficulties posed to the movement of ideas and practices in India of the premodern period, in the following way: ‘Though popular and common for the whole country, Sanskrit was after all a language kept aloft only by deep-rooted national sentiment and cherished by the *literati*. Cudgones and manuscripts were cramped in number and circulation. Their survival was unpredictable. An Aurangzeb might consign them to flames. A Tipu might use them as fuel to boil cavalry horsegram.’ Ayyangar, *History of South Indian (Carnatic) Music: From Vedic Times to the Present* (Madras: Self-published, 1972), 204.

<sup>372</sup> Ayyangar, *History of South Indian (Carnatic) Music*; P. Sambamoorthy, *Great Composers* (Madras, Indian Music Pub. House, 1950); Sambamoorthy, *History of Indian Music* (Madras, Indian Music Pub. House, 1960); Gowri Kuppaswamy and M. Hariharan, eds, *An Anthology of Indian Music* (Delhi: Sundeep Prakashan, 1989).

<sup>373</sup> S. Seetha, *Tanjore as a Seat of Music (During the 17th, 18th and 19th Centuries)* (Madras: University of Madras, 1981).

preventing any unintended miscegenation.<sup>374</sup> Muslim participation in the sphere of Karnatak music itself is therefore an aspect regarding which scholars of Karnatak music, have shown a complete lack of awareness and interest. This is true even of the self-avowedly critical, revisionist scholarship. Thus, even though the question of the politics of ‘gate keeping’ by Hindu upper-caste communities has been raised, and the undeniable modernity of this musical tradition been highlighted, alternative trajectories of the history of Karnatak music in the modern period have been largely ignored.<sup>375</sup>

Mention must be made here of the signal and salutary contribution that has been made by Indira Peterson<sup>376</sup> and Daves Soneji,<sup>377</sup> whose focus on Tanjavur at the very cusp of the transition to high-colonial rule, brings into view a world of musical practice that had, in a sense, as many facets and historical trajectories as it did participants. Under Marāṭha rule, Tanjore’s polyglot court served to foster and support the efflorescence of music, dance, and drama, and produced the forms and practices that came to be considered both traditional and canonical in these fields. Soneji’s work in particular, prompts us to look back at the specific participants of this courtly culture, focusing his attention on the role of *devadasis* or temple dancers and courtesans in not only giving voice to these cultural practices, but also re-shaping and re-creating them.<sup>378</sup> He also unsettles the notion of their sudden and complete disappearance from the field of musical

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<sup>374</sup> Kuppuswamy and Hariharan, *An Anthology*, 88-92.

<sup>375</sup> Lakshmi Subramanian, *From the Tanjore Court to the Madras Music Academy: A Social History of Music in South India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006) and Amanda Weidman, *Singing the Classical, Voicing the Modern: The Postcolonial Politics of Music in South India* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

<sup>376</sup> Peterson, ‘Multilingual Dramas at the Tanjore Maratha Court and Literary Cultures in Early Modern South India,’ *The Medieval History Journal* 14.2 (2011): 285–321.

<sup>377</sup> Soneji, ‘The Powers of Polyglossia: Marathi Kīrtan, Multilingualism, and the Making of a South Indian Devotional Tradition,’ *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 17.3 (2014): 339-369.

<sup>378</sup> Daves Soneji, *Unfinished Gestures: Devadāsīs, Memory, and Modernity in South India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

and dance practice, charting the longer history of their progressive marginalization and eventual silencing. There were, then, even during the first half of the twentieth century, practitioners and practices of music, beyond the world of Brahmin ‘gate keepers’ that scholars of modern Karnatak music must take into account even if their interest is in understanding the emergence of canonical repertoire performed on stage today. And it is in this kind of exploration, that one would find, I think, the poets and composers of Islamic Tamil music - versatile, articulate, yet unheard - that I found in these printed songbooks from late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

### **Conclusion**

Tamil Muslim poets were clearly both familiar and versatile in the practice of composing songs in the traditional forms of South Indian music. This included both the so-called popular and folk songs, as well as songs written in the ‘classical’ or art music styles. These compositions, according to M.M. Uvais, were an intimate part of the Islamic Tamil literary practice and the oeuvre of virtually all Tamil Muslim poets of repute. Their ability to compose *kṛtis* in praise of all the key Islamic figures and making use of different *rāgas*, was understood, it seems, display their skills and raise their stature within the Islamic Tamil literary community. The use of these *rāgas* as well as *meṭṭus*, strongly suggests that these songs weren’t just meant to be read, they were meant also - if not primarily - to be sung. A modern-day visitor to the Nagore dargah, if she arrives in time for the annual festival marking shaikh’s death, the kantūri, will find that musical performances of different kinds form an essential part of the ritual festivities. Music, even today, is far from absent from the life of the Nagore dargah. Yet, no doubt important transformations have taken place within the course of the twentieth century itself, that

have seen a categorical shift away from the classic forms of Karnatak music, to forms influenced by the Tamil Icai Iyakkam, Tamil cinema, as well as the bowdlerized deployment of *ghazal* and *qawwālī* by Muslim singers whose linguistic and performative fluency is in Tamil.

Going forward, we need to interrogate the possibility of interactions that the Islamic Tamil printed songbook culture may have had with the contemporaneous emergence of the Madras Music Academy and its upper caste ideologies and functionaries. Was there a connection between the investment of Tamil Muslims in the printing of Islamic Tamil songbooks at the same time that the Academy and other upper caste groups of performers and listeners were seeking to reform and sanitize its social practice? Were there other kinds of musical print and performance cultures that existed at the turn of the century, and where did Islamic Tamil music fit in? Are there alternative ways of imagining the history of Karnatak music, such that the Islamic Tamil variant could be seen as being less an anomalous or stillborn experiment in syncretism, and more a shared practice within a larger cultural economy? What role did Tanjore, the veritable ‘seat of music’ in early modern South India play in the efflorescence of Islamic Tamil musical practice? What role did the Muslim musicians who had arrived in Tanjore from Gwalior have to play, in sites like Nagore and perhaps in the larger Islamic Tamil musical tradition? Gwalior was, after all, the city where Shahul Hamid had spent his youth as a student of Muhammad Ghaus, the spiritual teacher of Tansen. The intimacy of ties between Tanjore and the Nagore dargah are well known in the region. The shrine was a recipient of royal patronage and was also managed under the supervision of the Tanjore kings. Arguably, the dargah imitated Tanjore’s courtly culture - acting as patron of the



arts, a venue for musical performances, and imitating certain other rituals during the festival period. It is perhaps with these details in mind, that I would begin probe further into the history of Islamic Tamil music.

## CHAPTER 6

### Conclusion

This dissertation explores the history of the Nagore *dargah*, South India's most prominent Sufi shrine site, through an examination of the rich corpus of hagiographical literary materials composed by Tamil Muslim poets over the course the period 1650 to 1950, approximately. The final resting place of a sixteenth-century North Indian émigré sufi by the name Shahul Hamid (c. 1504-1590), the Nagore *dargah* is an impressive shrine complex that has attracted the attention of a number of scholars. Yet, little is known about the shrine's early history. Indeed, the silence of contemporary sources on the existence of both saint (who is believed to have spent the last 28 years of his life in Nagore) and the shrine is striking, to say the least, has prompted at least one scholar to raise doubts about shaikh's historicity. What is harder to deny is that in a little over half a century from the date of his passing, by the mid-seventeenth century, both the Nagore *dargah* and Shahul Hamid had come to occupy a privileged place in Tamil society. It is in this period, when dramatic changes were taking place in the political economy of Coromandel commerce, within which Nagore too was situated, that we find that the *dargah* becomes a recipient of royal patronage and Shahul Hamid joined the ranks of the most important Muslim figures venerated by elite Muslim poets in their Islamic Tamil *kāppiyams*.

This marked the beginning of Nagore's long career, both as a beneficiary of monumental acts of patronage – performed by kings and by merchants, Muslim and non-

Muslim – and as a subject of hagiographical, venerative literature composed by the region’s elite Tamil Muslim *pulavars* or poets. While stories about Shahul Hamid’s life were certainly circulating in the region in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, it is only in 1812 that we get a systematic account of his life, in the form of the *Tirukkāraṇappurāṇam*, an epic-like narrative or *kāppiyam* composed by renowned Muslim poet of the age, Ceyku Aptul Kāṭiru Nayiṇār Leppai Ālim Pulavar. This was no ordinary hagiography, simply laying out the life-story of a Sufi *shaikh* or master – it was a *purāṇam*, a monumental poetic work comprising 2,576 *viruttam* verses, that organized Shahul Hamid’s into 56 chronologically ordered *paṭalams* or chapters and split into three broad *kāṇṭams* or stages. The *Tirukkāraṇappurāṇam* does not as much explain his *wilāya* or sainthood, as it expresses it through stories of miraculous acts and events associated with him. Rather than dismissing these narratives for being apocryphal, I have tried to emphasize the specific way in which they articulate the authority of a figure like Shahul Hamid, by embedding his life within a larger web of inter-textual resonances and according him a specific place in the hierarchy of Islamic figures worthy of veneration: as a *wali*, as a *qutb*, and as the third most important Islamic figure in the region, after the Prophet and Abdul Qadir Jilani. Certainly, contrary to the observation made by more than one scholar that the use of the Tamil language, its literary genres, motifs, and vocabulary by Tamil Muslim poets reflects a desire to localize an ‘alien’ Islam in a Tamil Hindu landscape, to the extent that the *Tirukkāraṇappurāṇam* may be read as an attempt to situate Shahul Hamid within a particular locale, that locale extends, as we shall see, well beyond the Tamil region. We might think, in fact, of a movement being made in the opposite direction. Through a retelling of Shahul Hamid’s life-story, the Tamil country

was being emplotted and rearticulated as part of a translocal Islamic topography, one that included within it not just Islam's Arabian 'heartlands' but also the wider West Asia, the Indian Ocean littoral, as well as north India.

The number of hagiographical writings about Shahul Hamid and the Nagore really expands with the arrival and dissemination of print technology later in the nineteenth century. This is the period from when the bulk of our 'sources' appear. The relationship between hagiography and print while frequently noted, I argue, is still not that well understood. Certainly, in the context of Islamic Tamil printed hagiographical works from the nineteenth century South India, we do not find the kind of simple overlap between the 'popular classes' and hagiography (as a kind of 'popular' print culture) that has been observed in other contexts. Much of this printed hagiographical material was composed and published by well-known poets and scholars and formed part of an elite literary print culture. Additionally, although the literary forms in which these works were being produced were 'traditional', print had introduced important changes to ways in which these old forms were not composed, printed, circulated, and consumed. The effects of print may not have been as 'revolutionary' as had once been understood, but certainly important changes had been wrought by it even in traditional forms.

Finally, then, our study of hagiographical traditions brings us to a hitherto unacknowledged and unexplored world of Tamil Islamic religious practice, that of composing hagiographical and venerative praise poetry using various Tamil song genres, including such 'classical' forms as the *patam* and *kīrttanai*, which have otherwise come to be seen as quintessential expressions of the Hindu bhakti religious aesthetic. Yet, incredibly, at least until the early decades of the early twentieth century, were Muslim

writing lyrics in praise not just of Shahul Hamid but in honor of all the Islamic figures they venerated. What is most striking of all is the care with which the texts mention the *raga* and *tala*, or the melodic and rhythmic profile of each of these compositions, suggesting a much deeper familiarity on the part of these Tamil Muslim poets with the world of Karnatak music.

It is important to acknowledge here that the texts discussed in the foregoing chapters do not exhaust the world of hagiographical writing on the subject of Shahul Hamid and Nagore dargah, indeed. While we have focused our attention on the Tamil corpus of hagiographical texts, which form the bulk of such writings, there are works in Arabic and Persian too, which the present study has not been able to include for lack of linguistic competence in those languages. We know that Arabic ‘source books’ were an important part of the process of composing the Tamil hagiographical narratives, but a study of the ways in which that interaction took shape remains a desideratum at this point. Even with regard to the Tamil texts, it is important to keep in mind that the thickness of the archive does not provide us with an accurate index of either the production or circulation of these texts.

How do we make sense of this rich tradition of Islamic Tamil hagiographical literature? Despite being organized chronologically, because each of these chapters engages with a different literary genre, they may appear to be discrete, even disconnected. Taken together, however, they bring into clearer relief the historical development of an important regional Islamic venerative tradition over a three-century long period. Certainly, these literary materials are not merely instances of a ‘vernacular’ or ‘localized’ Islamic literary tradition, as scholars have been prone to assessing them as

individual works in one or the other Tamil literary genre. What this dissertation allows us to see, instead, is how these works have accreted over the *longue durée* to constitute a whole Islamic, Tamil, literary venerative tradition, one that has hitherto been completely ignored by scholars of both Tamil literature and religion. Indeed, in the absence of an official body or process of ‘canonization’, it is important to acknowledge the role played by works such as the *Tirukkāraṇappurāṇam*, the *Nākaiyantāti*, and the later prose hagiographies in establishing and confirming the place of Shahul Hamid as a venerable Sufi — especially one whose importance in the region is second only to such translocal Islamic figures as the Prophet Muhammad and Muhiyuddin Abdul Qadir Jilani.

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