

GABRIELLA EICHINGER FERRO-LUZZI

Christian Teaching in Hindu Environment

INTRODUCTION

The object of this study is to add to our knowledge of the Indianization of Christianity by using a hitherto untapped source of information. Indianization or inculturation, as the process has come to be called, has long attracted the scholars' attention. Their investigations usually start by recalling de Nobili's *ante literam* inculturating method. Contrary to other Jesuits in the sixteenth century as well as later Catholic and Protestant missionaries, who tried to convert above all member of the lower castes, de Nobili set himself the task of converting Brahmins at the top of the social hierarchy. He applied a 'downward filtration theory' according to modern parlance (Lobo 1985: 18-19). In order to achieve his end he adopted a Brahminical way of life abjuring meat and fish and following also other rules of ritual purity. By wearing the ochre robe he wanted to be considered a renouncer. However, for earlier converted Syrian and Goan Christians their participation in the Hindu way of life has never been seen as problematic (Brown 1982; Godwin 1972). Even at present Christian villagers in Ramnad district Tamilnadu, are fully immersed in Hindu culture (Kjaerholm 1990-92: 38).

In the eighteenth century the Capuchin missionary Tessier denounced the Jesuits' missionary method starting the quarrel over 'Malabar rites' (Dharampal 1982), but in the twentieth century, especially after the Vatican Council II, the Roman Catholic Church became more tolerant of Hinduism and other religions. Protestant missionaries too, who had earlier demanded a radical break with Hinduism – some priests are said to have obliged their converts to eat beef – now adopt a more positive view of Hindu beliefs and practices.

The present-day discussion of inculturation 'refers to an encounter whose outcome is a convergence that does not replace either of the cultures from which it arose' (Angrosino 1994: 825). But acculturation or syncretism, *i.e.* a give and take of religious ideas between South Asia and Europe, has doubtlessly also occurred. The monastic institution almost certainly spread to the

West from Buddhist South Asia. The very Christian desire for salvation or liberation from sin seems to me the Hindu desire for liberation from rebirth (*mokṣa*) adapted from a cyclic view of time to a linear one. On the other hand, the worship of child Kṛṣṇa that began in the Middle Ages, might well have been inspired by the worship of baby Jesus. I am not the first to notice the similarity between Herodes and Kṛṣṇa's murderous uncle Kamsa. The medieval Śaiva Siddhanta's stress on grace strongly recalls Agostinian grace. In this religious philosophy 'Śiva's whole creative and redemptive activity is one of grace and love' Dhavamony writes (1971: 273). This could not have been said of older conceptions of Śiva as the destroyer or of the ferocious Durgā and Narasiṃha.

Ritual is the field of inculturation preferred by the Vatican. Hansen (1986: 252-53) gives a list of ten adaptations which were approved by Rome in 1969. These include sitting on the floor and removing footwear during Mass and 'touching the object with one's fingers or palms of one's hands and bringing the hands to one's eyes or forehead' instead of kissing it. Not mentioned in the list is the age-old use of unfermented grape juice and the Christian wife's *tāli* ('marriage badge') on which a cross is engraved. Diehl (1974: 81) observes that Roman Catholic Christians wear the amulet *tāyattu*, which shows the image of the Virgin, a saint or Jesus in place of a *mantra*. I can add that at Velankanni the Western handshake at the end of Mass is replaced by the *añjali* gesture and the ostensory is carried in procession under a ritual umbrella in accordance with a Hindu expression of respect for deities. To this day, framed pictures of the Velankanni *cakra* (pl. I) or *yantra*, first described by Kjaerholm (1990-92: 48-54) are sold near the church. The spectacular fusion of Christian and Hindu concepts on it comprise the *om* sign ending in a cross.

The *Aikiya Alayam*, the most ardent proponent of inculturation in Tamilnadu, goes further in its fusion of symbols, since it combines a cross with the Hindu *om*, the Buddhist wheel and the Muslim lunar crescent and star (fig. 1) (AACC 1996, Dec.: 2). While Hindus like to start their writings with the Piḷḷaiyār curl in honour of the elephant-god, in a story by Rajanarayanan (1975: 19) a Christian woman traces a cross at the head of her letter, a habit certainly not invented by the writer. Of course, Hindus too may inculture Christian forms. A design of the devil in a book on Tamil folktales (Muthiah 1990: 168) shows him with goat horns as in the Western tradition and with Kālī-like protruding teeth.

Art and architecture are other choice fields of inculturation. For instance, the AA (1993) contains a statue of the Virgin dressed in a saree, standing on a lotus and surrounded by the ornamental arch *tiruvāci*. Hansen (1986: 254-59) reproduces copper plates in which the position assumed by Christ is inspired by the figure of Śiva. I can add that in a relief on the wooden door of Tiruputtur church (pl. II) the crucified Christ is overshadowed by a tree, a common way of representing Hindu deities. The same church also has a gate-tower (*gopuram*) topped by a cross (pl. III). Of course, reinterpretations are not lim-

ited to Indian Christians. The cross on a Christian church suggests to the Tamil writer Mauni (1991: 118) arms stretched out in benediction.



Fig. 1 – Fusion of religious symbols in the emblem of *Aikiya Alayam* ('Temple of unity').

Christian music and dance have incultured forms too. The Tamil religious songs broadcast by Vatican Radio sometimes have *raga* style and sometimes mix Western and Indian musical systems. A particularly beautiful form of inculturation has been devised by Francis Barboza¹ who expresses the Christian message in *Bhārata nāṭya* dance (fig. 2). In order to do this he has created additional gestures, such as those for the Church and the risen Christ.

Written literature also offers an opportunity to inculture Christian figures. Several Indian Christian authors composed *piḷḷai tamil* for baby Jesus depicting the stages of his life in traditional poetic form (Richman 1997: 171-89). Just as the Hindu *piḷḷai tamil* is not limited to Kṛṣṇa, whose worship in child form is codified, so the Christian *piḷḷai tamil* extends to the Virgin conceived in child form (Thomas 1977).

Myth and legend equally reveal signs of inculturation. Food offerings to deities being a staple of Hindu worship the offering of milk by cows and humans frequently occurs in Hindu temple legends (Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi 1987). A legend of Ārōkkiya Mātā ('Our Lady of Health') at Velankanni ech-

¹ 'Christian Themes in Bharata Natyam', paper read at the '14th European Conference on Modern South Asian Studies', Copenhagen 1996.

oes these *stala purāṇas* (pl. IV). It tells of the Virgin holding the infant Jesus in her arms who asks a lame boy for some curd to quench her child's thirst. As soon as he complies with her request his leg is cured (*CI* 1971: 436-37). Various legends surround St. Thomas, who is believed to have been the first missionary in South India and to have died there as a martyr. One of these legends makes him a carpenter who gave the money with which he was to build a palace for the king to the poor (Brown 1982: 44). This detail recalls the legend of Māṇikkavācakar who gave the money with which he was to buy horses for the king to a holy man (Aracu 1972: 342-48). In another legend about St. Thomas reported by Marco Polo the apostle was accidentally shot to death by an arrow that a low-caste archer had aimed at a peacock (Brown 1982: 44). This tale is undoubtedly inspired by the myth of Kṛṣṇa who was accidentally shot by a tribesman. Of course, Hindu mythology too may be influenced by Christian themes. The very death of the great god Kṛṣṇa, unique in Hindu mythology, might be another instance of Christian influence. To cite just one more example, Fr. Clooney draws attention to similarities between Nammālvār's spiritual journey and the Christian tradition (*AACC* 1996, Dec.: 4).

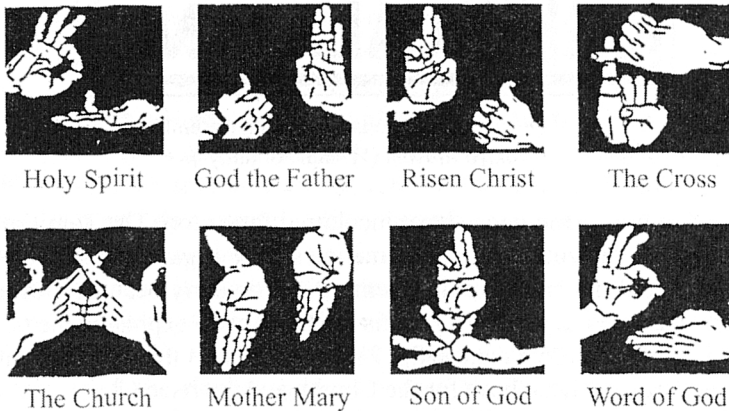


Fig. 2 – New *hastas* invented by Fr. Francis Barboza SVD to depict Christian themes in Bhārata Nāṭya.

Myth as a part of language brings me to purely linguistic inculturation. For centuries both Roman Catholic and Protestant missionaries mainly relied on prestigious Sanskrit terms to translate Christian conceptions. To this day both denominations call their religious retreat ashram and employ the profoundly Hindu syllable *om*. However, the Protestants seem to have been more preoccupied with selecting terms familiar to the converts and yet not too much burdened with specific Hindu associations as Tiliander (1974: 106) writes. Therefore, this Protestant missionary proposes to substitute 'assumption of body' (*uṭampeṭuttal*) for *avatāra* and rejects the term *pūjā* (Tamil *pūcai*) as

too connected with idol worship, while these are freely used by the Catholic Church. The Catholics' greater readiness to couch the Christian message in traditional Hindu terms might be explained by the fact that Catholicism, which includes the rite of pilgrimage, renouncers (monks and nuns) and belief in saints, is already closer to Hindu thought than Protestantism. The Christian chariots drawn by devotees with great effort in present-day Tamilnadu (Punzo Waghorn 1999: 96-116) are modelled on the Hindu *tēr*, to be sure, but they differ also little from Catholic processions in Mediterranean countries, in particular the dangerous carrying of the heavy *macchina di Santa Rosa* (a towering statue of the saint) at Viterbo, in Italy, and the spectacular processions taking place in Spain during the holy week.

Both Catholic and Protestant Tamils have begun to oust Sanskrit terms in favour of purely Dravidian ones in accordance with the government's language policy. This tendency, which recalls the short-lived Nazi-German attempt to oust words of Latin origin in favour of Germanic ones, is evident in the Tamil programmes of Vatican Radio. For instance, baptism originally translated verbatim as *ñāṇasnānam* ('bath of knowledge') is now increasingly called *tirumuḷukku* ('holy dip'). *Tirupolivu* rather than *mata pōtanai* or *upatēcam* now mostly translates sermon. Rejection of the Brahmin dialect replete with Sanskrit words and adoption of generic non-Brahmin speech extends to non-ritual terms employed by Vatican Radio. For typographical reasons the Sanskrit word *varuṣam* ('year') may be written as *varuṭam* without changing the pronunciation but it is now actually pronounced as *varuṭam* to please non-Brahmin listeners not conversant with Sanskrit phonetics. The interview first translated by the Urdu word *pēṭī* is gradually coming to be called *nēr-mukam* ('close-face'), a Tamil-Sanskrit compound, and even *nēr-kāṇal* ('close seeing'), a purely Tamil compound.

The examples given above incultured only the Christian language without affecting the Christian creed, but there are also cases in which the terminology seems to reveal an adaptation to Hindu ways of thinking. When death is metaphorically expressed as 'reaching the feet of God', the image is borrowed from liberation according to Hindu religious dualism; when a deceased Catholic sister is said to have attained *mahā samādhi* (AsA 1996, April: 9) the term carries a host of yogic and other Hindu associations and when somebody dying is described as 'offering himself by ritually pouring water' (*tannai tārai vārtta*) the image is taken from the Hindu custom of making a ritual gift.

Calling the present age *kali yuga* (VR 19.8.1995) reveals a still closer adherence to Hindu thought. Of course, even though the Christian West has no *yuga* cycle, the decline of the family in the West and the increase of drug abuse have also led Western Christians to speak of this age as degraded, thus making seem *kali yuga* a perfectly appropriate term. When in announcing the imminent birth of Christ it is said that 'God wants to become man' (VR 14.12.1997) it attributes to God the desire for his own incarnation rather than

his desire to send his son. This slight shift of meaning, which does not contradict the Christian message, is likely inspired by the Hindu concept of *avatāra* and the *advaita* view of life germs desirous of becoming human again, as expounded in Ramamirtham's novel 'The son' (1965).

Contrary to village Hinduism dominated by goddesses and the Śaktic form of great tradition Hinduism that makes woman supreme, in Christianity not even the Virgin is considered on a par with either her son or God the father. However, since lovingness and protectiveness are also part of the Western mother image, it does not seem far fetched to speak of 'God as Feminine', as Fr. S. Joseph has entitled his Ph.D. thesis. Toning down the novelty of his metaphor he cites the fourteenth century English mystic Julian of Norwich, for whom God was father, mother, spouse, friend and brother, Pope John Paul I, who announced in 1978 that 'God is father; still more God is Mother' and Pope John Paul II, who permitted the use of the mother image for God (1994).

The hitherto untapped source of information on the inculturation or Indianization of Christianity are didactic ten-minute plays produced in Tamilnadu and broadcast by Vatican Radio once a week. Off and on taping these plays I have arrived at a *corpus* of nearly 500. The inculturation discernible in them does not have the striking character of some ritual forms. However, while not all Christian rituals in India may be entirely approved of by the Roman Catholic Church, the incultured Christian message in the Vatican plays shows how far the official Church is willing to go. These plays share the Hindu reformers' social concern and focus on values common to Christians and Hindus. Some values upheld are not those of the modern Westerner but they are usually compatible with Christian morality, even though this compatibility may be more with the Old Testament than the New one.

The study will be divided into the discussion of plays with a family setting and plays dealing with public matters. It will also point out explicit or implicit adherence to Tiruvalluvar's moral teachings and deal with the Indianization of Biblical stories.

A) PRIVATE OR *AKAM* THEMES

When dealing with the subject matter of Tamil literature the distinction between *akam* ('private') and *puram* ('public') adopted in ancient Tamil poetry suggests itself immediately. Although in the Vatican plays this distinction cannot be clear-cut: private themes may have public consequences and public matters may occur in a family setting, the ancient Tamil model will serve as a convenient approximation.

Given the decline of the family ethos in Italy and other Western countries the Pope is doing his best to defend family values. In India there is no need to stress the importance of the family anew. It has always been recognized and is

reflected in both written and oral Tamil literature from ancient times to the present. With this double Christian and Hindu background the predominance of family themes in the Vatican plays does not come as a surprise. Of course, the family problems that may arise and the values that have to be defended are sometimes typically Indian.

I. The Arranged Marriage

1. The Dowry Evil

The plays recognize that most Christian marriages are arranged like their Hindu counterparts. In the context of the arranged marriage they never tire of denouncing the dowry evil. They praise those who refuse to pay or accept dowry and criticize those who continue to ask for it or who are willing to pay. They also chastise people for celebrating potlatch-like weddings that may put the bride's parents in debt. 'The woman Vairam's firm resolution' (VR 27.2.1991) belongs to the first praiseworthy category. The Tamil title *Vairattin vairākiyam* contains a pleasing alliteration and also a metaphoric correspondence between the hardness of the diamond (*vairam*) and the firmness of the mother's resolution. The mother named Vairam is determined not to pay dowry for her daughter even though her financial situation would allow it. But she is willing to give her daughter jewellery and kitchen utensils, gifts called *strīdanam*. Luckily she learns of a young man who has vowed not to ask for dowry. Both the groom and the mother are upheld as examples to be followed.

While *strīdanam* that remains the wife's personal property even after her marriage is unobjectionable, dowry considered a social evil refers to payments made to the groom and his family either to compensate his parents for the financial sacrifice they made to have him study in order to obtain a well-paid job, which will also benefit his future wife, or to pay for their daughter's dowry. Unfortunately, as long as higher education is expensive and marriages are arranged it is unlikely that the law forbidding dowry can be enforced and the well-meaning propaganda against it in all medias can be successful.

In the play 'Love is wealth' (VR 12.11.1991) the son bows to his father's request to renounce his bride and marry a rich dowry-bringing girl, so that he can find a wealthy husband for his own daughter. The future father-in-law is unusually generous and pays even more than the requested dowry. Thanks to the youth's sacrifice his sister is married in great style but she soon returns home repudiated because her dowry was black money. Shortly afterwards the police arrive to arrest her brother. The father exclaims 'What trial!' (*cōṭaṇai*), but his son corrects him: 'No, it was punishment (*taṇṭaṇai*)' (for having forsaken his bride). Another brother even becomes a smuggler for his sister's sake (VR 10.3.1992).

In 'Not telling the truth' (VR 8.12.1998) objection to dowry takes on a

form akin to the rhetoric strategy of praising while seeming to denigrate and denigrating while seeming to praise. The man who asks for dowry has no intention to accept it. This is the first instance of positive falsehood of which I shall say more in chap. C, even though in this case it cannot be said to pursue a didactic purpose. The groom who had first asserted that he will not accept any dowry then asks his father to request a considerable sum. He knows that by doing so the marriage arrangement will be broken off without any dishonour for his prospective bride who will thus be able to marry the other man she loves. Besides, renouncing dowry he himself will be able to ask her elder sister in marriage for whom he has caught a fancy when going to see his prospective bride.

2. Other Problems

In some plays the arranged marriage provides the context in which to criticize moral defects other than money-mindedness. In 'The old bridegroom' (VR 14.9.1993) gossip is the bad habit chastised.

A free-lance marriage broker arranged a girl's marriage to a widower. Not knowing that her husband was the broker his gossiping wife insults the girl's mother because she has given her daughter to a man as his second wife. Hearing this, the girl's father asks the broker to give back the commission he paid him because he has shamed his family. The broker, who had bought with the money a necklace for his wife, now orders her to hand it over to the broker. She is punished for her bad tongue by the loss of her jewellery. Unlike the widow the widower is not considered inauspicious and there is no prohibition against his remarriage but marrying a widower is no honourable matter for a girl. Although well-known to the people concerned and treated in written Tamil literature (cf. Ramamirtham 1972: 136-148) this fact is usually overlooked by the outside observer concerned only about the high caste widow's plight.

The Tamil language has a saying 'What is seen is false, what is heard is false, only what is thoroughly investigated is true'. The first part of this saying is the title of a play (VR 11.5.1999) that warns against rashness in the context of the arranged marriage. Unfortunately, the Indian habit of talking and thinking fast sometimes results in rashness. This well-known characteristic is emblematically expressed through the Pāṇṭiyaṇ king who rashly condemned an innocent merchant to death in the epic *Cilappatikāram* as well as in pan-Indian folktales about the faithful dog and the helpful mongoose rashly killed by their masters. In the play parents are arranging their daughter's marriage to a youth believed to have a good job with a newspaper company in town. News reaches them that he begs, pretending to be blind and another time sells fish. About to stop their marriage arrangement they are relieved to learn that the director of the newspaper has asked the prospective groom, whom he knows is a talented actor, to play the blind beggar and the fish-monger to find out how much they may earn per day.

The arranged marriage normally comprises the rite in which the future groom goes to see his prospective bride (*peṇ pārttal*). In one play a young man amuses himself by going 'to see the girl' and then refusing to marry her. Although his friend tries to make him give up this bad habit he goes to see another girl with the same cruel intention. However, the prospective bride, who happens to be the friend of the last girl he shamed, teaches him a lesson. After asking him about his studies and salary she points out that she has a higher degree and earns more than he. She therefore refuses to marry him. The shamed youth's friend is so pleased with the brave girl that he comes forward to marry her himself (VR 9.1.1996).

Retracting one's promise after the betrothal ceremony is also considered morally wrong. When the prospective bride is badly burnt in a fire accident after her betrothal, the groom's mother does not want her any more claiming that the girl must be inauspicious, but would accept her if her dowry were increased. In a classical change of perspective, as in the folktale of the king who hurt himself on seeing the first person in the morning, the son asks whether it might not rather be he who has brought bad luck to his bride. He also points out to his mother that if he now rejected his bride he would lose his honour and perhaps also his job (VR 22.2.1994).

'Wounds and scars' (VR 16.3.1988) takes up the subject of cross cousin marriage in which a brother and sister may have pledged to marry their children to each other even before they are born. In the play the girl objects to marrying her cross cousin because he is a drunkard. The vengeful drunkard decides to force her to marry him. He asks a friend, whom he has often invited to join in his drinking bouts, to spread the false news that the girl has been seen in amorous contact with him. The mother had hesitated to give her daughter to the drunkard, but thinking her reputation ruined now consents to the marriage. Triumphant, the groom tells his bride that to celebrate his wedding he has been drinking six litres rather than the daily one. He also sarcastically remarks that a stain on the man's reputation can be blown away like dust but on the woman's reputation it is like an unhealing wound. In reply the bride hits him with an axe so that his wound too will not heal any more.

Although the arranged marriage is mostly no love marriage the young may nevertheless pose conditions, some of which may sound strange to a Westerner. In 'You must come' (VR 12.11.1996) the younger sister refuses to get married if her elder sister does not come to her wedding. The angry elder sister had declined to attend because her parents are now paying a higher dowry than they gave to her husband thereby shaming him. In order not to ruin her sister's marriage and family harmony the offended woman changes her mind. In this play dowry as such is not contested but seeming partiality in paying it. It turns out that there was not partiality. The parents had simply not been wealthy enough to pay more at their first daughter's marriage.

II. *The Unarranged Marriage*

1. The Love Marriage

The unarranged marriage is almost by definition a love marriage. In 'Dreams are not shattered' (VR 25.1.1989) the daughter contracts a love marriage against her parents' wish and leaves with her husband for Merut. Her mother soon forgives her but her father refuses to do so until his death. When the mother learns that a relative goes to Merut she asks him to inquire about her beloved daughter, since the letters she wrote to her have all returned. Finding the young woman in great poverty the relative advises her to accept her mother's financial help. Too proud to admit that her husband has not been able to achieve what they have dreamt he would she refuses.

But she adds that she still hopes their dreams will come true one day. The relative admires her confidence and promises to tell her mother that he could not find her. This play is remarkable because it stresses the Tamils' strong sense of shame and honour. It is also remarkable because of the characters' obstinacy (cf. Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi 2002: 19, 174-75). While the father's obstinate refusal to forgive is implicitly criticized, no criticism is raised against the daughter's obstinate refusal to admit her error, which causes great sorrow to her mother and prevents her own family's financial well-being. This obstinacy is condoned in the name of honour and shame.

The preceding love marriage may or may not have been an intercaste marriage, which is approved by Indian Christians in principle. In 'This is mixture' (*Itu t̃āṇ kalappaṭam*; VR 13.10.1998) the father who adulterates food (*kalappaṭam* = adulteration, mixture) is made to agree to his son's intercaste marriage (*kalappuṭ tirumaṇam*) when the son tells him he likes mixture. This argument also convinces the father to stop his bad habit.

2. Marriage as Self-sacrifice

In the Vatican plays the most striking aspect of the unarranged marriage, sometimes combined with arrangement, is marriage conceived as self-sacrifice. Although sacrifice belongs to the highest Christian values, Western Christians would not normally think of marriage as an occasion for sacrifice, but Indian young men and women may do so.

Some forms of selfless Indian marriages are well known. Gandhi exhorted young men to marry widows and other underprivileged women. Following this recommendation a Vatican play (10.9.1996) presents a social reformer who comes forward to marry a young widow. After some objections her father agrees to the marriage.

This social conscience is a modern development but another type of marriage as possible self-sacrifice has a long history, since it is connected with the role of the mother's brother in the Indian family. After the mother's death

during delivery, or for some other reason, her maternal uncle often takes charge of her child. Given the preference for cross cousin marriage he then expects his nephew to marry one of his daughters. In 'The god who sacrificed his love' (VR 15.10.1996) the nephew decides to renounce the girl Rosy he loves and marry his cross cousin, since she has already attempted suicide and needs protection. He also does so because he knows that his seriously ill uncle will not be able to take care of her much longer. Endowed with the same spirit of sacrifice Rosy approves of this decision. Another youth declines his manager's offer to give him his daughter in marriage and make him his successor because he feels obliged to marry the mentally retarded daughter of his maternal uncle who brought him up. The manager is impressed by his spirit of sacrifice and makes him his successor all the same (VR 27.9.1994).²

Even more striking from a Western point of view are plays in which a young man offers to marry a girl out of remorse, not remorse for having made her pregnant, as Westerners might suspect, but because of the guilt he feels towards her father or some other person. Unable to correct his friend, one young man thinks it his duty to denounce him for having discredited a girl in an anonymous letter. But denouncing a friend is immoral. Therefore, to make up for this bad action, he marries the slandered girl (VR 20.10.1998).

The play 'Light comes at dawn' (VR 13.7.1988) is perhaps the most curious case of marriage as atonement. A youth is suspected of having killed an old man and stolen his money. He denies that he killed the man but admits that he stole his money to be able to marry off his sister. The deceased's daughter confirms that her father died of a heart attack. On the thief's release from prison he promises never to steal again and offers to marry her as 'right penance' (*cariyāna parikāram*).

Even vicarious atonement is conceivable. During a girl's wedding ceremony the police arrive to arrest her dishonest father. This induces the groom and his family to leave and thrusts the father into despair, not so much because he has to go to jail but because his daughter's marriage is ruined. The official who discovered the father's fault now consolingly tells him that he will marry his own son to the girl (VR 1.12.1998).

All these cases of men who think of their marriage as a form of self-sacrifice or atonement can only occur in a culture in which marriage is considered an indispensable stage of life, above all for women. Consequently, every man by marrying a girl performs the meritorious deed of 'giving her life', as explicitly stated in the case of the social reformer who marries a widow.

In the Vatican plays women do not lag behind men in considering marriage a possible occasion for self-sacrifice. I do not mean the arranged marriage itself, as some Western readers might suspect, since most Indian girls are

² For Hindu literary instances of the same theme see Ramamirtham (1966: 26-55; 1978: 22-41); Karthigesu (1999).

only too glad if their parents find a husband for them. However, given their conviction that men too desire nothing more than getting married they may offer to marry a handicapped man.

In 'Beast and man' (VR 17.3.1992) a youth wants to revenge himself on the girl who swore she loved him but then abruptly left to marry somebody else. He intends to tell her husband how he courted her, but finds him already knowing everything, confined to a wheelchair. The youth no longer harbours any ill feelings against his erstwhile love but states that his desire to marry her was egoistic like that of a beast, while her marriage was a sacrifice as it becomes a human being.

The protagonist of 'The beauty of the soul' (*Maṇa alaku*; VR 1.8.2000) is a nurse who renounces her marriage to a well-earning cousin in the U.S. and comes forward to marry the doctor whose face has been disfigured in an accident.

Like love marriages, sacrificial marriages tend to be contracted without asking the parents' consent. The heroine of 'An emblem of selflessness' (*Tiyāka cuṭar*; VR 27.5.1998) first sacrifices her earnings and possible dowry to make her brother study. Then having grown too old for marriage according to Indian standards she accepts a job away from home. However, after some time she suddenly writes her parents that she has married. First angry at their daughter because of her autonomous decision, the parents change their minds and praise her when they learn that she has married a colleague who lost a leg in the war.

A Western woman too may marry a handicapped man because she loves him, but several women in the Vatican plays marry out of compassion, not love. This motif is not limited to Indian Christians. In one of Marina's comedies (1980) the groom is asked whether he felt love at first sight for the girl he married. He denies it saying that it was 'pity at first sight' on seeing her sad face when she learnt that it was not her horoscope that perfectly matched his.

III. Marital Life

1. Post-marital Payments

As is well-known the failure to pay the remaining dowry may result in the wife's repudiation or murder. In the hundreds of Vatican plays consulted, I have found only one planned dowry death averted by a courageous doctor by a hair's breadth (VR 16.8.1994). This relative lack of interest in dowry death is probably due to the fact that in cross cousin and other preferential marriages common in the whole of Dravidian South India dowry may sometimes be nominal or absent, while in North India, where marriage within the family is forbidden, the dowry is all-important.

As in the case of pre-marital dowry the plays praise those who refuse to make them and chastise those who do. 'Strength of mind' (VR 1.2.1989) praises a young pregnant wife sent back to her native home until she brings the remain-

ing dowry. In order to save her marriage her parents buy her a precious necklace with great financial sacrifice. She, however, adamantly refuses to accept it saying that since she wears her husband's *tāli* and carries his child in her womb she will wait until he comes to fetch her back without additional payment.

In 'He did it' (*Avanē kāraṇam*; VR 22.11.1994) punishment for having insisted on post-marital payment takes on a curious round-about way. Obeying his father's order, the husband repudiates his pregnant wife because she did not bring the whole dowry. Adding to the wife's sorrow her child dies. In order to offer her some distraction her brother sends her to relatives in town. In the meantime her husband has repented and goes to town to search for her. There his rich friend, who killed a woman in a car accident, asks him to say that he drove the car because having to attend to urgent business he cannot lose time with the police. He asserts that given his influence he will make the matter drop easily by proving that the accident was the woman's fault. However, the victim turns out to be the repudiated wife and the police conclude that her death was no accident but murder. Now the guilty friend wants to tell the truth but the husband prevents him from doing so. He will receive just punishment because he has morally killed his wife by repudiating her.

It is against the law to ask for dowry but it is also morally wrong not to keep one's promise. Seeing that his father has failed to give the full dowry he had promised to his son-in-law the son comes forward to pay the rest. He re-baptises the payment as a gift to the unborn grandson so that the money can be temporarily passed on to his brother-in-law (VR 12.1.1993).

2. The Husband's Rights

The Bible does not forbid the husband to command and the wife to obey, but the extent and forms of the husband's dominance in the Vatican plays would not be approved in the modern West. The plays compare marriage to a cart pulled jointly by two bulls or to a scale (VR 1.8.1995), but in actual fact they defend the Indian tradition which does not give equal rights to husband and wife. This does not mean that they do not condemn husbands who interpret their rights in a despotic sense. Repudiating a wife for no fault of hers is only one of his possible faults. Under financial stress a husband threatens to send his wife back to her native home if she does not throw their newborn baby into a dustbin. Wisely, she gives the baby to a barren friend. Years later the husband deplores the fact that he has no son (VR 14.11.1995).

One play punishes the husband for his jealousy and rashness. Since his in-laws did not agree to his marriage he orders his wife to sever all ties to her native home. He even reproaches her for shouting '*appā*' ('father') in pain. When his little son tells him that a stranger has come to see his mother he rashly concludes that he must be her lover and kills her. Learning that the man was her brother who brought her money from partition of the family property he is inconsolable (VR 17.8.1988).

Husbands are also criticized for becoming overbearing after they obtain wealth and high office. One husband even slaps his country wife who comes to his office simply dressed since she brings shame on his new position of superintendent. Later he repents and asks forgiveness, but she replies that it is his right to vent his anger at her (VR 19.5.1998).

Increasingly Tamil wives work outside the house, which may even be required, as life-long dowry one character sarcastically remarks (VR 25.8.98), but such work also brings problems. One working wife's husband has to be convinced that it is not demeaning to help her in the house (VR 22.4.1996). Another husband leaves his wife because without his permission she took an exam, thus raising her income above his. In order to cure his inferiority complex a colleague takes him to a family in which the wife, a bank manager, devotedly serves her husband, a simple clerk. A wife may occupy a high social position outside the house but at home the husband must command, the colleague states (VR 1.8.1995). In order to earn more than his wife a further husband is induced to commercial spying. However, as in didactic folktales about cheated cheats (Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi 2002: 123-24) instead of being given high office he is given a good flogging. His manager comments: 'It is natural that the husband wants to earn more than his wife but he must do so honestly' (VR 6.6.2000).

A husband may be punished for cheating but not necessarily for beating his wife. One wife whom her husband has left with a friend during his absence turns out to be overly exacting. When the host's wife complains to her husband about the financial sacrifices she has to make, he slaps her for her lack of hospitality. Learning what has happened the husband beats his arrogant wife on his return. The friend's mother comments that he has done well (VR 23.2.1993). Of course, the arrogant guest merited reproach but justifying blows can only occur in a culture in which the husband has the right to administer corporeal punishment to his wife.

In 'Intestine war' (VR 4.8.1998) another matron expresses joy on learning that her daughter, who took refuge in her native home, has been beaten by her husband because this means that he still cares for her. Decades ago in a similar situation her own husband did not beat her but decided not to talk to her any more. He has kept up his decision and still gives her orders only through their children. These words make the beaten young wife return to her husband ruefully. The old man's extraordinary obstinacy is not criticized.

3. The Wife's Duty

Christianity and Hinduism perfectly agree that the wife must love and cherish her husband and be faithful to him, but as we have already seen and shall see over and over again Indian culture expects from the wife a degree of submissiveness that has no parallel in the modern West.

The Christian playwrights are realistic enough to recognize that not all wives correspond to the traditional ideal. For instance an egoistic doctor's wife

who objects to the fact that her husband is more concerned about his patients' health than about going out with her is made to repent when a neighbouring doctor saves her father during his honeymoon ('A doctor's wife'; VR 1989).

Wives may also be overly status-conscious. Waiting to compete with a well-to-do neighbour one wife buys all sorts of luxury goods on credit. Observing that their level of wealth is incompatible with the husband's salary, the husband is suspected of having stolen office money. Until the misunderstanding is cleared up he is imprisoned and his wife cured of her bad habit (VR 28.4.1998). Other wives feel ashamed of the husband's lowly work. One wife induces her peon husband to pretend to be an officer and is discovered (VR 29.3.1994). Another wife would like her husband, a good cook, to study in order to take a white-collar job. To punish her he accepts the position of cook in Dubai thus leaving her alone for several years (VR 27.5.1997).

Some wives are shown to be money-minded to such an extent that they instigate their husbands to accept bribes (VR 29.4.1997). One even leaves her incorruptible husband (VR 11.1.1989). Another wife threatens to leave her husband and return to her native home if he does not buy her a silk saree. Steeped in sorrowful thoughts he is not careful in traffic and dies in an accident. A neighbour sarcastically remarks that instead of a silk saree she will now get a widow's white one (VR 21.12.1999).

The preceding wives would also be criticized in the West, but one has to be corrected only in Indian culture. She engages a young widowed country-woman as a cook and servant. Her husband first objects because she is a widow but is then seen talking to her confidentially. The wife suspects that he is betraying her, but he has only tried to convince the maid to marry a widowed colleague. He tells his wife that he does not want to betray her; she, however, has done wrong. A maid may cook but it is the wife's duty to serve the food to her husband, which she has neglected (VR 8.9.1992).

The majority of wives in the Vatican plays, however, are praise-worthy. In order not to hurt her husband's feelings, one wife tries to hide the fact that his sterility and not hers is responsible for their childlessness (VR 3.8.1993). Another wife renounces fame and money in order to live only for her husband (VR 7.5.1996). On her husband's return to her the earlier mentioned wife offered to resign the well-paid job that had caused his inferiority complex.

Particularly interesting is one battered wife's argument. Contrary to her office colleagues who sulk for weeks and months when mistreated by their husbands, she forgives him immediately. She argues that women must be tolerant because they have a stronger mind than men. In proof of her words she points out that men tend to get drunk, take drugs and commit adultery while women have no such weaknesses (VR 4.3.1997). Her colleagues are persuaded by this argument, which idiosyncratically interprets the Hindu concept of *śakti* ('energy' or 'power') vested in woman not man, without mentioning the term.

Equally without mentioning the term the plays dwell on the concept of

pattini, the wife whose absolute devotion to her husband confers special power on her. Contrary to written and oral Tamil literature, the Christian devoted wife's power is not magical, but she is nevertheless convinced that she will one day be able to correct her husband. The strength of this conviction is not derived from experience, since more than twenty wives in my *corpus* have tried to do so in vain. Several husbands are eventually corrected, but through other means as we shall see in chapter C.

Some wives do succeed in their correcting mission. A jobless husband who wanted to keep the money purse he found in front of the church finally accepts his wife's advice to hand it over to the priest. Remarking how happy the loser will be and congratulating him on his honesty the priest offers him the permanent job of church electrician (VR 5.1.1999). In other cases the wife's extreme devotion to her husband succeeds in making him change. One wife gives her savings to her husband who has repudiated her (VR 28.11.1995), another one implores the police to set her husband free for once (VR 26.5.1992); a third one bears the blow rowdies have intended for her husband, even though he had wanted to send her to her relative home on learning that she has TB (VR 4.5.1993).

The Christian playwrights' belief in the correcting power of a devoted wife is so strong that they even make it work indirectly. Ashamed of his wife whose skin has become full of white patches, a manager casts his eye on a married office worker and goes to her home. She seems to be alone, but then a man arrives who asks for chocolate. He is her husband whose mind has become deranged. She has tried every known medicine and still hopes that he will be cured. The manager is impressed and offers her any help she may need completely abandoning his adulterous intention. He tells his wife that God and her trust in him have protected him from betraying her. Thus two wives' devotion to their husband has succeeded in correcting him (VR 5.11.1993).

In the midst of all these models of devotion there are a few wives whose ideas of justice flout both normal Christian and Hindu values. According to Western law, close family members are not required to testify against one another, but in these aberrant Vatican plays the wife spontaneously denounces her husband. In one case it might be argued that she does so to save other children, since her husband adulterates children's medicine and she believes that their childlessness is punishment for his crime. She denounce him under tears stating that she will patiently wait for him until he is released and reformed (VR 16.6.1998).

Another aberrant play is even more striking and is no oversight, since it has been broadcast twice in slightly different versions. A helpful man who finds a person who has fainted in a traffic accident and takes him to hospital is accused of having stolen money from the victim's purse. He vehemently denies this. His female lawyer proves that the woman who claims she observed the theft from afar cannot have possibly seen it, so she must have been bribed

to say what she has. Then the clever lawyer discovers that her own husband is the thief. He was the first to arrive at the place of accident and in a sudden impulse took the money from the unconscious man's purse and left him unattended. One might think that she could have limited herself to proving the helpful person's innocence and persuading her husband to secretly return the money. But she denounces him in court and thus shames him, an action other wives do their utmost to avoid. The first version of the story is entitled 'He who ate salt' (VR 15.2.1994) meaning that just as the one who eats salt must drink water so the one who committed a fault must be punished. The second version has the straightforward title 'He who committed a fault' (VR 13.2.1996). On being denounced the husband states that he is proud of his wife. At home he had earlier asserted that justice is more important than the individual.

IV. *Parents, Children and Grandchildren*

1. Parents and Small Children

Pregnancy cravings are known all over the world but their magical interpretation that they have to be fulfilled if one does not want to hurt the unborn baby is more common in India than the West and may extend also to things other than food. For this reason in a Vatican play a mother-in-law allows her pregnant daughter-in-law to go to see a film even though her son has forbidden his wife to do so. Caught in the crowd the pregnant woman falls and has a miscarriage (VR 7.2.1995).

In the West, too, marriage should have the purpose of begetting children, but only where motherhood is all important as in India can a barren woman be stigmatized as inauspicious and her desire to have a child reach paroxysm. The play 'Living in a vicious circle' (*Vaṭṭattukku! vāḷkkai*; VR 26.12.1995) attributes this indomitable desire to a medical doctor. Being denied motherhood she is so absorbed in observing other women's beautiful babies and deploring her lack of them that she forgets herself and fails to intervene in time. Paradoxically, she thus causes some babies' death. When reproached for her fault she tries to commit suicide but is saved by her husband. Henceforth she considers all children as her own children, a humanitarian solution also proposed in written Tamil literature (Jeyakanthan 1975: 85-99).

Since rising dowry costs have rendered daughters a financial liability the desire for male rather than female offspring has increased and the father may have to be dissuaded from killing his baby daughter (VR 3.12.1996). Desperate at the birth of a female child another father is consoled by a colleague who points out that women can also become important. Nothing has been heard of Gandhi's sons, while Nehru's daughter has become famous (VR 13.2.1991).

Not all Hindus agree on the legitimacy of abortion but objection to it is doubtlessly stronger among Catholics. 'The veiled woman' stresses this Chris-

tian view in curious Hindu guise. A medical doctor's pregnant wife, lovingly cared for by her husband, tries in vain to dissuade him from practising abortions in his private clinic. One day a veiled Muslim woman comes to the clinic asking for abortion and permanent sterilization. After the operation she turns out to be the doctor's wife (VR Aug. 1990). Leaving aside the plausibility of the story, the pregnant wife's decision can be conceived only in a culture in which the belief exists that by hurting oneself, one can hurt others. The doctor's wife probably saw no other way to make her husband stop killing other unborn babies. In order to punish and correct him she sacrificed her own motherhood and probably also her married life. Her decision recalls women who commit suicide hoping that their ghost will haunt the person who drove them to the desperate act, in particular the folktale of the toe-sister who before committing suicide cursed her ungrateful nephew to have no surviving children (Rajanarayanan 1992: 157-62). I must add that the story of the veiled woman does not seem strange to Indian Christians as it has been broadcast twice.

The Vatican plays also tell of parents who deeply love their children. In 'Self-sacrifice' (*Tiyākam*; VR 31.8.1993) coolie parents want their son to study in order to have a better life than they had themselves. Therefore they secretly put aside some money by eating less. In another play a poor mother forgives her boy who admits under tears that he has used the money for himself, which should have served to buy food for his mother and little sister as well (VR 11.2.1992).

Children too show touching love for their parents. Learning that her son roams around the railway station rather than go to school his mother beats him. She is deeply sorrow to learn that he has played truant in order to earn some money for her as a porter since he knows that she is ill and malnourished (VR 22.6.1993).

In the West handicapped children tend to be particularly pampered by their parents. This is not necessarily so in India, as both Tamil folktales and Vatican plays admit. In the latter a deformed boy is despised by all, including his mother, so she does not believe him when he tells her that he has seen his sister's intimacy with a man. The sister elopes steeping the mother in sorrow. The deformed boy's consoling words: 'But I shall always be with you' touch the mother's heart so that she asks him to forgive her (VR 29.8.1995).

A schoolboy's love for his parents inadvertently makes his father repent and give up his habit of drinking and beating his wife. To the teacher's question 'If God appeared in front of you, what boon would you request?' the son had replied 'A new father who does not make mother cry' (VR 21.7.1998). This play recalls the folk version of the Paraśurāma myth in which the son does not only ask the boon that his mother will be revived but also that his parents should live in harmony (Murukanandam 1991: 107-8). I have repeatedly referred to the folktone of the Christian plays. This similarity is not surprising since folktales are also mostly didactic and created in the same section of society.

Children may also indirectly teach their parents to forgive. Quarrelling neighbours are induced to make peace when they see how quickly their children become friends again after having beaten each other (VR 22.12.1992).

Among both Hindu and Christian Indians there is nothing wrong in disciplining children but strictness must have a limit otherwise children may run away (VR 13.7.1999). One play offers an alternative solution to harsh treatment of children. Rather than chasing away his son who played truant the father pleads with him and then tells him that neither he nor his mother want to eat in their sorrow. This typically Indian hunger strike morally coerces the son to go to school regularly (VR 10.8.1988).

One play teaches parents to understand that not all children have the same gifts. A schoolboy secretly makes clay statues of people including one of himself with a donkey's head because his parents always call him 'silly ass' seeing his bad marks. A renowned sculptor, however, defends him and tells his parents that their son's talent is a gift of God (VR 10.12.1996).

Some school teachers' educational methods too are shown to be wrong. Angry at a girl since she did not learn her Tamil lesson a teacher scolds her as being fit only to gather cow dung. These words make the girl's father rush to school and insult the teacher. Both he and the teacher are made to admit their fault (VR 22.9.1998). The reason why the girl did not study her lesson was that her father had reproached her for spending too much time on Tamil lessons. This play implicitly criticizes some parents' infatuation with English, which another play points out amusingly. After his promotion a father tyrannizes not only his wife but orders his son henceforth to call him 'stylishly' daddy. On realizing how wrong his actions were he retracts his order. His son should call him again *appā* in beautiful Tamil (VR 19.5.1998).

The Christian Tamil plays attach the highest importance to education but only for material purposes, in the hope that their offspring's standard of living will be higher than their own. This total lack of interest in the spiritual side of knowledge is noteworthy since de Nobili stressed precisely the Brahmins' spiritual knowledge in his missionary method. It also contrasts with frequent quotations of Tiruvalluvar who highly praises knowledge. In the play 'Self-sacrifice', mentioned before, the father lost two fingers in an accident but consoles himself thinking that his son will have two eyes opened through his study made possible thanks to his parents' sacrifice. His metaphor of eyes patently refers to a famous couplet of the *Tirukkural* in which writing and counting are said to be eyes in a praise of learning as such.

While some plays criticize parents for being too strict or over protective, others point out the opposite error. A bank manager is always busy with office work and his wife with her social engagements such as participating in a ladies' club contest of *kōlam* (ornamental and auspicious designs) drawing. They therefore refuse to attend a school celebration in which their son will receive a prize. The cook has pity on the boy and offers to accompany him. The

boy gladly accepts the offer and makes him wear his father's suit. The cook nearly betrays himself when a teacher asks the false manager for a job for his son. The misunderstanding becomes even more comic (this is one of the few humorous Vatican plays) when the teacher finds the manager working in the garden and takes him for a servant. Learning that the cook had posed for him the manager wants to dismiss him, but changes his mind when the cook teaches him a moral lesson: children are like delicate flowers that must not be nipped (VR Aug.1990). This domestic play has a public social component since the servant teaches the master. In India this reversal usually refers to the rejection of the caste system, but it has also a Western parallel in Beaumarchais' 'Figaro's marriage'.

2. Parents and Grown-up Children

The plays also deal with the relation between parents and their grown-up children. A son who eloped with a woman is later abandoned by her when he catches TB. But his mother searches for him and there is tearful reconciliation between them (VR 24.6.1997).

Most grown-up sons and daughters are shown to obey their parents' wishes and even bow to their morally disputable orders. Occasionally, however, they may try to correct their parents. According to an Indian stereotype the wife is likely to induce her husband to leave his native family and set up a separate household with her. In one play, a mother tries to teach her daughter how to achieve this end. But the daughter reminds her that mothers should advise their daughters how to adapt to their husband and his family and not cause ill-feelings (VR 3.3.1992).

Just as a few wives consider the public good more important than their private interest so do some sons and daughters. One law-abiding son contrives to have his father arrested for his many criminal activities. One has to wash one's hands after having touched his account book, he states. But his decision also has another motif. The widowed father had threatened his accountant if he did not give him his daughter in marriage. The daughter, of whom the son is fond, wants to study rather than get married. When the father does not heed his son's warning that he will do something bad if he does not change his plan with regard to the girl, the son ostensibly changes a black money note and thus attracts the police (VR 30.11.1993).

3. Attitudes Towards the Aged

Probably everywhere in the world, if people had to choose between their parents and their children they would favour the latter, but the Tamils are particularly conscious of this asymmetry and treat it in written literature and folk narrative (Alakapuri 1975: 40-41; Rajanarayanan 1989: 23-24). In the Vatican play 'Only in one direction' the mother notices sadly and resigned that her son

always forgets to buy medicine for her while he buys all sorts of presents for his son and his wife. Nevertheless she keeps worrying about his health (VR 30.5.1995).

Other plays censure callous exploitation of aged parents. Since one of the sons needs his mother as a servant he does not allow her to go to see her husband who lives with the other son. The latter needs the father as a watchman and therefore does not tell him that the mother has become bedridden. Upon her death the father is inconsolable because he could not say good-bye to her. When he then hears his son complain about having to pay for the funeral he explodes in a terrible rage. He chases away his son and declares that he will light his wife's funeral pyre himself (VR 15.3.1994).

On the other hand, parents should help their grown-up children and not just let themselves be served. In one play the mother who has to be told this lesson is 55 years old.

Several plays criticize the grown-up children's money-mindedness. As in folktales, one good and loving son tends to be contrasted with the other bad sons and their wives (VR 25.2.1997). However, the surviving parent may also punish all loveless children by disinheriting them and moving to an old-age home (VR 1.2.1994).

Some plays limit themselves to picturing the undesirable situation without offering a solution. A hospitalized father who overhears his sons' callous talk pulls out his feeding tubes (VR 9.8.1994). 'The useless coin' (*Cellāk kācu*, literally 'the coin that does not pass because it is counterfeit') is a common metaphor for unwanted old parents. In a tragic play thus entitled (VR 14.12.1988) the retired father slaps his son for coming home drunk. His wife reproaches him in insulting terms saying that he who has become a 'useless coin' has no right to command any more. The father who made great financial sacrifices to have his son study is heart-broken and leaves his home. Whether he will live as a mendicant or commit suicide is left open.

While the relationship between grown-up children and aged parents may not always be ideal in real life and fiction, Tamil culture postulates special closeness between alternate generations and thus probably helps to create them. A young woman who is deeply grateful to her grandfather who brought her up will not leave him under any circumstances. Therefore, she renounces an advantageous marriage because her future husband and in-laws would put her grandfather into an old-age home. She is lucky to get her manager's support who offers to marry her and take the old man into his house (VR 24.3.1992).

The folk tone of many plays is particularly evident in this subject. One play is modelled exactly after a folktale in which the grandson wants to keep the miserable things his parents oblige his grandfather to use until they have become old and he can do so likewise (VR 11.1.1994). Other plays elaborate the theme of alternate generations more originally. For instance, parents fear that their daughter might have been kidnapped because she is carrying money.

But the daughter has taken the money to her grandfather whom she knows her parents neglect (VR 12.1.1999). One play criticizes loveless parents and praises a loving grandson with the help of a double meaning (VR 23.6.1998). When the boy's aged grandfather breaks his eye-glasses (*kaṇṇāṭi*) his parents claim they have no money to buy new ones, but his mother acquires a dressing table with a big mirror (*kaṇṇāṭi*). Hearing that his mother bought *kaṇṇāṭi* the boy is glad thinking that she means the grandfather's eye-glasses. When he sees the mirror he angrily breaks it reproaching his parents for not loving the old man as he does. With his own savings he then buys eye-glasses for his grandfather. His father is impressed by the boy's gesture and asks the grandfather's forgiveness. The latter comments: 'Now everything looks bright'.

V. Siblings, Uncles, Nephews and Nieces

The repeatedly mentioned folktone is audible also in a play on the relationship between brothers. In Tamil folktales at partition of ancestral property one brother tends to cheat the other but the cheated one ends up by being the winner thanks to magical or supernatural help. In the Vatican play with the alliterative title *Maṇṇum poṇṇākum* ('Even earth can become gold'; VR 9.7.1996), divine justice is believed to have brought about the positive result. At partition the younger brother is given worthless land, but then a flood destroys the crops raised on the elder brother's fertile land. Since the flood threatens to carry away the existing bridge, another bridge has to be built on the younger brother's worthless land for the expropriation of which he receives much money.

Of course, brothers may also be praised for their generosity (VR 18.2.1992). We have already seen instances in which the brother sacrifices himself for his sister by renouncing the girl he loves or committing crimes and risking imprisonment. However, brothers may also be less than kind to their sisters. One elder brother decides that his sister has to marry the man he has selected for her. When she refuses, mainly because she thinks it wrong to marry before her elder sister does, he feels offended and moves out of the joint family with his wife. Learning that the latter secretly keeps up contact with her in-laws he threatens to send her back to her native home. At that moment, however, his sister arrives promising that in order to re-establish peace in the family she is now ready to marry any man he propose. Strangely, this makes him change his mind and understand the selfless reason of her earlier refusal to get married (VR 5.5.1998).

If the sister is older than her brother she may care for him like a mother. In 'Certainty vanishes' (the alliterative title *niḷal ākum nijaṅkaḷ* literally means 'certainties become shadows'; VR 21.1.1992) a brother asks his married sister for a job in her husband's business company. He jokingly adds that if she

gives him this help he will wait for her unborn daughter to grow up so that he can marry her by reference to the uncle-niece marriage common in Tamilnadu. The sister promises to recommend him to her husband but then discredits him as he happens to overhear. He violently accuses her, but she insists he must first hear her reasons before condemning her. She has done so to prevent him from joining her husband's phoney company whose members will certainly go to jail one day (she is one of the wives who have vainly tried to correct their husband). Besides, when her husband is in jail she will need his protection. His fury transforms itself in gratitude.

We have already seen plays in which the nephew brought up by his maternal uncle thinks himself morally obliged to marry the latter's daughter. But the maternal uncle feels responsible for his nephews and nieces even without bringing them up. In one play with two versions there are two maternal uncles, one known to be kind, the other boorish. When the niece's husband gets into financial straights she asks the former for a loan and is refused. However, the rude uncle gives her the money as a gift rather than a loan since he could not give it at her wedding. The niece and her husband comment on the unpredictability of the human heart. The play is entitled 'Even a thorn can become a flower' (*Muḷḷum malarākum*; VR 1990). In the second version the rude but generous uncle is a drunkard. The moral upheld by the play is that one must not conclude from a person's one bad habit that he must be bad in all other circumstances ('A heart of stone'; VR 19.9.2000).

Of course, helpfulness is not restricted to maternal uncles. A paternal uncle gives sound pieces of advice to his nephew who has come to the village to take up agriculture. The nephew, however, thinks he knows better. When he is sold worthless land at an exorbitant price and loses all his money, the uncle comes again forward to help him. The nephew has learnt his lesson. Henceforth he will listen to the advice of experienced elders (VR 8.8.2000). But not all uncles fulfil their socially prescribed role. Some may try to exploit their young relatives (VR 14.4.1998).

VI. In-laws and the Wider Family

Apart from the dowry which may cause ill feelings between in-laws, both before and after the marriage, there is another negative fact specifically Indian or, even, specifically Tamil connected with the cultural emphasis on honour. It is called 'quarrel between in-laws' (*campanti cantai*) and tends to be provoked by the groom's relatives, who expect to be specially honoured during the wedding ceremony. In a Vatican play the groom's elder sister finds faults with everything needlessly and ends up by being chased away by her own brother (VR 26.11.1996). Even though *campanti cantai* is an almost institutionalized custom it is also criticized by Hindus (Balasubramanyam 1974: 36-41).

Interestingly, the Vatican plays constantly stress the value of joint living believed to be most deeply felt among Brahmins. But they do so for practical reasons in accordance with the Tamil saying 'Living jointly brings a thousand benefits' (*Kūṭi vāḷntāl kōṭi nanmai*, literally 'living jointly brings 10 million benefits', in short 'living together much better'; VR 2.9.1997). No matter whether the young wife has persuaded her husband to set up a separate household with her or whether she has induced her mother-in-law to move out, she finally realized that she needs her mother-in-law's help and protection ('Come back'; VR March 1991; VR 9.11.1993). The young wife may also give up her desire for separate living when she sees how generously her in-laws treat her on her departure (VR 28.9.1993; VR 13.8.1996).

The stereotype of the bad mother-in-law crops up in the Christian plays but they tend to show that she can correct herself. In one case the mother-in-law's repentance takes on a touching form. Despite all her efforts, the daughter-in-law has not succeeded in winning her fault-finding mother-in-law. Nevertheless she devotedly cares for the sick old woman hiding the fact that she has received a letter informing her of her own mother's illness. When a telegram arrives announcing her mother's death she is heart-broken and so is her mother-in-law who realized that her daughter-in-law has renounced seeing her mother one last time for her sake. Full of remorse she asks the young woman's forgiveness and promises her: 'Now I am your mother' (VR 14.3.2000).

However, the problems faced by the young wife or created by her when moving to her husband's house are not exclusively connected with her mother-in-law. She must also find a way of reconciling her loyalties to both her native and her husband's family. Concerned only with the honour of her native home, one young wife minimizes her brother's misdeed but then discovers that asking for loans in her husband's name the youth has shamed her husband and herself (VR 20.4.1988). When speaking to strangers, another young wife married into a family less wealthy than her native one constantly draws unfavourable comparisons thus shaming her husband and his family. Not only does her husband patiently bear her behaviour, he even covers up her brother's theft in order not to hurt her feelings. On learning this she realizes her fault and asks forgiveness (VR 27.7.1988). On the other hand, the mother-in-law too, may have to be taught that she must be impartial, consider her daughter-in-law like a daughter and refrain from passing on all wealth to her own daughter (VR 23.9.1997).

Establishing good relations with her sister-in-law may be just as difficult for the young wife as winning her mother-in-law. A widowed young woman takes refuge with her little son in her brother's house. The brother's wife is displeased, claiming that all joy has disappeared since the inauspicious widow has arrived. But when she has a miscarriage she attributes it to divine punishment and henceforth treats her sister-in-law and nephew kindly (VR 6.5.1997).

We have already seen a play in which the eldest daughter wrongly thought

that her mother had shamed her husband by giving him less dowry than she promised to her younger sister's husband. A further play on the theme of the son-in-law's honour brings in a food criterion. During a festival at his wife's native home, a son-in-law notices that his mother-in-law calls his brother-in-law to eat separately before him. Thinking that the man receives special honour because he earns more, he feels shamed and complains about it to his wife. The latter strongly reproaches her mother but has to learn that her husband has been completely mistaken. Suffering from diabetes the richer brother-in-law has been advised by his doctor to eat a sort of porridge (*kūḷ*). Knowing that he would be ashamed of eating this low-ranking food in the presence of others, she had called him to do so separately (VR 21.11.1995).

Cohesion among the wider family is cemented by participation in family ceremonies and socially prescribed gifts such as the maternal uncle's duty to make a money gift to his niece at her wedding. But there are also numerous other occasions on which gift giving and participation are expected. A teacher thinks he has found a way of nearly avoiding this onerous financial sacrifice. Rather than travelling with his whole family to participate in his relatives' ceremonies he sends only one child with an envelope containing some money. The child has to recite an invented excuse for his parents' absence. In this way he saves the bus charge for the rest of the family. Not duped by his trick his relatives wait for an occasion to retaliate. This occasion comes at his mother's death. The teacher expects able-bodied male relatives to come and help him carry the bier but only small children arrive, so that he has to arrange for paid help (VR 21.2.1995).

Like their Hindu countrymen the Christian authors know that things can be seen from different perspectives. In addition to praising the relatives' generosity they also teach that there is a limit to financial obligations (VR 16.5.1995) and that one should not let oneself be foolishly exploited (VR 26.10.1999).

B) PUBLIC OR *PURAM* THEMES

In order to facilitate discussion, plays with public themes will be divided into their urban and rural settings with the proviso that there are several overlaps and cases where this distinction cannot be made. Interestingly, the urban/rural divide is made by the Christian playwrights themselves. The St. Thomas Institute in Chennai produces mostly urban plays while the majority of rural plays come from Tuticorin. Plays created by the Kalai Kaveri Institute, Trichy, occupy an intermediate position.

I. *The Urban Milieu*

1. Office Work

Work, in particular office work, is the dominant setting for moral teaching in an urban milieu. With the increase of literacy the search for white collar jobs has become a major concern for urbanites. This emphasis on work, which has always characterized the Judeo-Christian tradition, is relatively new in India. Traditional Indian culture recognized people's need to work in order to make a living but did not value industriousness as such. 'Idle people's minds work well' a folk narrator states (Rajanarayanan 1984: 131-32). Bharati (1982: 81-90) praises quietness with reference also to Tāyumānavar and Putumaippittan (1977: 228) questions the Biblical quotation 'On the seventh day, having finished his work (play?)...', since a working God has seemed to him inconceivable.

a) Search for Work

The play 'Who needs it' (VR 1990) contains a reflection of this way of thinking perfectly appropriate in contemporary Tamilnadu with its unemployment problem. Feeling bored at home a well-earning man's wife thinks of looking for an office job. When she learns that the man who comes to repair her gas stove is a degree holder like herself she renounces the job she could have got in his favour, mindful also of her father's words that there are more unemployed degree holders in India than beggars.

Plays dealing with search for work mostly praise honesty and censure deceit. A qualified candidate is at first refused the job he merits because he does not let himself be bribed but then obtains it thanks to his generosity (VR 15.9.1998). A manager is impressed by the girl who declines the job for which she has applied when she learns that her father recommended her. But she bashfully agrees to fill the unrecommended vacancy of Mrs..., which the manager proposes her (VR 16.3.99).

Given the difficulty of obtaining work, people may be induced to seek the help of corrupt persons who promise to find work for them on payment but then cheat their clients (VR 11.8.1998). Eventually the cheat is denounced. One character does not exactly cheat but fails to keep his promise of giving a friend a job in his company. Fortunes change and the betrayed, who has come forward, thinks of revenging himself on his former friend when the latter now asks him for a job. However, his uncle succeeds in making him change his mind and re-establish the old friendship. Excusing his breach of promise the ex-friend states that he had had no other choice than give the job to his wife's brother, otherwise his marriage would have become hell (VR 13.6.2000).

In other plays the candidate is to blame. Accepting the advice of a friend by the name of Stalin, a candidate borrows a good suit from the dry-cleaner in order to wear it for his interview. The employer recognizes his suit and chases the

candidate away ('The greatness of falsehood'; VR March 1991). In 'Knowing the ways' (VR 13.4.1988) blame falls on both the candidate and the employer. Hearing that another youth with much lower qualifications than his will get the job the candidate attacks the manager and is jailed. A qualified woman candidate who had also been refused a job adopts a different strategy. She starts a movement of non-violent social protest and convinces the youth to join it on his release from prison.

b) The Place of Work

Envy is one of the character defects criticized in the place of work. An elderly meritless male employee envies the newly appointed female employee who soon gets a promotion because of her capability. Therefore, he hides an important file in his home claiming that she has lost it. Thinking that his father forgot it his son brings the file to the office. When the employee's misdeed is thus discovered the manager does not chase him away but degrades him (VR 18.11.1987; VR 1991).

Given the importance of prestige in Tamil culture, people may be tempted to pretend to be more than they are. A peon who tells a distant relative that he is a manager gets into serious trouble when the latter asks a job from him (VR 3.2.1993).

Not only pretence, also pride in one's actual good qualities needs to be corrected. Convinced that he cannot make an error, a cashier categorically denies that he gave a woman less money than he should have by mistake. When counting his money in the evening he discovers the excess and brings it to the woman imploring her to forgive him. He is also cured of his pride. The play is pertinently entitled 'Anybody can slip' (*Yārukkum aṭi carakkum*) which changes the Tamil proverb 'Even an elephant can slip' (*Yānaikkum aṭi carakkum*) with the same meaning by a few letters only (VR 18.11.1997).

The Christian playwrights know that not all culprits are punished and innocent persons may sometime have to suffer. A peon is threatened by his office colleagues who say that they will make him lose his job if he does not do all sorts of errands for them, so he bows to their orders. When the manager returns from a conference earlier than expected and finds the peon absent, he dismisses him and none of his exploiters defends him (VR 7.12.1988).

Of course, the manager too gets his share of criticism. He may, for instance, be dismissed for sexual harassment of female employees (VR 8.6.1988). One manager takes curious revenge on the woman employee who resists him. He wants to harm her by stealing her jewellery but not knowing that she has changed her apartment he steals in the wrong house. When he returns the jewels he is discovered. He will have a hard time to convince the police that he has not come to steal (VR 13.6.1995).

Another Vatican play is interesting because it establishes a hierarchy between two moral defects: exploiting a person's weakness is considered worse

than the weakness itself (VR 28.7.1998). Three years before his retirement a manager dyes his hair, claims he feels like a man of thirty and accuses his wife of having aged too much. Proud of his looks he courts his young female employees. Knowing his weakness one employee shamelessly flatters him in order to obtain loans which she would not merit. She does not want to cede to him but hopes to have him transferred before his attentions become unbearable. In a bus she reveals her stratagem to a friend without noticing that the manager, whose car has broken down, sits in the row in front of hers. The next day the manager punishes her by transferring her to a 'godforsaken' place in Ramanathapuram. But the incident has taught him a lesson. He will retire before the appointed time, stop dyeing his hair and no longer pretend to be youthful. His renunciation sounds like a modern version of the forest-dweller (*vānaprastha*) according to the Hindu four stages of life.

Occasionally the Christian playwrights treat the problem of the aged in the context of work. In one case an employee hopes to have the old manager of the hotel sent away so that he can take his position. Knowing that the old man's memory is not as good as it used to be he induces him to make mistakes. However, the hotel owner is deeply grateful to the manager for the great service he has done him in the past years. So he tolerates his small mistakes and dismisses the scheming young employee (VR 4.1.1989).

Not all aged are so lucky. 'The seat of honour' (VR 28.12.1993) points out a deplorable situation difficult to remedy, so that the play does not offer any solution. A peon begs his manager to participate in his child's ear-boring ceremony. Shortly afterwards the manager informs his subordinates that he will retire and is given a touching farewell. However, when he comes to the peon's house he is deeply offended because he is asked to get up from the seat of honour, which the peon now gives to the future manager. He leaves an envelope with some money and leaves without attending the ceremony. He has understood that one is respected only as long as one is in power.

2. Domestic Work and Neighbourly Relations

a) Mistress and Servant

Domestic work and neighbourly relations also exist in the village but the Christian playwrights prefer to discuss them in an urban context. As a rule they side with the underdog, the servant who is obviously of lower caste than the mistress even though no caste name is mentioned. In several plays the servant's generosity changes the mistress' heart. For instance, a miserly mistress objects to giving their watchman her husband's old shirt in addition to a money gift for his wedding. The watchman's young wife notices that the money gift too is lower than what the master has promised. Sometime later, during heavy rain, the mistress' car gets stuck near the watchman's home. The latter's wife lends her only good saree, worried about whether she would get it

back. However, she and her husband are overjoyed when the grateful mistress sends her driver to bring them new clothes and accompany them to the wedding they wanted to attend (VR 27.2.1996).

In general, the plays recommend tolerance for the servants' faults mostly caused by their poverty. One mistress goes so far as to hide her servant maid's theft. She discovers that the woman who has always been honest has pledged the jewels stolen in her house because she needs money for her husband's operation. She does not denounce the maid to the police but gives her the required money as a loan leaving her repentant and deeply grateful (VR 17.8.1999).

b) Houseowner and Tenant

The houseowners and tenants' faults are corrected both verbally and through punishment. A greedy houseowner chases away his tenant because a newcomer to town, not familiar with the local rates offers a much higher rent. He ends up by losing the old and the new tenant. His misfortune teaches him a lesson (VR 8.6.1993). An arrogant tenant had promised to leave his apartment but refuses to do so. When his property in a village is burnt, he thinks it divine punishment. His wife comments: 'The loss of money does not matter, if you correct yourself' (VR 7.1.1992).

One play combining school and landlady-tenant problems teaches impartiality or abstract justice independent of personal relations. A mother believes her son who lied that his schoolmate stole his pencil. Therefore, she rushes to the school and boxes the innocent boy's ear. The headmistress justifies the teacher who bitterly reproaches her. The mother, however, had expected to find support in the headmistress who is her tenant. She has to hear that one must not think that friendship will hide guilt (VR 6.8.1996).

c) Other Neighbourly Relations

Under the *akam* heading I mentioned (pp. 290-91) an envious wife who induces her husband to accept bribes in order to be able to compete with her neighbours. I now come to plays with envy in a purely neighbourly context. A clerk thinks that his wealthier colleague living in a neighbouring house listens to the radio at high volume to make him envious. He is indeed envious and buys a similar radio on credit. When he cannot pay the instalments his neighbour offers to help him. Henceforth the clerk will not envy his colleague's luxury goods but his generosity (VR 14.12.1993). The story is entitled 'The sand rope', a Tamil metaphor for an impossible thing or a thing impossible to obtain.

The fact that a loud radio, which would be considered a nuisance in the West, could make one envious is not considered comic, but another play does chastise envy in the context of comic ignorance. An employee envies his neighbour, a musician, for the high pay he receives when called to play on the radio. He claims that he too could easily learn to play the guitar and fails mis-

erably. He has to hear that in order to become a good musician strenuous effort is needed, which he would be unable to sustain (VR 4.4.1988).

Gossip and ingratitude (VR 19.11.1996) as well as quarrelsomeness are the themes of several plays on neighbourly relations. In 'The fighting cock' (*Cantaik kōli*; VR 21.3.1995) a quarrelsome man who has made all neighbours his enemies finds no help when a cobra enters his house. Two female quarrellers are luckier. One woman gravely insults her neighbour who, in turn, threatens to beat her. The threatened one obliges her husband to call in the *pañcāyat* ('village counsel'). The husband wisely postpones his complaint and the *pañcāyat* leader wisely protracts the hearing. In the meantime the two women have come to realize that they better make peace in order to avoid being fined (VR 23.3.1993).

The common defect of rashness is also criticized in a neighbourly context. A mother rashly accuses her servant of having stolen earrings, which turn out to have been pledged by her own son (VR 5.9.1995). Another man's rashness is even more unpardonable. During his absence a neighbour had come to his house for the newspaper and had read an open letter on the table. Finding the money missing which he thinks he left on the table the houseowner accuses the neighbour of theft. Only later he remembers that he loaned it to a friend (VR 13.12.1994). The breach of privacy is not explicitly condemned.

Like rashness joy in sowing discord is a well-known Indian defect. Hindu mythology even contains a character, Nārada, specialized in sowing discord among the very gods. But he mostly pursues a positive purpose in contrast to the sowers of discord in Indian folktales and Vatican plays. In 'On whose side are you?' (*Nī entap pakkam*; VR 1989) the sower of discord has at least a motive, even though a selfish one. Since she wastes water and does not clean the common bathroom her landlady reproaches her. Probably to make her misdeeds stand out less, she tries to sow discord between her landlady and an orderly tenant. The landlady guesses her scheme and reproaches her even more. Another sower of discord is animated by spite only. Noticing the close friendship between two women a neighbour wants to destroy it. Her attempt to arouse one woman's suspicion of the other fails. In the end the spiteful neighbour is impressed by the two women's solid friendship and asks them to accept her as a third friend (VR 7.12.1993). One is remind of the last words in Schiller's ballade 'The pledge'. When the tyrannical ruler of Siracuse learns that a friend of the man whom he condemned to death would have willingly died in his stead he is moved and asks: 'Please accept my prayer and let me become the third in your bond of friendship' (*Ich sei, gewährt mir die Bitte, in eurem Bunde der Dritte*).

3. Other Primarily Urban Professions

Among liberal professions divinity is absent from my *corpus* of Christian plays but they do discuss law and medicine though not as frequently as family matters and office work.

a) Law and Order, Crime and Punishment

In the subchapter on marital relations (pp. 292-93) I cited the case of a woman lawyer whose abstract view of justice was praised even by her guilty husband. Other plays present corrupt lawyers who incur cruel punishment. One lawyer is rumoured to have innocent people imprisoned and criminals who bribe him acquitted. When travelling alone in a first class train compartment he is approached by one of his victims who orders him to jump from the train otherwise he will shoot him. The lawyer dies of a heart attack and the would-be murderer congratulates himself on having saved a bullet ('Before counting up to ten'; VR 1990). Another victim thinks of killing the lawyer who had him imprisoned but finds that somebody has already done so. He thanks God for having prevented him from committing a crime (VR 16.11.1999).

Bribery has cropped up in several contexts. I now come to the evil of usury. As in didactic folktales the Vatican plays sometimes describe a duel between cheats, in this case between an unscrupulous money-lender and an equally unscrupulous client. When a dishonest client insults the money-lender rather than paying back his loan, the money-lender grabs his ring, detracts from its presumed value his due and then returns to him the small remaining sum. The man who had recommended the client without knowing his character comments that for people like him people like Seth (a caste of money-lenders) must exist (VR 31.8.1988).

'Why should I not be able?' (VR 18.1.2000) puts the duel between cheats in a comic context. A money-lender has heard a religious lecture that one should make people's soul (*ātmā*) change for the better. His attempts to impart this teaching on his clients utterly fail, partly because he himself is at a loss to explain the meaning of *ātmā*. At the same time he continues his disputable way of making money. He charges a commission for changing a big money note but then finds that the note is counterfeit. When he tries to recommend morality to a known thief the latter is unrepentant and jokingly remarks that he will soon return to jail since he is bored outside. He also tells the usurer that there is no great difference between them: he steals and then runs, while the usurer steals remaining seated. Having said so he leaves rapidly with the usurer's new sandals. A dignified person who has observed the happenings points out to the usurer that his attempt to moralize others is like propounding Gandhi's ideas from a butcher's shop. The first person to change should be he himself.

Another crook has found a way of making money without actually putting his hands into other people's pockets. Amongst other things he kindly offers to post a money-order for a blind man and, of course, never does so. But he makes the mistake of giving the blind man his laundry bill in lieu of receipt through which the police are able to find him (VR 27.7.1999).

There are also pickpockets to be corrected. A pickpocket's maternal uncle refuses to give him his daughter in marriage if he does not become honest. Since he loves his cross cousin the pickpocket accepts a job. However, when

he wants to bring his uncle his honestly earned money he finds that he has been pickpocketed. The uncle calls the misfortune divine punishment which will hopefully correct him for good (VR May 1991). Another pickpocket fares worse. He had decided to pass from pickpocketing to more lucrative robbery. At his first trial of his new profession the steel bureau he moves topples onto him and he loses a hand ('Henceforth I cannot do it anymore'; VR 1989).

One play (VR 21.12.1988) broadcast twice is remarkable because it proposes an unusual way of correcting a professional killer. He has already committed half a dozen murders on commission and now accepts an advance payment for his next exploit. With the money he buys sweets for his pregnant wife. Heavy rain prevents him from taking the woman to hospital, so that he has to watch her writhing in pain. The difficulty of giving birth makes him understand the value of life. He will no longer kill. 'A new man stands next to the new-born baby'.

The bad reputation of police, known to beat and otherwise torture suspected persons and prisoners, may be partly responsible for the fact that people who cause traffic accidents often escape in order not to get into trouble with the police. The phenomenon is so common that the lorry-driver who takes his victim to hospital is praised in a bow-song (*villuppāṭṭu*; VR 5.10.1988). This form of folk art, which mostly has a violent content is akin to the *Moritaten* sung in medieval German markets, though these gruesome songs were accompanied by barrel organs and not by bell-fitted bows.

'The other side of a murder' (*Oru kolaiviṇ marupakkam*; VR 23.3.1988) mentions the beating of a suspect in passing. The purpose of the play, however, is not to criticize police methods but to warn against hubris. The assassinated person's uncle tells the police that his nephew had no enemies. He wanted to live in peace up to one hundred years enjoying life without getting married and without cheating any woman. Suspecting the milkman who claims he discovered the corpse, the inspector tells his constable to 'take care of him', which proves effective. The milkman admits that he is the murderer, but adds that in his drunkenness he killed the wrong person on the other side of the street. The inspector comments on God's sports (*tiruvīḷaiyāṭal*) and asks the uncle to spread the story as a warning.

In addition to criticizing corruption among both high and low grades of police the plays also pay tribute to honesty and incorruptibility. One inspector is called a 'rail' (the English term) because he never sways from the right path like a train running on straight ('He runs straight like a train'; VR June 1992). This Tamil metaphor is interesting not only because of its modern technological image but also because it shows how things can be looked at from opposite perspectives. It sees straightness as a positive fact, while in Italian the metaphor straight (*dritto*) has the almost opposite meaning of unscrupulous behaviour.

b) The Medical Profession

Like teachers whom I shall not discuss separately since they appear under many other headings, medical doctors are mostly seen in a positive light and praised for their social service. Apart from the abortion doctor, my *corpus* of plays contains only one other negative owner of a private clinic who has to be taught that 'A spirit of service is needed' (VR 8.3.1994). The teaching is imparted by a young doctor who has recently joined the staff of the clinic. He discovers that a woman, who has not had a heart infraction as it was first assumed, is given useless treatment in order to extract money for her. The outraged young doctor resigns his post.

Other doctors are models of selflessness, like the one mentioned before (p. 290) who gets into trouble with his wife because he is more concerned about his patients than her social life, and the neighbouring doctor who interrupts his honeymoon to assist her father. Another doctor is even more idealistic. He refuses the rich bride not interested in social service whom his father has found for him and marries a low-caste nurse who shares his social spirit. He does so despite the fact that the nurse is a drunkard's daughter (VR 26.10.1988).

Like the preceding play, 'As you sow, so you reap' (VR 10.8.1999) joins two noble characters of high and low extraction. A riksha coolie's wife ends up in a private clinic for delivery. Lacking the necessary funds, her husband thinks of pledging his riksha. To his utter amazement the doctor informs him that he need not pay anything reminding him of an event that happened several years earlier. When his wife was in labour and his car refused to move, the riksha coolie had taken her to hospital and refused to be paid because he had vowed not to charge anything in such emergency cases. After the doctor had vainly tried to make him accept payment he had told the riksha coolie to appeal to him for any help he might need in the future. In gratitude the doctor had also given his little son the riksha coolie's name. Hearing this pleasant news the coolie asks for the doctor's name, which he will give to his newborn son.

c) The Performing Arts

Not surprisingly, the Vatican plays criticize the Tamil cinema craze, which has no parallel in the West, showing that both young men and young women may succumb to it. One young man is cured of his hero worship when he goes to see his favourite actor personally. Not only does the actor not give him the expected job, he also exploits a photo taken of the youth's aged mother in false proof of his claim that he helps 'abandoned women' (VR 22.6.1988).

The above young man wanted help from his film hero but no film role. Conversely, a girl desires nothing more than a small film role and has to be reminded of the saying 'The grass is greener on the other side' (VR 25.5.1999). Her favourite actress dissuades her, telling her of the sacrifice she has to make

for her profession. In order not to damage her image as a glamour girl she must hide the fact that she is a mother and put her son into an orphanage.

The relation between director and actor too gives occasion for moral teaching. Because of her son's serious illness, a dancer is eager to go home early, which would have been possible if the *prima donna* had arrived in time. The dance master refuses her request, while the director grants it and also advances the money she needs for medicine. 'Being human means to be helpful' he states leaving the dancer surprised at such magnanimity in the cinema world (VR 3.2.1998).

Given the proliferation of private theatre companies in Tamil cities some lay actors easily change from one company to the other. The moment he learns that another company pays a little more, an unscrupulous actor leaves his company putting the director in trouble. His decision turns out to have been a miscalculation (VR 23.11.1993).

d) Politics

Just as people are prepared to worship film heroes even though they know that morality is no hallmark of the cinema world, so people are prepared to worship political leaders even though they know that corruption and misuse of power are rampant among politicians. 'The procession' presents a corrupt big man who hopes to be elected, but a party member denounces his misdeeds so that he is arrested. Rather than driving through town in a triumphant procession, as he has hoped to do, he is driven in a jeep to the police station (VR 30.3.1988).

Contrary to the general low opinion of politics and politicians some people are idealistic enough to consider their party sacred. The protagonist of 'Even now he sacrifices himself' (VR 24.8.1988) is such an idealist who has gone to prison for political reasons. On his release, he learns of the present party leader's corruption. Rather than accept false honour in the form of a money bag to keep him quiet he kills the leader during the meeting in order to cleanse his party. Thus he sacrifices his freedom once more and perhaps his life.

4. Factory Work

The Christian playwrights distribute praise and punishment democratically between factory owners and workers. 'The demonstration' (VR May 1990) puts bad relations between father and son in a factory context. The son is a strike leader and wants to participate in a demonstration. Naturally, the father is against it and tries to prevent his son from doing so, but the son pushes him away. The angry father would have shot at him if his wife had not intervened. During the demonstration the factory is burnt down causing great financial loss to both the father and the son who would have inherited it.

'The factory was closed' (VR 17.2.1988) preaches kindness to workers. Interested only in financial gain, the factory owner shows no compassion for a

worker hit by an electric current and thus causes the other workers to strike. Due to the stress of acquisitiveness, the factory owner has a heart attack and dies. His wife who has always advised him to stop worrying about money takes over the factory. She compensates the victim of the accident and shows kindness to all workers thus making them return to work.

'A hasty man ...' (VR Sept. 1989) points out again the perils of rashness and the lack of self-control. The choleric husband, a factory worker, is in the habit of breaking household equipment during his attacks of fury. His wife foretells that his lack of self-control will cause his ruin one day. Then he directs his choleric outbreaks toward the factory manager who reproached him for having beaten the foreman. In revenge he punctures the tyres of the manager's car. Shortly afterwards one of his fingers is cut off in an accident. Since the factory ambulance happens to be broken the manager wants to send him to hospital in his car, which cannot start. Due to the delay the choleric man definitely loses his finger. This misfortune persuades him to promise his wife that henceforth he will try to control himself.

More interesting is a play entitled 'Bitter sugarcane' (VR 28.10.1995) that puts the factory in a typically Indian context. A rich factory owner without a wife and children decides to follow a holy man. Before doing so he asks his relatives to come to listen to the latter's lecture, promising that they will benefit by it. Since they put forward excuses he invites the workers to listen to the holy man. He then tells the assembled workers that he intends to distribute part of his wealth among them and give the rest to the holy man's ashram. One obviously drunk worker immediately wants to know how much he will get. After he is sent away as unworthy, the holy man delivers his spiritual lecture and then oversees the impartial distribution of the owner-renouncer's wealth.

5. Coolie Work

Several plays censure moral defects of either contractors or coolies. 'The sin is a lesson' (VR 28.2.1995) presents contractors between themselves. One contractor tries to prevent his rival from getting cement needed to build the orphanage for which he has been engaged. His cruel action keeps him away for some days during which his rival obtains an even bigger contract.

Contractors also tend to blackmail their workers asking them for commission. In one case all coolies sign a paper to denounce the contractor except the coolie woman Tāyammāl. She refuses because she knows that the contractor's son is in hospital and his father needs money for an expensive operation. Moved by her compassionate action true to her name meaning the motherly one the contractor corrects himself. He will no longer ask for commission (VR 26.8.1997).

Coolies too are not necessarily models of probity. One coolie wins a big sum of money in the lottery. Trying to cheat the government of the taxes he is caught and imprisoned. Proud of her new wealth the coolie's wife immedi-

ately resigned her work as a servant. Since she cannot obtain it again she will be poorer than before (VR 19.11.1991).

6. Poverty

Poverty is not, of course, found only in city slums, but the plays draw attention to it more in urban than in rural settings. Relative poverty, the difficulty or impossibility of paying the dowry has been discussed at length before. I have also given a few examples of genuine poverty inducing parents to go hungry for their children's sake. But the plays do not limit themselves to drawing attention to poverty, they also praise those who overcome it thanks to unswerving effort.

In 'The roadside painter' (VR 1.6.1988) the protagonist's strength of mind conquers poverty and terrible physical handicap. A well-to-do gentleman, obviously belonging to a high caste, is struck by the artistic talent of a low-caste roadside painter and asks a famous painter to accept him as his pupil. The latter agrees even though none of his pupils so far have come from the street. Before he can do so, however, a lorry crushes the roadside painter's two hands. Even more desirous to help the benefactor now advises him to paint with his feet. At an exhibition of his works the maimed painter is honoured with a golden cloth not only for the quality of his paintings but also for his extraordinary strength of mind.

One young man's dubious means of overcoming poverty (from a Western point of view) fails because of his spirit of sacrifice. Unable to find work and feed his mother he decides to sell a kidney. When he sees the woman who benefited from his sacrifice he can no longer bring himself to ask for payment. The doctor calls him a madman, but he insists that he has made a gift (*tāṇam*) for which no payment can be accepted. A little later he comes to the woman who had gladdened him by calling him 'elder brother' to tell her that he will soon die, allegedly not as a consequence of his lost kidney. He asks her to send some money to his mother every month as if it came from him working in a far away town. She promises to do so and keeps up her promise for years (VR 10.2.1998).

The play 'People like this' (VR 7.7.1992) starts in a village, moves to town and then back again to the village thus constituting a bridge between urban and rural settings. The coolie parents and grandfather are overjoyed at the birth of a little boy but the baby soon shows signs of fighting for breath. They take a bus to town to show it to a doctor but before they reach there they find that the baby has died. Since the bus conductor refuses to carry a corpse, the husband advises his wife to stop crying and take the next bus hiding the fact that the child is dead. Since the mother cannot control her tears she will walk back to her village carrying her dead child in her arms. This tragic story cannot have any obvious solution as long as abject poverty exists.³

³ I have indeed seen a signboard in a Tamil bus saying that transporting corpses is forbidden.

II. *The Rural Milieu*

1. Caste

The Christian authors discuss most moral issues in both urban and rural contexts but their relatively rare plays on caste clearly favour the village. There is good reason for the limited interest in caste and the choice of its setting. The plays deal with modern conditions in towns where caste has lost much of its influence given the proliferation of caste-free occupations and close contact among people of all castes in public means of transport, restaurants and places of work. Nowadays discrimination against low castes is still practised mainly by village big men belonging to 'dominant' castes of intermediate rank. (The Vatican plays are interested only in this negative part of the caste hierarchy and not in caste as a sort of extended family on which its members may count in need). However, even in villages things change so that a play broadcast in 1988 (3.2.) pictures a situation that may already belong to the past. In the play with the metaphoric title 'The sticks cut for firewood' the village headman outcasts the man who permits his daughter to marry a schoolteacher of Untouchable caste. Sometime later the headman gets into serious financial trouble and thinks of committing suicide. The tamarind tree he climbs in order to hang himself is near the house where the schoolteacher lives. He prevents the headman's suicide and advances him the needed money. This generosity makes the headman change his mind. He will build a house for himself in the Untouchable colony also because he knows that just as sticks cut for firewood will eventually be sold in the market so he himself will be outcasted for having accepted the Untouchable's financial help.

'All are children of the same mother' (VR 16.11.1993) presents again a generous low caste person. He is a hungry orphaned boy presumably of low caste origin who begs for work and food in a high caste colony and is chased away. When fire breaks out there he carries the old woman who has earlier chased him away out of her burning house (in this situation she cannot object to being touched by him) and also saves many other people. In the end he dies in the flames. All inhabitants of the colony are moved by the boy's sacrifice. They decide to make no more caste distinctions and build an orphanage in his name.

Imbued with modern values the young are more likely to disregard caste distinctions than their elders. In schools with mixed caste attendance, friendship may develop between social unequals. One high caste boy congratulates his low caste friend on his success at school and invites him to dinner in his house. His mother loudly objects so that the low caste boy can hear it and leaves. The son reminds her that they themselves have low caste persons in their family who are accepted because they are wealthy. Besides, they cannot be sure of their own high caste origin. (If the ancestor was converted to Christianity individually, memory of his caste origin is indeed often lost). He suc-

ceeds in persuading his mother so that she tells him to call his friend back. The son goes to the Untouchable colony, insists on having some of the family's rice water and then takes his friend home. Like his own mother, the friend's mother first objects to offering her food but for opposite reasons, *i.e.* conscious of her low social position (VR 8.9.1998).

In another play a Hindu boy befriends a Christian neighbour implicitly of lower caste than he. His mother tries to prevent the Christian boy from attending her son's wedding ceremony but has to retract her prohibition when his generosity saves the wedding (VR 14.3.1995).

Some of the last-mentioned plays may have had an urban setting, but I now come to specifically rural caste problems. A landlord who has a vested interest in keeping up caste discriminations orders one of his servants to make his son stop studying in town, but the servant refuses. To punish him the angry landlord orders his other servants to leave his cows in the cowshed and put rat poison where the servant's cows graze. But somebody, perhaps the landlord's son ignorant of the father's scheme, unties his cows so that all die (VR 11.3.1997).

In other plays the landlords' son or daughter induces their fathers to distribute land to the low caste poor. One son does not stop with this proof of social service, he also wants to build a school in the village knowing that illiterates are easily duped (VR 31.12.1996). A daughter's social action occurs in a dowry context. In order to pay for his daughter's dowry and wedding in great style the father asks back the land he has leased out to a great number of farmers. She objects recalling that the farmers know of the government land distribution act. When her father does not listen she disappears. He thinks that she has been kidnapped by one of the furious farmers and orders an attack on him. At that moment the daughter returns. She had been in town informing the police that her father will distribute land. If he does not do so, she will because she does not want to marry with money extorted from the poor. Impressed by her social spirit the father tells her that she has given him new life (VR 29.12.1992).

In addition to the young, teachers also fight the negative aspects of caste. A woman teacher makes the landlord understand that people are not oilpress bulls or slaves (VR 9.5.2000). Another teacher has recourse to a typically Indian method of achieving his moral end (VR 4.8.1992). Instigated by social reformers the inhabitants of an outcaste colony want to fish in a canal in which only high caste people (*mēl jāti*) have the right to do so (their fish diet reveals that they are high only with respect to them). The angry caste people think of burning the upstarts' houses. To make them desist the school teacher induces his pupils not to return home for their meals, *i.e.* to go on hunger strike. The parents are impressed by their children's firmness and return to coexistence by granting fishing rights to all villagers alike.

It is true that village big men do not want to grant equality to their subordinates in order not to lose cheap labour, but discrimination against low castes is not limited to them and tends to survive precisely among the lowest of soci-

ety. 'The dividing wall' (VR 27.7.1993) takes up this fact, well-known to the people themselves and the anthropologist, but often intentionally ignored by anti-caste propagandists. An old man presumably of Paraiyan caste launches a complaint with the police that in his village tea shop he is served tea in a metal cup (which is considered pollution resistant), while high caste customers drink from glass cups. A social reformer comes to inquire. He wants to know from the old man why his caste members eat dead animals (*i.e.* animals that have died of natural causes and not slaughtered) and is told that they have no money to buy other meat. Their dirtiness, the old man explains, is due to a lack of money to dig a deep well. The social reformer succeeds in banning metal cups in the village tea shop with the result that high castes no longer patronize it. The social reformer then discovers that the Paraiyans discriminate against Cakkiliyans and Kuṛavars whom they hold to be still lower than themselves. He also finds out that a Cakkiliyan tea shop exists in the village, which Paraiyans do not enter. Therefore, he tells the old man that if he wants to be respected by higher castes he must respect those below him. Only if he changes his own behaviour can he expect to receive help.

2. Outcasting Unconnected with Caste

City neighbourhoods where all inhabitants know one another resemble closely-knit village communities. In both cases gossip and censorship are feared. In addition to being criticized by neighbours, deviants in villages may be punished and even outcasted by the *pañcāyat*, but outcasting, *i.e.* forbidding all villagers to have contact with the condemned, occurs not only in caste matters. 'Punished judgements' (VR 9.6.1998) tells of a girl who has not had her menses for three months. Her parents do not believe her that she does not know why. Interrogated by the *pañcāyat* she again professes her innocence. Her father pleads with her fearing that their family would be outcasted if she does not tell the truth. In despair the girl commits suicide. A post mortem examination reveals that she has a tumour. The moral defect censured in this play is again rashness. In clear-minded retrospect the girl could have been sent to a doctor before being accused.

In another play a rashly made wrong conviction, which might have caused the suspected woman to be chased away, is corrected in time. The female stranger who has settled in the village is suspected of bad conduct because many people including men come to her house day and night. The *pañcāyat* leader tells the village gossipers that he cannot call her to a hearing as long as she has not done anything clearly wrong. He quotes the Tamil saying mentioned before (p. 284), that only what one learns by thorough investigation is right. Therefore, he decides to reverse the normal *pañcāyat* procedure and goes to her house to inquire, accompanied by other village dignitaries. She tells her visitors that she has lost her husband and her child through the same disease which causes high fever. In order to spare other women from suffering

her same fate, she studied siddha medicine (*cittar vaittiyam*). She has settled in their village because curative herbs grow in the area, which she gives free to many patients. The village dignitaries are sorry for having suspected her and promise her any help she may need (VR 1989).

3. Cheating and Violence, Punishment and Forgiveness

Unscrupulous people exist anywhere and we have already seen several instances including the one in which the son apposes his dishonest father by denouncing him. Although it occurs in a rural setting I have discussed it under the heading of family relations. I now give another rural instance in which the son's reproach is sufficient to correct his father. When picking coconuts for the landlord a farm worker's son falls from a palm tree. Advised by the local doctor to take the boy to a town hospital the worker asks a loan from the landlord. The latter refuses and sends him to his accountant known to be a usurer. The accountant also claims he has no money, even though he has just given a big sum to his son. The compassionate son gives the needed money to the servant and accuses his father. The accountant reveals that he is indebted to the landlord and therefore obliged by him to be a usurer and to refuse money to the servant. But now he will correct himself (VR 13.9.1994).

Liberality is one of the means through which a village big man obtains and maintains his position. One village big man's liberality, however, is false since he gets the funds he gives away by keeping most of the money collected for the public good for himself, by asking for bribes and authorizing illegal hazard games (VR 30.3.1993).

The folktoke to which I have repeatedly referred also characterizes the bow song 'Betrayal of trust' (4.2.1997). As his old age insurance a farmer gives a big sum of money to a friend and money-lender. When he suffers a stroke and cannot speak he tries to communicate through gesture that he wants his bag with money. Yielding to temptation the money-lender interprets the gesture as a wish for a coconut. Sometime later he gets a boil the size of a coconut. Taking it as divine punishment he tells his wife to return the money to the farmer as his last wish.

The Vatican plays also praise faithfulness and honesty in a village context. A newly appointed farm worker is asked to oversee coconut gathering during the owner's absence. The manager tries in vain to engage the newcomer in his plan to cheat the owner. In order to revenge himself on the incorruptible man he makes it appear that the latter has hidden some sacks with coconuts in his house. The owner dismisses the farm-hand, but on learning the truth excuses himself and rewards the honest man with a good permanent job (VR 16.2.1999).

In addition to fighting caste prejudice teachers set moral examples in other cases as well. A landlord meets a teacher again and belatedly asks his forgiveness. Years ago he had contrived to have the teacher transferred because he had refused to tell his dumb son the answers to the questions before

the exam. However, even with new teachers the son has been unable to pass (VR 4.2.1992). Another teacher prevents crooks from embezzling relief money given by the government. They try to involve him, hoping that in this way people will not suspect them, but he becomes suspicious, makes their plan fail and gives them a moral lesson (VR 5.1.1993).

Contrary to some literary Tamil tales that praise the quiet life in the country compared to the hectic pace of the city, the Vatican plays do not paint a romantic picture of village life. The playwrights are aware that *ahimsā* ('non-violence') is no villager's invention and that sickles and axes are readily available potential weapons. Even a gravely offended bride takes up an axe to revenge herself, as we have seen (p. 285).

Village big men may successfully hide both cheating and violence. When a man in the service of an unscrupulous landowner tells his master that he has committed a murder, the master decides to protect him. To convince the new policeman, who has come to inquire, of his probity and willingness to help people he goes to the house of an old woman whom he had previously chased away several times. He does so to oblige her son-in-law not to repudiate her daughter. The policeman wonders: 'Could it be that he is a good man, even though I have heard so many rumours about him?' (VR 9.3.1988).

However, violence may also be hidden for altruistic reasons. The sickle a violent farmer raises to attack another farmer accidentally falls on the teacher who tries to stop their quarrel. Together with her husband the would-be assassin's wife visits the injured teacher in hospital telling him that she prays to all gods to make him recover. She also implores him to help her when her husband is in jail. The teacher consoles her saying that he has told the police that the axe fell on him when her husband was cutting wood. The wife calls him their god and the husband prostrates himself in front of him. The teacher objects to this gesture stating that animals takes revenge, men can forgive (VR 26.1.1993).

This village teacher forgives a serious injury caused accidentally, while another noble villager forgives intentional violence. In an attack of fury a farmer had killed the village teacher and his wife leaving their son an orphan. Sentenced to 16 years in prison he is released for good conduct after eleven years. When he returns to his village, the headman decrees that nobody must give food and water to him, even though the ex-prisoner implores all assembled to forgive him. Finally his victims' son gives him a drink of water because to refuse it would make them murderers too. His generosity convinces the others, they will accept the repentant man again in their midst (VR 24.9.1996).

4. New Literacy

Education may also be sought by poor villagers, even though landlords may resent it. But education, which is always Western education (Christians obviously do not attend Vedic schools), should not make the students and their parents arrogant towards their illiterate fellow-men. In 'If one studies a few

letters' (VR 19.10.1988) an illiterate mother is extremely proud of her son who studies in town for an M.A. and looks down on uneducated villagers. When the son comes home during the holidays, she reproaches a neighbour for having given him porridge (*kūl*) to eat, for which the son had himself asked. *Kūl* is poor man's food not appropriate for her son (cf. p. 301), for whom she has prepared chicken and rice. Thinking that people are envious of her son she performs a rite against the evil eye for him. Since she has offended all villagers with her arrogance, the only literate woman in the village, who had so far written letters for her, now refuses to do so, even though the letter she wants to write to her son back in town shows that she has come to realize her fault.

In 'The all-knowing youth', another play reminiscent of Tamil folktales, the arrogant one is a student. A landlord's son returning from higher studies in town gives piece of 'modern' advice to the villagers, telling them that in foreign schools one learns even about sex. One village youth remarks that he talks as if marriage should be arranged after the pregnancy ceremony, which the student would find perfectly normal. When a cobra is seen entering a house the educated youth advises the owner to destroy his house, but the owner refuses to do so because he has no money to rebuild it. An illiterate person claims he can kill the snake without ruining the house. He puts a frog tied to a rope in front of the house. Noticing the frog, the cobra comes out to jump at it and can thus be killed. The educated youth is cured of his arrogance (VR 9.3.1993). This play realistically shows that the sanctity and inviolability of the cobra is an ideal not necessarily shared by villagers though they may worship snake deities.

C) CULTURE-SPECIFIC DIDACTIC STRATEGIES

I. *Vicarious Punishment*

By calling vicarious punishment culture-specific, I do not want to imply that it occurs only in India, though some of its forms would not readily come to mind to a Westerner. Vicarious punishment without didactic intention is found all over the world and does not normally apply to people, but to a scapegoat. In Tamilnadu an effigy called *koṭumpāvi* representing drought or disease is dragged out of the village hit by a scourge.

Harming a person indirectly by harming a relative is an idea that easily arises in cultures in which family members are not thought of as individuals by their community, but as a collective in which the elements are interchangeable. For instance, in southern Italy where the family spirit is still stronger than in northern Europe, the *mafia* has begun to take revenge on persons they consider traitors by killing their close relatives.

In 'The devil's siren song' (VR 30.9.1997) the devil adopts this fiendish method. In order to harm, not punish, a devout person who cannot be made to sin, he attacks his son. He acquaints the youth with an immoral friend who takes him to sex pictures. This experience induces the son to importune girls. When one of the girls shames him in front of others the friend advises him to revenge himself. He dictates to the shamed boy a letter in which he threatens to kill her. But the girl informs the police and the letter writer is arrested steeping his father in sorrow.

In Tamilnadu this indirect method of harming or punishing a person even appears in folktales, not only in the story of the toe-sister mentioned before (p. 294), but also in the story of the landlord who obliges a teacher to beat his own son in front of his son's eyes in order to frighten the latter and make him study (Rajanarayanan 1989: 81).

While harming one family member for another would not be acceptable to modern Western sensibility, it has parallels in the Bible, for instance in the dictum that the parents' guilt will fall on their children until the seventh degree. In the Vatican plays vicarious punishment does not last so long and becomes immediately effective. Several children are injured or die for their father's fault. In 'The recoiling ball' (VR 21.9.1993) a father who has a cycle repair shop thinks of making more money through illegal means. In addition to ordering a boy assistant (child labour) to puncture cycle tyres he only pretends to repair a customer's steering gear. Due to the unrepaired steering gear the customer runs into the dishonest man's son who has to be hospitalized.

This boy suffers only a slight injury, but other children have to die for their father's fault. In 'Do you need a certificate?' (VR July 1991) a father sells false certificates of university exams. When his daughter dies after having received an injection by a false doctor, he takes it as divine punishment and thinks that his daughter had to be sacrificed to correct him.

In 'Blood' a social worker, who has tried to stop arrack brewing, is violently attacked. Soon afterwards the attacker's son is hit by a car and needs blood transfusion. The hospitalized social worker offers to donate his blood which is of the right group, but the doctor does not allow it because he has already lost too much blood. The boy dies leaving his father deeply sorry for what he has done (VR 8.2.1989).

Grown-up children, too, may become victims of vicarious punishment. In several plays on the dowry evil the parent's fault falls on their son or daughter, as we have seen, but other causes also exist. A daughter who has vainly objected to her father adulterating the rice he sells cannot move her hand after receiving an injection. The doctor discovers that the medicine has been adulterated but assures her that the damage will be temporary. The father wants to revenge himself on the druggist but the daughter reminds him that he is doing the same thing, which makes him repent (VR 6.9.1994).

A village big man's son escapes fatal vicarious punishment at a hair's

breadth. The headstrong father uses his influence to prevent a tar road to be built to his village for self-serving reasons. He owns bullock carts for transport, which would become useless if motor cars plied the road. He also fears that people would not consult his son who studies *āyurvedic* medicine, if they could easily reach the town hospital. When the son walking to his village across the fields, is bitten by a snake a social worker rushes him to the town hospital in his landrover. This incident convinces the father to think of the public good and agree to the road ('The heart must widen'; VR July 1991).

Marriage partners too may be considered interchangeable so that one has to bear punishment for the other. In 'Wrong status consciousness' (VR 25.7.2000) the wife's excessive status consciousness leads her to brag about her husband's chances of obtaining prestigious positions. He thus loses the ordinary job offered to him which he would have badly needed. Of course, the unpleasant financial consequences also have to be borne by the wife. In a story mentioned before (p. 291), another wife's money-mindedness has tragic consequences for her husband and herself. He has to die and she to bear a widow's fate.

The Christian playwrights conceive even of multiple vicarious fatal punishment. 'It will never dawn' (VR 20.4.1999) refers to the husband's life. He is a drunkard who regularly beats his wife who has tried in vain to correct him. In despair she decides to try out the arrack he has claimed makes him forget all his troubles. Seeing their mother seemingly asleep and an open bottle next to her the children also take sips from it. Since the arrack was poisonous they all die. The inconsolable husband will never drink again.

In the legend of the Untouchable Vaiṣṇava saint Tirupāṇālvar Viṣṇu bears the injury inflicted on his devotee. He does so voluntarily to correct the Brahmin who caused the injury. In a Vatican play, conversely, an innocent person has to bear vicarious punishment involuntarily. She is a school teacher who confiscates the love letter that distracts one of her girl students from her lesson. On her return home her husband, a drunkard, asks her for more money to buy alcohol. When she refuses, he searches in her handbag and finds the letter. Thinking that she has a lover he pours kerosene on her and sets fire to her. In hospital the teacher receives the pupil's visit. Deeply sorry the girl promises that henceforth she will think only of her studies and states that the teacher's wounds will always burn in her ('Confusion and clarity'; VR Sept. 1989).

These last words recall the Śaiva legend in which the king feels the blows he has given a disobedient boy (Śiva in disguise).

In all these plays remorse makes the characters think that others are punished for their faults. Other plays explicitly reject collective responsibility. In 'Love or money?' (VR 30.1.01) a doctor's younger brother cheated him out of their father's property while he was away studying. He therefore severed all relations with him. However, when the cheat dies and his daughter remains totally abandoned, her husband having also died, he decides to adopt her, since her father's betrayal is not her fault.

II. Tiruvalluvar's Moral Dicta

1. Shaming

Some anthropologists have tried to distinguish shame cultures from guilt cultures. If we accept this somewhat simplistic distinction for argument's sake, ancient Tamil culture would be a shame culture in which people who felt shamed could 'sit the face turned north' (*vaṭakku irukka*) until they died from thirst and hunger. Modern Christian Europe and the US would have a guilt culture. As in the case of vicarious punishment, an intermediate position is occupied by southern Europe. The Sicilian author Pirandello treats the psychology of shame in several of his plays and the suicide of Southerners who feel dishonoured is not uncommon.

Even though shame-inspired ritual suicide is no longer practised in Tamilnadu, shame may still push people to inconsiderate actions. It is responsible for the fact that some characters of the Vatican plays are ashamed of their poverty and try to hide it. In one case the son reproaches his father for selling coconuts near the school in which he studies because this would shame him in front of his classmates (VR 5.12.1990). Several plays tell of wives who are ashamed of the husband's lowly work and push him to pretend to be more than he is with unpleasant consequences.

Both Christianity and Hinduism teach forgiveness, but it would not occur to a Westerner to consider forgiveness a punishment because it shames the guilty one. However, this is the moral of one of Tiruvalluvar's couplets that informs some Vatican plays. In 'Tit for tat' (VR 5.5.1992) a woman does not want to help her sick landlady because, in a similar situation, the latter had not helped her, but preferred to go to the cinema. Her husband remarks that the landlady's action was wrong, but to retaliate would also be so since it would make hatred grow. Helping her is appropriate punishment. If shame will correct the landlady it depends on God. This play refers to Tiruvalluvar's words obliquely, two other plays quote them *verbatim*. In 'I shall not let you go free' (VR 20.7.1993) the husband, who has been cheated out of a big sum of money, thinks of revenging himself on the cheat by refusing the alibi he could give his former friend when the latter is suspected of murder. But his wife quotes *Innā ceytārai oruttal/avar nāṇa naṇṇayam ceytu viṭal* ('Thou shalt indeed punish those men who have once injured thee/do shame them by the good return and wipe off its memory'; Balasubramaniam 1962: couplet 32.4) and makes him change his mind. In the other play quoting the couplet a drunken actor revenges himself on a fellow actor, who has refused him a loan (to teach him a lesson), by not calling him to act in a play which will run for thirty days. Nevertheless the ex-friend calls him to act in a play which will run for one hundred days. Feeling shamed, the drunkard not only makes peace with his former friend but also promises to give up alcohol (VR 12.5.1998).

2. Positive Falsehood

Although clear reference to Tiruvalluvar's above dictum occurs in only three plays of my *corpus*, a sense of honour, dignity and shame are frequent subjects. Positive falsehood propounded in another famous couplet of the *Tirukkural* is explicitly referred to just once, but its idea is evident much more commonly than the former. It also inspired only a minority of plays, less than 10%, but even this number is striking.

I do not want to imply that the Christian West has a monolithic view of truth. The American pragmatist W. James' claim that truth must be related to its worth to human beings strongly reminds one of Tiruvalluvar's words on the subject. But even those who would not agree with James in all cases will accept the merciful or white lie. Doctors are even enjoined not to tell the bitter truth to patients they think cannot bear it. The teacher's white lie to save a farmer from prison in a play mentioned before (p. 317) will likely be praised by most people.

Less dramatic but also protective is a father's lie. He asks his son for money allegedly for himself, in reality for his daughter-in-law. He knows that she would be beaten by his son if he learnt that she has given a loan to her own father in need (VR 2.3.1999). The police using tricks to discover criminals is a practice common in India and the West. In one play, not the police but the wronged Untouchable's son resorts to a trick to have his violent and corrupt master arrested. Pretending to be a police officer he phones the master, who offers him a bribe, and then tapes the phone call. The immediate reason for this vengefulness is that the master has beaten a little Untouchable boy for touching his own son and classmate (VR 17.12.1991).

In addition to the Western white lie there is the medical falsehood of the placebo test. In 'You are your own enemy' a Tamil doctor devises a personal version of it. When all his attempts to cure his alcoholic patient fail, he gives him pills claiming that they will turn into poison if he drank alcohol while taking them. This does the trick. The patient refrains from alcohol long enough to get used to abstinence, so that he does not revert to his addiction when told that the pills were only vitamins (VR 7.4.1992).

The Western invention of multiple choice questionnaires also deliberately mix truth and falsehood asking the candidate to find out which is which. Some tests in the Indian Christian plays are not of this type but resemble more those of God in the Old Testament. They also have parallels in the Hindu gods' habit of testing their devotees through disguise and various other forms of falsehood, like changing horses into jackals and back again into horses. 'An interview of the heart' (VR 1990) tells of a manager's laudable aim to discover the right person for work in his welfare institute. He has the standard test conducted by an assistant and himself walks in the street disguised as a leper. He thus discovers a truly compassionate woman applicant who does not hesitate to risk coming late and being excluded from the interview in order to help the presumed leper.

An employer has thought of a rather different test to find a hard-working employee. He stipulates that he will give a permanent job only to the candidate who, in addition to being qualified, brings him a text book no longer in print which his daughter needs for her studies. After a long search one candidate remembers that his friend has the book. When the latter learns why it is needed, he decides to give it himself to the employer in order to get the job. However, the employer only pays him for the book, but gives the job to the first candidate as a reward for his indefatigable effort (VR 9.2.1999).

'Blood is thicker than water' (VR 17.5.1994), in Tamil expressed as 'Even though he does not dance his flesh does', recalls the Hindu gods' mentally cruel tests. A police superintendent who has heard of an inspector's incorruptibility wants to test him, enlisting the help of the inspector's son and a constable. The constable claims to have surprised the son trying to steal a woman's necklace. The inspector has his son arrested. Rather than yielding to his wife's plea to use his authority to let him go free he is determined to resign. When presenting his letter of resignation to the superintendent he is given another letter of promotion, since he has passed the test with flying colours.

In the preceding examples falsehood pursues a positive aim but, with the exception of the doctor's placebo test, was not meant to correct people. I now come to didactic falsehood. 'The trick to catch a person' (VR 11.8.1992) comprises two sketches with the same didactic purpose. In the first sketch a thief has his bag stolen by another thief. The second thief is the first thief's victim who having recognized who stole from him plays the thief himself to teach the first one a lesson. The trick works and the real thief repents. In the second sketch a debtor engages a false soothsayer who predicts the heartless usurer's imminent death. Convinced by the debtor that one can take along in death only one's good deeds but not one's money the usurer corrects himself. He promises to remain honest even after he is told the truth.

The Indian concept of *ahimsā* presupposes a moral sensibility greater than Western kindness, since it extends to animals who are not killed and eaten. On the other hand, the average Indian seems to be taught sensibility to the pain of others less than the average Westerner. This is evident in Indian humour. An accident with unpleasant or serious consequences for the one concerned may nevertheless cause laughter because it is an unusual sight (Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi 1992: 176). Christian Tamil playwrights are conscious of this characteristic of their countrymen and chastise it repeatedly. Without being explicitly commented on the debtor's corrective method of causing the usurer's fear of death can only be called mental cruelty.

Other plays devise mental shock treatments explicitly, sometimes using the English term. 'Shock treatment' (VR 4.4.1995) deals with naïve insensibility or tactlessness. A woman has no qualms about telling her neighbour that her daughter, who is blind in one eye, will have difficulties in finding a husband, unlike her own beautiful daughter. The heartless woman's husband re-

proaches her but does not succeed in making her understand the mental cruelty of her behaviour. Some time later, upon returning from hospital where their daughter has given birth to a girl, the husband tells her that all has gone well, except for the fact that their granddaughter is blind in one eye. His inconsolable wife exclaims that this misfortune is surely divine punishment. The husband corrects her: no it is his punishment. He has invented the story to make her understand her fault, which she does.

Deliberately spreading false news either to disparage others, or just for malicious fun of it, may be a defect more common in traditional societies than in modern ones where moral censure is relaxed. In the Vatican plays, one way of correcting falsehood is to use a second falsehood, a technique that recalls absurdity cancelled by absurdity in folktales of India and other parts of the world (Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi 2002: 129-30). A liar who enjoys people's fear and sorrow when he brings them all sorts of bad news corrects himself after he is falsely told that his own child has been hurt in a traffic accident (VR 13.9.1990).

One type of slanderous lie is the anonymous letter. In order to revenge himself on the family who rejected his daughter as daughter-in-law, her father writes an anonymous letter in which he casts doubt on their daughter's morality, thus ruining her marriage and bringing shame on her parents. Simultaneously, he proposes that his own son marry the slandered girl. This makes the son guess that his father wrote the letter. To teach him a lesson he engages an actress who tearfully claims she is pregnant by him. Now his father is shamed for arranging the girl's marriage to his profligate son until the latter restores harmony and causes his father's repentance admitting that all was a play (VR July 1990).

In addition to prescribing placebo pills, doctors use also other falsehoods with didactic intention. A mother thinks that her son passes too much time with his paternal grandfather and thereby neglects his studies. She claims the doctor has told her that the old man's cough is the beginning of TB and her boy must not come in contact with him any more. The incredulous husband consults the doctor, learns of her lie and understands its reason. The doctor promises to correct her on the next occasion. When she comes to him with an ordinary cough he diagnoses the beginning of TB. Now she asks forgiveness of her father-in-law and her husband asks her to forgive him (VR 10.3.1998). In this play in which falsehood again cancels falsehood the wife has to be told a lesson, though perhaps not in this mentally cruel way.

In another play a lawyer uses didactic falsehood to convince a client of her error. A business man's wife comes to him asking for a divorce, not because her husband beats or betrays her, but because she feels unloved by him and her children. Unconvinced by her stories about their lovelessness, the lawyer tells her he will prove that she is wrong, if she agrees to his plan, which she does. He has her husband informed that she has been admitted to a

private clinic with a bad bone fracture. Now her husband rushes to her bedside, renouncing all business engagements and her children shower her with love. The would-be divorcee admits that her lawyer was right and stages a gradual recovery as advised by him (VR 2.11.1993). The positive aim of preventing divorce in this play justifies the mental torture of innocent people, a method similar to vicarious punishment discussed before.

The dowry problem is repeatedly solved with the help of didactic falsehood. In 'The bartered youths' (VR 19.4.1994), the father asks the marriage broker to find a rich bride for his son who wants to marry a poor girl. When the mother cannot make the obstinate father change his mind, mother and son resort to a trick jointly. Contrary to other marriage brokers in real life and fiction this brother points out that lying is a sin. But the groom replies that a lie is necessary to abolish the dowry evil and give a poor girl the chance to marry. After the wedding ceremony, the father learns that the money and jewellery his daughter-in-law brought into the family were provided by his own wife. He takes the news in good humour.

Sometimes didactic falsehood devised to fight the dowry evil comes from well-meaning people outside the family. A dowry-hunting mother who refuses to accept the poor girl her son wants to marry is made to change her mind thanks to a friend of the family. The friend invites her and her family to his house where his daughter-in-law, dressed in blue jeans and wearing her hair open, orders about her mother-in-law. She claims she has the right to do so, since she brought a rich dowry. This experience convinces the mother that it is better to have a poor but gentle girl as daughter-in-law rather than a rich and disobedient one. At the wedding ceremony of her son and his chosen bride, the friend and his family are invited. The mother notices that the arrogant young woman is decently dressed in a saree and behaves modestly. The sound of the wedding music drown her suspicious questions ('For whom the price?; VR April 1991).

Didactic falsehood may also solve other problems arising during marriage arrangements. In 'The bait' (VR 18.1.1989) the prospective groom who comes to see the eldest daughter of the family prefers her younger sister. The latter consoles the rejected bride, promising to put things right. She writes a letter pretending that her father and herself agree to the marriage he desires. Then she goes to the prospective groom's house, where she claims that on seeing the latter's handsome brother she has changed her mind. Her feigned fickleness makes him understand his fault. He will abide by his earlier proposal to marry her elder sister.

The family considered a unit in which its members are interchangeable has characterized some cases of vicarious punishment. A similar idea appears in plays which use didactic falsehood to reestablish harmony in the family. A young man notices how rudely his future father-in-law treats his wife. Sometimes after his marriage his father-in-law visits his daughter in her new home

and is taken aback by the harshness with which she is treated by her husband. He strongly advises her to return to her native home. She does come, but accompanied by her husband who explains that he had only pretended to mistreat her to make him realize her mother's feelings. The father promises to be kind in the future. The mother smiles as they have not seen her for a long time (VR 10.5.1994).

This play on didactic falsehood defends the mistreated wife, but Indian wives must be able to bear mistreatment, as we have seen at the beginning of this study (pp. 291-92). In 'For wives only' (VR 22.4.1997) the parents impress this ideal on their daughter through the same trick. The daughter is beaten by her husband so that his five fingers show on her face for not preparing coffee. A neighbour advises her to go on strike and return to her native home, which she does. Hoping to save her marriage, her father pretends to beat her mother who pretends to insist on getting a new saree. Now it is the daughter who advises her mother to strike, but the mother replies that it was her fault, she should not have troubled her husband, tired from work. Persuaded by her argument the daughter returns to her husband.

Another young wife has to be cured of her romantic view of marriage. Not content with her husband, she writes about her problem to a famous woman writer who invites her to come to her house. There she notices how rudely the husband treats her heroine. The latter explains to her that life is different from literature. She has learnt to think only of her husband's good qualities not his faults. The young wife returns home content that her own husband is so much better. However, the writer had asked her husband to stage rudeness to save the visitor's marriage (VR 2.11.1999).

Drunkenness is one of the character defects most frequently chastised in the Vatican plays. This does not come as a surprise since abuse of alcohol is indeed a great problem among Indian lower castes who constitute the majority of Christian converts. 'The heart cannot bear it' (VR April 1991) uses didactic falsehood to combat it. Realizing that his mother has been unable to make his father stop drinking, the son takes matters into his own hands. In his psychology class he has learnt that parents cannot bear seeing their children adopt their own bad habits, so he comes home seemingly drunk. That makes the father reform himself and give a good example. The actors in the Vatican plays are good at imitating the drunkard's drawling speech, which they have doubtlessly heard many times. Using a similar trick a son-in-law asks his wife to lament that he beats her in his bouts of drunkenness. This distressing news induces the father to make a deal with his son-in-law that both will stop drinking (VR 13.7.1993).

Didactic falsehood may also create harmonious relations between in-laws. In 'The turning point' (VR 1989), the wife constantly complains about her sister-in-law. She is made to change her behaviour when the latter proves to be generous in an emergency situation invented by her husband.

The didactic trick employed in 'You reap what you sow' (VR July 1989) is again devised within the family, but its result has a wider social meaning. After having brilliantly passed his entrance exam and been promised the job, the candidate receives a telegram that he is put on the waiting list. When he complains to the manager, the latter explains that he is obliged to give the job to a young man recommended by an influential person whose help he needs for his company. Without showing the slightest remorse, he adds that the candidate will surely find another job elsewhere, if not, he will have to consult a soothsayer. The dejected candidate's friend promises to help. He happens to be the prospective groom of the manager's daughter. In accordance with her he repeats the same words his friend was told to his future father-in-law. He has to refuse his daughter because he is obliged to marry the daughter of an influential person whose protection his family needs. He even imitates the manager's lack of remorse and ironic recommendation. The seemingly spurned bride consoles her dejected father, saying her fiancé will surely change his mind, if his friend gets the job he merits. In this play corruption is an openly admitted side-issue, the main moral shortcoming corrected through falsehood is injustice and failure to keep one's promise. The manager's insensibility towards the candidate's feeling is punished by making him mentally suffer for a while.

A further play on positive falsehood combining private and public settings is remarkable for another reason. The father advises his son to pray to God before going to an interview. Without having done so, the son presents himself to the manager. The latter desires not only professional qualifications but also good character and is convinced that a devout person is honest too. Putting his hand into an earlier candidate's pocket he had found a *ganja* ('marihuana') cigarette, pornographic pictures and a razor blade (for pickpocketing). Repeating his search in the new candidate's case he finds pictures of God and a paper on which the divine name is written over and over again (a traditional Hindu form of devotion). Interpreting the candidate's confusion as modesty the manager is highly pleased and gives him the job. The elated youth wonders for a moment whether the laundry man has mixed up the contents of different customers' pockets, but his father says that it has been God's grace and he agrees. He will never say again that he does not believe in God as he used to do simply because it is fashionable among his friends. While he is in church to thank God his sister reveals to her father that it was she who put the religious material into his pocket. Since the manager's daughter is her college mate, she has found out how her father conducts interviews (VR 2.11.1988). Superficially the play might seem to uphold the Hindu view that good actions produce good results even when performed unintentionally. But this is not so. The candidate's unintentional falsehood leads him to give up his intentional false claim to be an atheist.

The play entitled 'If truth were falsehood?' (VR 8.12.1992) is particularly interesting because it shows that Tamil Christians are aware of the contradic-

tion between Tiruvalluvar's teaching 'Even a falsehood partakes of the nature of a truth/But only if it produces just a harmless good in sooth' (Balasubramaniam 1962: couplet 30.2) and the Western Christian view. A school boy enjoys telling small lies just for the fun of it, but sometimes also with more laudable intentions. For instance, he boasts of the reception his family supposedly gave to a government official in order to make another boy envious, who used to describe to a poor classmate the good food he eats every day. Although the liar is a bad sportsman he tells his mother that he has won a prize in a contest to make her happy. The liar's friend who has repeatedly reproached him for his bad habit seizes the opportunity to correct him when the liar's chemistry and physics books are stolen. He claims he does not believe in the theft and will not let him study in his books. He also asks all other classmates to refuse help. Seeing the boy cry rather than write his exam the teacher inquires. On being told the whole story, he refers to Tiruvalluvar's couplet in his own words and concedes that the boy lied with good intentions, but a lie is a lie and ought not to be told. The boy promises never to lie again.

D) EXPLICIT AND IMPLICIT CHRISTIAN TEACHING

1. *Criticism of Common Hindu Beliefs*

The Christian playwrights are careful not to seem blasphemous in Hindu eyes (more than 55% of listeners are said to be Hindus). The beliefs criticized are common among Hindus but not shared by all of them. They are also criticized by Hindu reformers.

1. Purity and Pollution

The pan-Indian concepts of purity and pollution have both social and religious aspects. The positive pole of purity, which does not normally create any social problems, is left untouched by the Christian authors. Some aspects of pollution are also never dealt with since they are unlikely to cause any ill feelings, such as the forty-day prohibition for the parturient to visit a temple, which has a parallel in the Bible. It was practised among some Western Christian communities and is or was also observed by Tamil Christians in my experience. However, the attribution of impurity to social categories is the aspect of Hinduism most strongly criticized by Hindu reformers and well-meaning laymen alike. Naturally, Christian playwrights defend the uplift of the ex-Untouchables who constitute a large portion of converts. They stress that character and not birth makes one high or low, in which they have the support of Subramanya Bharati. The title of one of their plays 'There are no castes, dear' (VR 21.4.1998) quotes his poem 'Children's song'. The plays also preach

equality among people of different castes and creeds praising friendship between members of high and low caste as well as between Hindus and Christians, as we have seen.

2. Auspiciousness and Inauspiciousness

In the case of auspiciousness and inauspiciousness, which partly overlap with purity and pollution, the positive pole is again more or less unobjectionable. There is nothing wrong in choosing a good or auspicious day for an action like moving to a new house as mentioned in passing in the Christmas play entitled 'A good day' (25.10.1994), an expression that includes the meaning of auspiciousness. However, several aspects of inauspiciousness are singled out for criticism in perfect accord with Hindus with a modern spirit. Decades ago Kalki (1985: 21-28) already made fun of it. In my *corpus* a sister's kindness corrects her brother who believes she is inauspicious (VR 1.6.1993). The inauspiciousness of the barren woman is mentioned in one play censuring envy and lack of kindness. A mother reproaches a childless neighbour for giving sweets to her child, fearing that her inauspiciousness might make her child ill (VR 29.4.1997). The widow's inauspiciousness is mentioned only twice, for instance in the play in which the husband objects to a widowed servant but then tries to arrange her remarriage (which would immediately cancel any presumed inauspiciousness). The lack of interest in the widow's inauspiciousness is understandable, since the victims of this belief are mostly Brahmins who are nearly absent from the plays. However, the inauspiciousness of things, words and omens are repeatedly made the butt of criticism.

One play expounds the danger of belief in omens in historical guise. A king does not set out immediately to fight Muslim invaders because he holds the time to be inauspicious, since a black cat was seen near a temple. Thus the Muslims are able to besiege his castle and oblige him to surrender ('No, no, not now'; VR 1990).

A grandfather who believes that a gecko falling on his sick grandson forebodes the child's death frightens his mother to such an extent that she faints and is taken to hospital. On her return, after four days, she learns that her little boy has already recovered ('Why this vain fear?'; VR 1990). An astrologer's prediction of an old man's imminent death comes almost true. Worried about her husband's life his wife dies a psychogenic death (VR 6.8.1990).

Belief in omens may also be criticized in a comic vein. The brother-in-law's trick to correct a usurer, which we have seen before (p. 316), belongs to this category. In another play a peace-loving man wants to invite his two brothers-in-law, who do not speak to each other, to his house-warming party. He therefore walks around the house of one of them at night shouting that a great banyan tree will fall, a great life will go away. Hearing this the angry brother-in-law attributes the false holy man's words to himself and thinks that he will soon die. This conviction induces him to make peace with his relative.

On being told the truth he accepts it laughing (VR 17.9.1996).

The play entitled 'A good omen' even makes fun of the positive side of belief in omens (VR 20.4.1993). A superstitious mother prevents her son from setting out for an interview because a woodcutter passes by, which is a bad omen (since he will cut all positive things). Her husband jokingly remarks that if a woodcutter is inauspicious, in his house everything will be so. Unconvinced by this argument the mother calls a Brahmin astrologer in order to learn of her daughter's marriage chances. The astrologer foretells that the daughter will marry a high-placed man coming from a *periya* ('great' or 'big') family in front of whom cars stand in line. A man arrives who asks her daughter in marriage for his son. The young man lives in the mountain resort Ooty at a height of more than 2000m, is one of seven children and works as a traffic policeman. Tongue-in-cheek the girl's father remarks to his superstitious wife that the astrologer's predictions will all come true.

3. Direct Contact with Supernatural Beings

In the Old Testament God speaks to his devotees, so there is no Christian objection to this belief in principle. However, the deification of deceased ancestors is unacceptable to Christians. Consequently, the belief (also not shared by all Hindus) is rejected that ancestors with supernatural knowledge may speak to their living family members in their dreams. Knowing a mother's belief that her deceased husband gives advice in people's dreams several relatives claim that he has told them to marry her beautiful daughter. When the girl's brother obliges them to admit that they lied the mother decides that she will agree to her daughter's marriage only if her husband will tell her so in her own dream. Her daughter despairs of ever getting married, but her brother promises to help. Their mother is made to find a letter of the deceased father in a book in which he writes that he knows he will soon die and is preoccupied about their daughter's suitable marriage given her superstition. Now the mother agrees to the marriage her daughter desires. After the wedding the brother reveals to his happy sister that he is the author of the letter. He has devised this play, another instance of positive falsehood, in her interest (VR 4.5.1999).

4. Animal Sacrifice

'Sacrificial goats' (VR 15.12.1992) criticizes animal sacrifice. A little boy is desperate because his father wants to sacrifice a kid, his playmate, during a village festival. The teacher supports the boy telling the father that one must not kill any living being. His words do not impress the father who continues preparations for the sacrifice. The boy who climbed a tree to see what would happen falls and loses much blood. The teacher takes him to the hospital and offers to give him blood. Now the father compares the blood shed by

his son to the blood the sacrificial goat would have shed and decrees that henceforth all blood sacrifice must be stopped in the village. The moral teaching of the play is clear, since animal sacrifice is distasteful to Christians and higher caste Hindus alike. However, meat-eating villagers cannot be made to stop animal sacrifice with reference to *ahimsā*, as the teacher has tried to do, but only with the object of spiritualizing their religion and abolishing its primitive features.

II. Biblical Tales

Plays on Biblical tales are relatively rare and those that choose to dramatize them mostly stress beliefs and values common to Christians and Hindus.

Among the three Hindu ways to salvation, the way of devotion, *bhakti marga*, is now the favourite one. Consequently, Job's and Tobias' father's unswerving devotion strike a familiar note in the minds of Hindu listeners. In both Biblical cases, God cruelly tests his devotees, a technique acceptable to Hindus who remember for instance Viṣṇu's test of certain *Ālvārs* and Śiva's even more cruel tests of some *Nāyanmārs*. In the Biblical tale of Tobias (VR 1.12.1992) an angel sent by God appears in the guise of a friend who guides Tobias to the magic medicine that will cure his father's blindness. This event strongly recalls magical cures in Hindu legends except for the fact that in their case a divine *avatāra* is usually the helper. The tale of Lazarus found sitting in Abraham's lap, while the devil takes the rich man to hell who had refused Lazarus alms might *mutatis mutandis* also come from India (VR 3.9.1996).

The very title 'The heroic divine woman' (VR 17.12.1996) given to the play about Judith highlights the associations evoked by it in the Indian mind. In Hindu mythology the heroic divine woman would be the warrior goddess Durgā whose violence, for instance in killing the dangerous buffalo demon, is considered legitimate since it protects others. The ancient Tamil warrior goddess Korṟavai might also come to mind. However, the Biblical tale of Judith also defends the deeply felt value of female chastity. Judith thanks God for the fact that her trick of making Holofernes drunk was sufficient for her scheme. He spared her the sacrifice of her chastity so that she did not commit any sin. These words show that Old Testament Jews and modern Tamil Christians do not think killing sinful but extra-marital sexual intercourse would have been so. The Vatican play literally quotes the Biblical priest's words: 'You are a saint'.

A play with a modern Tamil setting also contrasts wifely chastity and death, though not of a violent nature. A coolie's wife needs money to buy medicine for her sick husband. The contractor whose advances she has long resisted profits by the occasion. He will give her the loan only if she yields to him. If her chastity is more important to her than her husband's life, this is her business he states. In this predicament her son arrives informing her that his

father has died (providentially, one might almost say; VR 6.10.1991).

'The prodigal son' is the Christian playwrights' favourite Biblical parable. It appears with only minor changes in its Biblical form and in several modern versions. Its central message: repentance and forgiveness are also the most frequently propounded morals in other plays, as we have seen. Through a slight change a Tamil version stresses these values even more than the Biblical original, since the prodigal son's elder brother angrily leaves the house unable to bear the royal treatment his father gives his unworthy younger brother. The father tells him that his door will always remain open for him too, *i.e.* he will forgive him if he repents and returns. Repentant sinners, forgiven not by their fathers but by God himself (of course, the father in the parable stands for God), repeatedly appear in both Christian and Hindu lore. One may cite the historical repentance of Loyola, the founder of the Jesuit order, and the legendary repentance of the Hindu saint-poet Aruṇākiri.

The spectacular conversion of Saul to Paul cannot but touch Christian converts' heart. The play retelling this episode has been given the alliterative title 'Even a stone softened' (VR 1990). Saul's conversion may or may not be considered miraculous, but the tale of the Kanaan wedding contains a patent miracle.

Its theatrical version is put under the beautiful metaphoric title 'The water maiden blushes' (VR 23.11.1988), *i.e.* colourless water turns red. It may be useful to recall that the Tamil translation of wine in this play as well as in the Eucharist is *tirāṭcai racam*, unfermented juice of grapes. Given the enormous cultural importance of the wedding ceremony, including the wedding meal, in India any Christian Tamil can sympathize with the host's despair when his miscalculation of the needed quantity of beverage became apparent. The miracle remedying this miscalculation will be greeted with satisfaction by any listener of the play. Given the Tamil and generally Indian custom of uniting the whole extended family at a wedding the Tamil Christian playwright makes Mary one of the host's relatives.

This stress on family relations, which we have seen in the first chapters of this study, also characterizes a play broadcast not by Vatican Radio, but by Madras Radio at Christmas several years ago. In this play, Joseph and Mary are cross-cousins and the mystery of Mary's virginity is solved in a typically Indian way. Joseph had wanted to remain a bachelor but could not help bowing to his uncle's wish to marry his daughter. He asks his bride to help him keep his vow of chastity and she agrees. Stress on family relations also appears in passing in the Vatican play on Judith since the heroine is accompanied in her mission, not by a servant, but by her daughter disguised as a servant.

In addition to adapting some Biblical tales to the Hindu environment, the Vatican plays in one case elaborate a Biblical character's life story autonomously. While Pär Lagerkvist's novel elaborates the vicissitudes of Barabbas' life after his death sentence was annulled, the Vatican play 'A day when he

lived in hiding' (28.4.1992) creates a prelude to the Biblical episode. The highway robber Barabbas is in the habit of killing travellers in order to appropriate himself of their belongings. He also thinks of killing the holy family on their way to Egypt. Barabbas' assistant, however, objects and points out that the travellers are as poor as they themselves. When Barabbas remains adamant in his murderous intention, the assistant proposes to make the travellers' life the stake in a game of dice. If he wins, the family belongs to him and will remain unharmed. To Barabbas' surprise, every throw makes his assistant the winner, so he is obliged to grant them shelter for the night. When the holy family sets out in the morning, Barabbas is struck by the child's calm and innocent glance. 'What does it mean?'. The narrator comments that he will get the answer in Pilatus courtroom and at Golgata. The stress on eyes in this religious tale, which may seem strange to a Westerner, is probably not accidental. It also appears in another play discussed below. According to a Hindu view, the eyes reveal divinity. The eye-opening ceremony, *i.e.* the chiselling of the eyes to complete a statue transforms a mere stone into the embodiment of the deity.

III. *Christian Teaching in Modern Tamil Guise*

1. Forgiveness and Altruism

a) Forgiveness

As mentioned before, the parable of the prodigal son is particularly dear to the Christian authors. Half a dozen plays in my *corpus* deal with it explicitly or implicitly. One version chooses the well-known Christian metaphor of 'The lost sheep' for its title (VR 7.11.1995). As in the Biblical parable there is hatred between two brothers. The elder brother has brought up his younger brother trying his best to make him either study or work, but all in vain. The younger brother commits a theft and is imprisoned. On his release the elder brother does not want to see him any more, even though he has corrected himself in prison and now takes up the lowly work of a riksha coolie. At his place of work the elder brother commits an error and is strongly reproached by the manager. Then however, the manager forgives him, induced to be magnanimous by the generosity of a riksha coolie who takes him to his office despite the fact that he has hurt his leg in an accident. The generous riksha coolie turns out to be the repentant ex-prisoner whom his brother now forgives recalling the Biblical teaching.

In addition to the central moral this modern version of the prodigal son singles out the opposition between brothers in the Biblical original. Two other implicit versions do without the brothers but choose the theme of partition at the beginning of the parable. In 'Partition' (VR 4.7.1995) the aged parents first live with their eldest son in the village. After the son's wife objects to their

presence, their younger son welcomes them in town, but the father would prefer to live in the village for reasons of health. When he decides to divide his property, the eldest son expects to obtain nothing since he drove away his parents, but is treated generously. This makes his wife repent. She now invites her husband's parents to stay with them in the village.

A second play on the same theme makes the forgiving mother the central figure (VR 18.8.1998). She divides her property evenly among her sons, also among those who have not taken care of her after her husband's death. Questioned about this seeming injustice, she explains that she loves all her children alike. Besides, she is convinced that the sons who do not want her in their house in reality, love her but are instigated by their wives not to show it.

The prodigal son stresses the father's, or God's forgiveness. But the Bible also says: 'forgive, so that you will be forgiven', *i.e.* forgiveness should engender a sort of chain reaction. This already happened in the modern version of 'The prodigal son' entitled 'The lost sheep', but it can also be expounded without the help of the parable. In 'No one-way street' (VR 13.1.1988) a servant has stolen the master's necklace and is beaten for his crime by another servant. When the guilty servant tells his master that he committed the theft because his daughter has been sent back to her native home for not bringing a promised necklace, the master forgives him. He also advances the money needed to buy a necklace which he will gradually detract from the servant's salary. After this event, the forgiven servant does not talk to the one who beat him any more. When the latter is hit by a motorcycle he fails to call help and thus becomes the cause of his death. Now the master chases away the servant whom he once forgave because he has not been able to do the same.

'When errors are punished' (VR 25.8.1992) deals with the same theme in an office setting. The manager forgives the serious error committed by the head clerk. However, when the head clerk wants to give a suspension order to a typist who made an error, the manager suspends him instead. In this context it may be interesting to recall a play in which a woman begs her manager to forgive the peon who has tried to discredit her, because if he were dismissed and lost his income, his family would suffer (VR 20.7.1988). The teacher who hid the fact that he was accidentally struck by a farmer's axe when the latter wanted to kill an enemy also did so thinking of the fate of the aggressor's family, if the bread winner went to jail. He furthermore reminds the repentant farmer that 'He died for people's sins'.

In the New Testament, Jesus saves a prostitute from being stoned by inviting only those to throw stones who are guiltless. Two very different plays express the same moral stripped of its sexual trappings. 'The rumour spread by Vasanti' (VR 1990; the Tamil title joins the name of the slanderer and rumour through alliteration) tells of a slander-monger who accuses the mother of an unmarried office-going girl of allowing her daughter to come home late (the reason for her late-coming is overtime at her office). When the same reproach

is heaped on her own younger sister, the slander-monger is taken aback.

The Biblical 'first stone' is even more patent in the play entitled 'Are you honourable man?' (VR 1.9.1992). The *pañcāyat* meets because people want to outcaste the man who appropriated himself of some of the money he collected for a temple festival. However, a village dignitary points out to those who insist on outcasting the embezzler that he knows they themselves did so on other occasions. Besides, the man did not commit the crime for his own sake but to pay for a friend who needed an urgent operation. The accused promises never to embezzle again and the accusers refrain from outcasting him.

Both Good Friday and Christmas provide occasions for upholding the moral value of forgiveness. In 'Resurrection' (VR 13.4.1993) an old sick man in hospital does not want to see his relatives who once treated him badly, since he suspects that they have come to visit him hoping to inherit his money. The Christian nurse does not believe so. It is Good Friday and the bells ring forgiveness. She offers to tape the relatives' conversation in the hall, which confirms that they have indeed not come for his money. Forgiving them, the old man feels resurrected.

Contrary to Good Friday, which is mentioned only once in my *corpus*, around Christmas time the Vatican plays regularly refer to this major Christian festival. 'Those eyes' (VR 8.11.1994) is interesting because it brings in again the theme of eyes we have met before in the elaboration of a Biblical subject. Two thieves wait for the family to go to church to break into their house. Climbing from the roof one thief suddenly sees two eyes look at him. Frightened, he loses his grip, falls and breaks his leg. The other thief escapes. When the family returns, the injured thief begs them to forgive him promising never to steal again. The houseowner replies that if he did not forgive, it would not be Christmas. The eyes the thief has seen are in a picture of child Jesus illuminated by his flash light.

Like other moral values forgiveness may be taught through tricks including positive falsehood. In 'Once more' the teachers are two children, one of whom lives with the father, the other with the mother who left her husband because he beat her. When their parents do not listen to them when they say that they do not want any Christmas present but wish to celebrate with both their parents they think of a trick. Each child induces his respective parent to attend a Christmas mass, making them stand close to each other inadvertently. At the end of the mass, the parents thus have to exchange the word *camātānam* (peace or reconciliation). When this word does not yet convince them to return home together, the little boy pretends to feel dizzy. Now both parents take care of him jointly, which makes him recover quickly and finally induces the parents to celebrate Christmas together (VR 7.12.1999).

Christmas being the child god's festival, it is probably not accidental that in another play too a child teaches forgiveness and generosity. Generosity is first stressed by a servant woman who gives the new saree she has received

from her masters for Christmas to a still poorer widow. The master's little girl then gives her own new dress to the servant's girl forgiving her for having recently beaten her. Her father remarks that they celebrate a phoney Christmas, their child and the servant have taught them the true Christmas spirit (VR 24.12.1996).

b) Altruism

Christmas is also an occasion for teaching altruism and hospitality. 'An old woman came' (VR Dec. 1989) punishes a family for their lack of human kindness and hospitality, but the test the old woman has devised amounts to tactless intrusion and would hardly be accepted in the West. While the family is getting ready to receive the husband's manager, who has promised to celebrate Christmas with them, an old woman arrives, declaring that she wants to stay with them for five days. Some time ago when she fainted in the street, a taxi driver saved her, but she thinks she owes her life to the woman riding in the taxi and now wants to celebrate Christmas with her family. Both husband and wife vainly try to get rid of her with all sorts of lies. When the manager comes they claim she is their mentally confused servant. However, the old woman had come with the intention of giving them a great amount of money in gratitude for the wife's help. Having learnt that it was the taxi driver who saved her, she leaves to give the money to him. Seeing the family's lack of Christmas spirit the manager leaves too.

'A good day' (VR 25.10.1994) again starts with preparations for Christmas. Mother and son are only interested in showing off their best clothes and have no feeling for the grandfather nor for a servant woman who asks for a loan to take care of her sick child. The visiting uncle reminds them that Jesus taught: 'love thy neighbour'.

Being among Christmas cardinal values, the Bible stresses altruism in various forms. The Vatican plays on this theme show a similar variety. In 'The temple door opened' (29.6.1988) a couple had vowed to go on pilgrimage and therefore do not want to remain to take a neighbour with appendix trouble to hospital. After having sent a telegram to her mother, they set out on their pilgrimage. Unable to enter the temple because of a bomb warning they return depressed just in time to give their approval for the neighbour's operation. This altruistic act makes them feel as if the temple door had opened. (Why a doctor cannot operate with the patient's consent, but needs that of another person, even if it is only a neighbour is a mystery). This play makes altruism more important than the performance of rites, an idea also found in Hinduism. In fact, characters of the play are probably Hindus and therefore I have translated *kōvil* as temple and not church. The husband's objection to visit the sick neighbour before going on pilgrimage because one must be pure when entering a temple, also points in this direction.

The title 'Even if it is only a small piece of straw' (VR 22.6.1999) is the

first part of the proverb every listener knows ends with 'it will serve to clean one's teeth'. The play teaches again helpfulness without expecting return but reward nevertheless ensues. Although in financial straits, a couple has always financially helped a woman neighbour they call 'auntie'. When the wife needs an operation, auntie's son, who happens to return from America, advances the money. Of course, since helping is a moral duty an altruistic action also recalls the dictum of the *Bhagavad Gītā* that enjoins one to do one's duty without expecting reward.

Jesus' words 'What you do to the most humble of your fellow men you do to me' teaches altruism in an even stronger form. These words conclude a play on a poor worker who takes a boy, hit by a car, to hospital in a riksha, paying the riksha coolie with borrowed money. His compassionate act is contrasted with the behaviour of bystanders who refuse to help because they do not want to get into trouble with the police (VR 21.7.1992).

Altruism can also be used as a means to impress others. At the death anniversary of his father a rich man gives alms to one hundred people. He is not, however, animated by genuine altruism, but only wants to show off. Learning that a coolie woman has given her whole earning of Rs.10 to a person who has to be taken to hospital, a dignitary remarks that she has given the greatest alms. He also reminds those assembled of Jesus' words that the two coins offered as alms by a poor widow were more than the big sums offered by rich phariseers, since they gave away only their surplus (VR 30.5.2000).

'He is your brother' (VR 28.1.1992) teaches altruism through the use of positive falsehood. The woman doctor of a leper hospital is worried that the new nurse who has shown signs of disgust at the sight of patients might find her job too difficult. To correct her, she enlists the help of the nurse's brother who happens to visit. After his love marriage, the brother has not had contact with her and the rest of the family for many years. He arrives as a leper full of bandages. When his sister takes them off unhesitatingly, she finds to her joy that his skin is healthy. The doctor tells her that she has used this trick to teach her that she should consider all patients her brothers. To a Tamil this Christian teaching may also recall the words '... all men are my relatives' in a famous poem of the *Puranānūru* (1983: poem 192), but there is a difference. The ancient Tamil poem does not speak of people in general, but of the renouncer and stresses more impartiality and detachment than love.

2. Other Christian Teachings

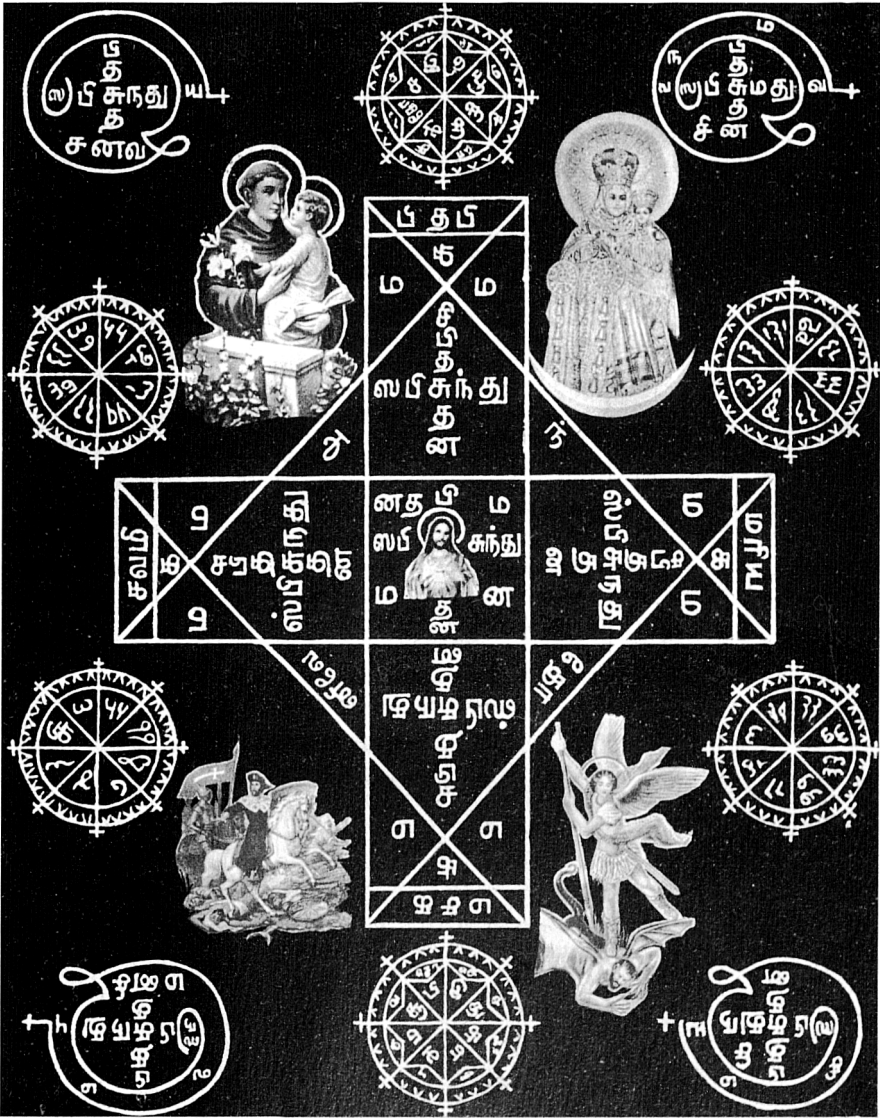
Rituals play an important part in both Christianity and Hinduism. Countless Hindu legends and even folktales try to induce people to dutifully perform their rituals by pointing out the benefits that may accrue from them. Similarly, the Vatican play 'Intoxication clears up' (VR 7.7.1998) points out the benefit that praying before one's meal may bring. It puts this teaching in the context of the husband-wife relationship. Since the husband cannot be made to stop

drinking, the wife's father invites her to return to her native home with her son. The all-bearing wife refuses to do so since she still hopes to be able to correct him and prays God daily for this to happen. When her husband comes home with another bottle she implores him to pray with her before starting to eat. During their prayer her little son drops the bottle, at the same time shouts are heard in the street. Twenty people have died after having drunk poisonous arrack. Realizing that he escaped the same fate because he prayed the husband repents and promises never to drink again.

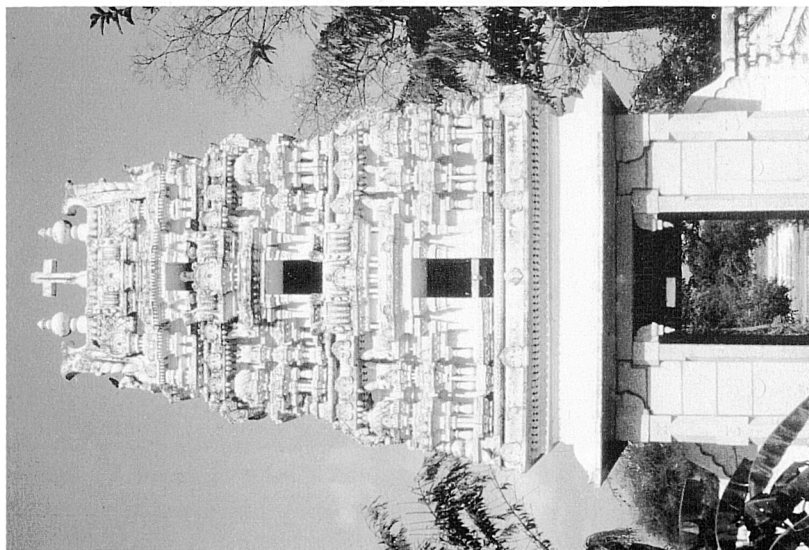
Pointing out the danger inherent in pride seems to be specially important in Hinduism in which the yogic superman easily falls prey to this temptation. However, ordinary Christians and Hindus may also possess the same character defect. 'The other side of a murder', which we have seen before (p. 307), punishes the man for his hubris that living up to a hundred years depends only on him. In 'Beyond us', a landowner is similarly convinced that he will enjoy life for a long time to come. Since his wife returned to her native home unable to bear his drinking habit, he wants to make his accountant's daughter his second wife. The accountant prefers to resign rather than give him his daughter. Seeing a cobra enter his house, the accountant and his daughter pass the night with a relative. In the morning the snake creeps out of the house in which the landowner is found dead. Thinking that the accountant went away leaving his daughter alone, he entered the house to take by force what had been denied to him and was bitten by the snake (VR 12.10.1993). The cobra revenging sin, especially of a sexual nature, one must know, is common in Hindu lore.

While pride is probably criticized more in Hinduism than in Christianity, humility is probably praised more by Christians than Hindus. The Vatican plays expound Jesus' words that 'he who humbles himself will be elevated' in contexts that would hardly come to mind to a Westerner. The protagonist of 'Temple tower and garbage heap' (VR 9.11.1988) is a politician who likes to boast of his greatness and contrives to make others praise him. To achieve the latter aim, he has newspapers indicate the donation he made to a women's society as twice the sum he actually gave. When a journalist shortens his speech, cancelling all self-praise the politician threatens him. The journalist happens to be the friend of the politician's son who hopes to correct his father by shaming him. At an assembly his father's picture should be revealed, but when the curtain is taken away it shows a monkey causing loud laughter. The son points out to his father that Jesus advised people to be humble. In fact, the humble woman of the women's society receives praise.

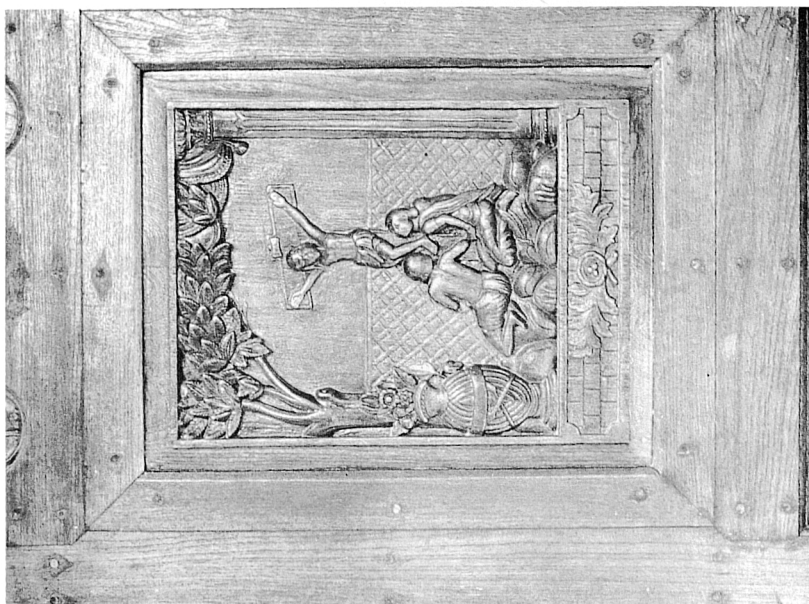
'Lightening and rain' (VR June 1992) repeats the same Christian teaching in the culture-specific context of the arranged marriage. One young man asks the marriage broker to tell a few lies so that he can find a rich bride. Another young man asks the marriage broker to find a bride with good character for him. If he were interested in money, he might just as well marry a money purse, he remarks. The first young man claims he is a security guard, even



Velankanni cakra.



a) Gate-tower (*gopuram*) topped by cross at Tirupputtur church, Tamilnadu. (Photo by the author).



b) The crucified Christ shaded by a tree at Tirupputtur church. (Photo by the author).



A lame boy offering curd to child Jesus in the legend of Vailankanni, Tamilnadu.

though he is only a watchman. The second young man says he is a mechanic in a spare-part company hiding his wealth. After the marriage the first man's wife comes to the broker disappointed, the second man's wife comes full of joy. The broker comments that in his profession he has seen many people who humbled themselves and were praised and *vice versa*.

According to Christian opinion, Christ's death at the cross, which might show his weakness, in reality proves his strength. The play entitled 'My strength is weakness' indirectly supports the latter idea in a film *milieu*. A successful film director shows kindness to the light boy whom the main actress, a capricious *prima donna*, wants to dismiss because he had not recognized her and dismisses her instead. He also reminds her that her show of authority to an inferior is a sign of weakness, not strength (VR 1.3.1994).

'Heaven is a good meal' (VR 24.8.1993) gives the stress on work typical of the Judeo-Christian tradition an Indian culture-specific form. The plot resembles a Tamil folktale but for its Christian twist. In the folktale, people simply get rid of an unwelcome guest, who has profited by their hospitality too often, by claiming that a snake fell into the food. In the Christian play too a relative regularly visits at meal time in order to be invited to eat. Warning him that their food is bad for his health does not impress him, so the unwilling hosts resort to a trick. They tell their boy that a gecko fell into the mutton dish. They will give the sauce first to the uncle to see what happens before he may eat the curry. When the boy asks his uncle whether he does not feel nauseated by the gecko in the food, he leaves disgusted. At home he says to his wife that henceforth he will eat only at home and work for his food, since the Bible says that those who do not work must not eat.

I end this presentation of Christian teaching in Hindu environment with a humorous play that fuses Christian and Hindu ideas. 'Heaven must be merited' (VR 20.2.91) starts with a Christian servant carrying a Bible who talks to his master's son rather disrespectfully, claiming that this is the way he has heard his master talk to his son. According to him, reading the Bible would not be useful to the youth because 'how can a donkey appreciate the fragrance of camphor?', a Tamil saying that corresponds to the Biblical *margaritas ante porcos*. When the angry youth opens the Bible, he reads that for the good ones the doors of heaven will always be open. Now he wants to start an agitation that sinners, too, must be allowed to go to heaven. Taken to heaven by God's bodyguard, he accuses God of several errors: his first was to create the world, the second to create man and the third to create sex. God laughs aloud, an echo of Śiva's boisterous laughter, but a new trait of the Christian God, and replies: 'No, the only error was to give reason to vain talkers like you'. But sinners can go to heaven, he goes on to explain, if they correct themselves and abolish desire, the root of all evil (an idea not contradicted by Christianity, but also not stressed in it as it is in Hinduism). The youth hopes to transform sinners into saints but wants to be the leader of the movement. God again laughingly tells

him that he must first abolish his desire for high office. Shouting: 'Abolish high office, abolish sinners!' the youth wakes up from his midday nap. He asks the servant whether there are really no sinners in the other world to which the servant replies: 'If not there, they are certainly here'.

CONCLUSIONS

Some years ago the Vatican was accused of relying 'overmuch on the aesthetics of ritual and a view of culture as divorced from social action' (Angrosino 1994: 830). If this was ever true, which is doubtful given the great number of Catholic schools and hospitals, it is certainly no longer so. Concern with social justice is one of the major themes in the Vatican plays. Unlike de Nobili who distinguished social form from soteriological content of religion and, therefore, did not try to change the Indian caste system, now the Roman Catholic and Protestant Churches fight discrimination against lower castes. This rejection of untouchability and other forms of discrimination is not the Christian playwrights' only social involvement. Thirty plays in my *corpus* deal with the dowry evil as their major or minor subject. They also chastise alcoholism, corruption, usury and the adulteration of food and medicine.

In addition to upholding the more specifically Indian social values of the joint family and the wife's duty to be submissive, the plays praise general moral ones, such as honesty, incorruptibility, generosity, spirit of sacrifice and forgiveness. The faults forgiven include cheating, stealing and even murder, envy and subordinate's error, the wife's desire to set up a separate household with her husband and the husband's mistreatment and repudiation of his wife.

Both Christianity and Hinduism may be considered sacrificial religions. Christ's sacrifice on the cross and countless martyrs sacrificing their lives for their faith characterize Christianity; ritual blood offerings have decreased, but not yet disappeared in Hinduism. The Vatican plays tell of a whole series of sacrifices, such as the sacrifice of money, health in the case of a kidney offering or a wife bearing the blows mentioned for her husband, and freedom or life in the case of the politician who kills a corrupt person in order to cleanse his party. From the Western point of view the most curious form of sacrifice is marriage conceived as an occasion for self-sacrifice. A youth may sacrifice his love and marry an underprivileged girl in order 'to give her life', as the Tamils say, or he may make up for a fault by marrying the victim. A girl may renounce her love or a prestigious marriage and marry a handicapped man who would not otherwise find a spouse.

The Christian playwrights' major object, however, is not to simply praise morality, but to correct the guilty one. Of course, praiseworthy forgiveness or generosity usually make the wrongdoer repent. Among particularly noteworthy cases, I recall the father's repentance on learning of his son's love for his

parents since he would have asked God for the boon of a new father who does not make his mother cry and the villagers' repentance. They retract their prohibition to accept a repentant criminal released from prison back in their midst after his victims' son comes forward to give him a glass of water.

Punishment, too, is a legitimate corrective strategy which attains its object in most cases. Only very few plays limit themselves to pointing out the undesirable situation without offering a solution, which could not be found as long as the world does not radically change. Among these deplorable cases is the play on the defenceless peon exploited by all employees of his office and the play on the retiring manager who has to realize that one is respected only as long as one is in power. The long list of moral defects chastised includes dishonesty of various kinds, money-mindedness, envy, quarrelsomeness, exploration of people's weakness, arrogance, misuse of power, breach of faith, superstition, laziness, lecherousness, alcoholism and violence. These would be condemned also outside India. Other character defects have a long cultural tradition in India without being limited to that country. Particularly common among these is joy in causing discord, rashness, gossip and slander, betting for trivial reasons as well as excessive status consciousness that may induce people to feel ashamed of their low social position and pretend to be more than they are. For the last-mentioned defect European languages have special terms such as *chevalier d'industrie* in French and *Hochstapler* in German, but these refer to a somewhat antiquated type of swindler who also desires more than just prestige.

Punishment for these and other faults consists in loss of money, loss of job or degradation, loss of neighbours' support, loss of a bride or a dear family member, loss of honour, loss of freedom and even one's country (in the case of a superstitious king), as well as the suffering of physical pain by being beaten, maimed or, in rare cases, losing one's life. What I have called vicarious punishment must be understood as the negative side of highly valued family unity. Apart from parallels in the Hindu tradition and the Old Testament, for instance, God made David's son die to punish the father for having had Urias killed, there may be a further reason for its occurrence in the modern Christian plays. Since the object is to reform the wrongdoer, the latter would not have time for it if he died himself. Independent of their religious convictions, modern Westerners would not conceive of God who punishes and corrects a man by making him mentally suffer through the loss of a dear family member. However, there exists a corrective tendency in the modern West which resembles this method. I am referring to the fact that the lawgiver is less concerned about the victim and his family than about reforming the perpetrator of the crime, even though the success of his reeducation is far from certain.

Although social justice in the plays mostly coincides with family values, a few characters disregard these values in favour of the public good, as when one family member denounces another, an incorruptible teacher makes not only

the recommended bad pupil fail, but also his own son, who had fewer bad marks and a wife renounces motherhood thereby hoping to make her husband desist from practising further abortions.

The most unexpected corrective strategy in the Christian plays I have called positive falsehood. Even though the immediate inspiration of this way of thinking is one of Tiruvalluvar's couplets, there are several other possible sources of it. The Hindu gods playfully test their devotees and are believed to perform all their gracious and cruel actions in play. This playfulness reflects on their worshippers who have no qualms about engaging in non-blasphemous religious joking (Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi 1992: 120-35). As instances of the Tamil love of play one may cite the popular art of the street theatre (*terukkūttu*) and the fact that among all Indian language programs of Vatican Radio only the Tamil program broadcasts plays. Given this love of theatre, it may no longer seem surprising that some Christian authors have devised plays within plays, as the characters themselves admit after their didactic purpose has been fulfilled (VR 1.11.1994; 30.12.1997; 28.3.2000). If 'conceptual language is not the sole, nor even the main form of understanding and expressing truth' (Wilfred 1989: 351), recourse to play may be perfectly legitimate.

Apart from quoting some Biblical verses and dramatizing some Biblical tales, which uphold values mostly shared by Hindus, there is no attempt at proselytizing and Christian priests and missionaries are absent from my *corpus*. There is good reason for this absence, since the rise of fundamentalism in Hinduism and other non-Christian religions, which see Christianity as a residue of the colonial past, puts missionaries in a predicament. Indian theologicians have proposed that their role is no longer to convince people to let themselves be baptized, but to give testimony of their religion (Clémentin-Ojha 1993: 121-22). The Jesuits who have been the most active proponents of inculturation from the time of de Nobili to the present, now even speak of 'The necessity of inculturation that results from the fact of plurality of cultures, which is part of the plan of God' (Wilfred 1989: 347). But speaking of pluralism raises the dreaded spectre of relativism. 'Is it not like saying... all religions lead to God as all rivers lead to the sea'? Amaladoss (1986: 65-66) replies to this charge calling relativism only indifference to which religion one belongs because all lead to God and not vocation for a certain religion. 'All rivers lead to the sea, but not for the same person', he adds. This subtle distinction might be brushed aside as simply a case of hair-splitting, but I think Amaladoss is right. Education from childhood, personal taste and mentality may indeed make a religious person favour one religion without denying the value of other religions. Perhaps a musical example can illustrate what I mean. All Western music lovers will agree that both Bach and Wagner are great composers, nevertheless many prefer one to the other. A good music teacher will be able to reveal hitherto unnoticed beauties in the works of the less favoured composer, similarly a good missionary will be able to explain hitherto unnoticed merits

of his religion to members of other creeds. Conversion in both cases will be rare, but even without conversion judgements of the other composer or religion will become more favourable. In any case, knowledge of the other is of the greatest importance, since 'What is dangerous today is not excess of plurality, but the abundance of mutual ignorance' Wilfred (1989: 353) writes.

With the Indianization or inculturation of Christianity having become an accepted strategy, the question of the culture of reference arises. Since 70% of Christian converts come from the lower castes it might be thought that their 'little tradition' Hinduism should be the model (Clémentin-Ojha 1993: 114) with its stress on trance and healing cults (Mosse 1994: 103). The Vatican plays definitely exclude this possibility. Since their purpose is to uplift the lower castes socially, economically and spiritually, they clearly favour inculturation in the more spiritual and civilized forms of Hinduism. Their efforts perfectly coincide with those of Hindu reformers and laymen. Several years ago when I was watching people whirl around with firebowls in their hands as a prelude to a firewalking ceremony, an educated Tamil called the spectacle 'savagery' (*kāṭṭumirāṇṭittanam*). Inculturation in the spiritual forms of Hinduism can be seen in the very title of the Indian Jesuit journal *Vidyajyoti* (Light of knowledge) as well as in the dialogues conducted at the *Aikiya Alayam*, Chennai, whose topics include *Tiruvācakam*, *Tirumantiram*, *Tāyumāṇavar* and *Ramana Maharishi* (AA 1993).

The Vatican plays condemn animal sacrifice, abhorred by Westerners and high-caste Hindus alike, and criticize belief in omens like many educated Hindus do. With regard to healing the inculturation process is a grey area, since not only Hindu gods are believed to heal, but also Christian saints and the Virgin. The Tamil centre of pilgrimage Velankanni is considered the Tamil Lourdes and the Virgin there is known as 'Our Lady of Health'. But Christian healing must be achieved through faith and prayer, not through trance and possession cults. These forms of ecstatic religiosity, typical of 'little tradition' Hinduism are totally unacceptable to the Vatican and do not even occur in the plays consulted.

Some of the Christian playwrights' social teachings, such as the rejection of alcohol and divorce, also happen to coincide with high-caste values. The wife's extreme submissiveness, which they recommend, points in the same direction. It is true that belief in the magic power of an absolutely faithful and devoted wife (*pattini*) is found in all sections of society, but in ordinary social life the wife's submission is, or was, more important in Brahmin families than in low caste ones. Until a few decades ago divorce and remarriage were forbidden to the high caste wife. She also did not normally work outside the house, so that she wholly depended on her husband and had no other choice than submit to him and her mother-in-law. Conversely, submission has been no obligation among low caste wives who were often financially independent and for whom divorce and remarriage were legitimate. If one can give any

credit to folktales, insubordinate wives have been far from rare among the lower strata of Indian society. The Christian playwrights' praise of the joint family leads to similar considerations, since the ideal of jointness is still deeply felt among Brahmins, while the nuclear family is said to be more common among the lower castes.

Only the language in which the plays couch their Christian message is not prestigious literary Tamil (plays with a historical setting and those that make God or the devil talk are an exception), nor of course Brahmin speech, but middle-class non-Brahmin colloquial Tamil and, in a few cases, a low caste dialect.

For all these reasons I should call the form of inculturation propounded by the Vatican plays Sanskritization without Sanskrit.

REFERENCES

VR = Vatican Radio

- VR (18.11.1987) *Nārkālikaḷ mārum* (Seats change).
 — (6.1.1988) *Vācal tīrantirukkīratu* (My door will always remain open).
 — (13.1.1988) *Oru vaḷi pātaiyalla* (No one-way street).
 — (3.2.1988) *Viṛakaṭitta kampu* (Sticks cut for firewood).
 — (17.2.1988) *Pēṭṭari niṇṇu pōccu* (The factory was closed).
 — (9.3.1988) *Nallavaṇāṁ nallavaṇ* (Could he be a good man?).
 — (16.3.1988) *Kāyaṇkaḷum taḷumpukaḷum* (Wounds and scars).
 — (23.3.1988) *Oru kolaiviṇ marupakkam* (The other side of a murder).
 — (30.3.1988) *Ūrvalamum ūrkkōlamum* (Processions).
 — (4.4.1988) *Ācaikku aḷavukōl* (A measuring rod for desire).
 — (13.4.1988) *Pātaikaḷ terikiṇṇa* (Knowing the ways).
 — (20.4.1988) *Piṛanta viṭṭu kauravam* (The honour of one's native family).
 — (25.5.1988) *Iḷaṅkuruttukkaḷ* (Tender leaves).
 — (1.6.1988) *Cālaiōrattu ōviyaṇ* (The roadside painter).
 — (8.6.1988) *Oru vitaiviṇ katai* (As you sow, so you shall reap).
 — (22.6.1988) *Ūravait tēṭi* (Looking for relationship).
 — (29.6.1988) *Kōvil katavu tīrantatu* (The temple door opened).
 — (13.7.1988) *Viṭintāl veḷiccam varum* (Light comes at dawn).
 — (20.7.1988) *Avaḷ nallavaḷ* (She is a good woman).
 — (27.7.1988) *Marumakaḷē marumakaḷē* (O, daughter-in-law!).
 — (10.8.1988) *Veḷiyēṛram* (Chasing away).
 — (17.8.1988) *Maunappuyal* (Storm of silence).
 — (24.8.1988) *Ippavum ivar tiyāki* (Even now he sacrifices himself).
 — (7.9.1988) *Kaṭaṇpaṭṭār kaṭaṇ* (He made debts).
 — (5.10.1988) *Mutal utavi* (First aid), *avilluppāṭṭu* (bow song).
 — (19.10.1988) *Iraṇṭeḷuttu paṭittuviṭṭāl* (Studying a few letters).
 — (26.10.1988) *Niḷalum nijamum* (Shadow and reality).
 — (2.11.1988) *Vēlai vēṇuṅka* (I need work).
 — (9.11.1988) *Kopuramum kuppai mēṭum* (Temple tower and garbage heap).
 — (23.11.1988) *Nir maṭantai nānukiṇṇāl* (The water maiden blushes).
 — (7.12.1988) *Appāvikal* (Poor chaps).
 — (14.12.1988) *Cellākkācu* (The useless one).

- (21.12.1988) *Maṇitaṇ pirantaṇ* (A man was born).
- (4.1.1989) *Nāṇ māṇējar ākap pōkirēṇ* (I am going to be the manager).
- (11.1.1989) *Niyāyaṅkaḷ māruvatillai* (What is right is right).
- (18.1.1989) *Tūṇṭil* (The bait).
- (25.1.1989) *Kaṇavukaḷ citaiyavillai* (Dreams are not shattered).
- (1.2.1989) *Maṇa uruti* (Strength of mind).
- (8.2.1989) *Irattam* (Blood).
- (1989) *Oru tākṭariṇ maṇaivi* (A doctor's wife).
- (1989) *Ni entaṭ pakkam* (On whose side are you ?).
- (1989) *Oru vicāraṇaiyiṇ muṭivu* (The end of an investigation).
- (1989) *Utaivukku oṭivantēṇ* (I hasten to help you).
- (1989) *Pāṭṭi vantaḷ* (An old woman came).
- (1989) *Inimēḷ muṭiyātu* (Henceforth I cannot do it any more).
- (1989) *Tiruppaṅkaḷ* (Turning-points).
- (July 1989) *Pōṭṭatum tāṇ muḷaikkum* (You reap what you sow).
- (Sept. 1989) *Oru kuḷappam oru telivu* (Confusion and clarity).
- (Sept. 1989) *Ātirakkāraṇukku...* (A hasty man...).
- (Sept. 1989) *Cuyanalam turattukiratu* (The consequence of egoism).
- (1990) *Kallum kaṇintatu* (Even a stone softened).
- (1990) *Pattu eṇṇuvataṅkuḷ* (Before counting up to ten).
- (1990) *Itayattukku ḍr iṇṭarviyu* (An interview of the heart).
- (1990) *Vacanti conṇa vatanti* (The rumour spread by Vasanti).
- (1990) *Muḷḷum malarāḱum* (Even a thorn can become a flower).
- (1990) *Yārukku tēvai* (Who needs it).
- (1990) *Ēṇ inta viṇ payam?* (Why this vain fear?).
- (1990) *Aiyō vēṇṭām* (No, no, not now).
- (May 1990) *Pōrāṭṭam* (The demonstration).
- (July 1990) *Moṭṭaik kaṭitam* (The anonymous letter).
- (August 1990) *Kōṣā peṇ* (The veiled woman).
- (August 1990) *Malaraikkilḷātē* (Don't nip the flowers).
- (13.9.1990) *Kuḷappam kurucāmi* (A Cassandra).
- (5.12.1990) *Cuyataricaṇam* (Self-knowledge).
- (1991) *Rājāviliruntu cēvakaṇ varai* (From king to servant).
- (13.2.1991) *Peṇṇiṇam uyarntatu* (Woman is great).
- (20.2.1991) *Corkkam cummā varātu* (Heaven must be merited).
- (27.2.1991) *Vairattiṇ vairākkīyam* (The woman Vairam's firm resolution).
- (March 1991) *Tirumpi vā* (Come back).
- (March 1991) *Poyyiṇ perumai* (The greatness of falsehood).
- (April 1991) *Neṇcu porukkavillai* (The heart cannot bear it).
- (April 1991) *Yārukku vilai?* (For whom the price?).
- (May 1991) *Maṇitaṇ mārivittāṇ* (He changed).
- (July 1991) *Maṇacu viriyaṇuṅka* (The heart must widen).
- (July 1991) *Carṭipikaḷ vēṇumā?* (Do you need a certificate?).
- (6.10.1991) *Kaṇṇai virru* (Irrational sacrifice).
- (12.11.1991) *Anpē celvam* (Love is wealth).
- (17.12.1991) *Vāḷa niṇaittāl vāḷalām* (if one wants to live).
- (7.1.1992) *Irukkai iṭam koṭuttāl* (If one gives a place to stay).
- (21.1.1992) *Nilāl āḱum nijaṅkaḷ* (Certainty vanishes).
- (28.1.1992) *Ivaṇ cakōtaraṇ* (He is your brother).
- (4.2.1992) *Maṇacka muṭiyumā?* (How can one forget?).
- (11.2.1992) *Enakkuttāṇ pacikkātā?* (Am I the only one hungry?).

- (18.2.1992) *Anpu puyal* (Storm of love).
- (3.3.1992) *Tāyārīn pōṭanai* (Mother's advice).
- (10.3.1992) *Paṇamum maṇamum* (Money and mind).
- (17.3.1992) *Mirukamum maṇitaṇum* (Beast and man).
- (24.3.1992) *Uḷḷattil ūṇamillai* (No defect in the soul).
- (7.4.1992) *Unakku nītāṇ etiri* (You are your own enemy).
- (28.4.1992) *Ōṭi oḷinta oru nālil* (A day when he lived in hiding).
- (5.5.1992) *Carikkuc cari* (Tit for tat).
- (26.5.1992) *Peṇ niṇaittāl* (If a woman makes up her mind).
- (June 1992) *Ivar oru rayil* (He runs straight like a train).
- (June 1992) *Iṭiyum maḷaiyum* (Lightning and rain).
- (7.7.1992) *Ivarkaḷ irukkirarkaḷ* (People like this exist).
- (21.7.1992) *Oru vipattum oru utaviyum* (Help in accident).
- (4.8.1992) *Niyāyankaḷ purintuviṭṭāl* (If one understands what is just).
- (11.8.1992) *Āḷaip piṭṭa amukku* (A trick to catch a person).
- (18.8.1992) *Putup paṇṇakkāraṇ* (The newly rich).
- (25.8.1992) *Tavarukaḷ taṇṭikkaḷ paṭum pōtu* (When errors are punished).
- (1.9.1992) *Niṅkaḷ uttaramā?* (Are you honourable men?).
- (8.9.1992) *Yār kurravāli?* (Who is to blame?).
- (10.11.1992) *Tivu* (A lonely island).
- (1.12.1992) *Toṭarnta anpu* (Unfailing devotion).
- (8.12.1992) *Meyaip poy āṇāl?* (If truth were falsehood?).
- (15.12.1992) *Paliyāṭukaḷ* (Sacrificial goats).
- (22.12.1992) *Piṇcuvuḷḷaṅkaḷ* (Children's nature).
- (29.12.1992) *Putu vālvu* (New life).
- (5.1.1993) *Maṇam kalaiyaṭṭum* (Let silence stop).
- (12.1.1993) *Poṅkaṭṭum putu vālvu* (Happy new life!).
- (19.1.1993) *Cuṭar viṭum tipaṅkaḷ* (Glowing lamps).
- (26.1.1993) *Unnai nī arivāy* (Know thyself).
- (3.2.1993) *Vāṅkōli mayil ākiratu* (A turkey disguised as a peacock).
- (23.2.1993) *Enna piraviyō?* (What type of person is this?).
- (9.3.1993) *Ellāt terinta ilaiṇaṇ* (The all-knowing youth).
- (23.3.1993) *Kuṭumpam iraṇṭu paṭṭāl* (If the family is split in two).
- (30.3.1993) *Unkaḷukkāka nāṇ* (I am there for you).
- (13.4.1993) *Miṇṭum uyir* (Resurrection).
- (20.4.1993) *Nalla cakunaṇ* (A good omen).
- (4.5.1993) *Maṇaṇḍyāli* (The mentally ill man).
- (11.5.1993) *Avaḷ ippaṭi ivan?* (She is like this and he?).
- (1.6.1993) *Ēṅkum uḷḷam* (A yearning heart).
- (8.6.1993) *Pōtum eṇra maṇam* (Being content with little).
- (22.6.1993) *Poy maṇaṅkaḷ* (False hearts).
- (13.7.1993) *Oru tavaṇu tiruttappaṭukiraṭu* (A fault is corrected).
- (20.7.1993) *Unnai viṭamāṭṭēṇ* (I shall not let you go free).
- (27.7.1993) *Kurukkucuvār* (The dividing wall).
- (3.8.1993) *Kuḷantaikkāka* (For a child's sake).
- (24.8.1993) *Cōrriḷ corkkam* (Heaven is a good meal).
- (31.8.1993) *Tiyākam* (Self-sacrifice).
- (14.9.1993) *Kiḷattu māppiḷḷai* (The old bridegroom).
- (21.9.1993) *Cuvaril eṇinta pantu* (The recoiling ball).
- (28.9.1993) *Uṇ viruppam* (As you wish).
- (12.10.1993) *Namakku mēlē* (Beyond us).

- (2.11.1993) *Eṇ kaṇavar eṇ makkaḷ* (My husband and my children).
- (9.11.1993) *Kuṭumpa uravu* (Family spirit).
- (16.11.1993) *Oru tāy makkaḷ* (All are sons of one mother).
- (23.11.1993) *Paccōnti* (The chameleon).
- (30.11.1993) *Oru nāl varum* (One day will come).
- (7.12.1993) *Ūrār tanta pāṭam* (Friends teach a lesson).
- (14.12.1993) *Maṇal kayiru* (The sand rope).
- (28.12.1993) *Mariyātaikkuriya nārkaḷi* (The seat of honour).
- (11.1.1994) *Veḷiccam vantiriccu* (Light has come).
- (1.2.1994) *Ellāmē paṇantān* (Money is everything).
- (15.2.1994) *Uppu tinṇavan* (He who ate salt).
- (22.2.1994) *Niccayam naṭakkum* (It will certainly take place).
- (1.3.1994) *Eṇ palam palavīṇamāyiruppatē* (My strength is weakness).
- (8.3.1994) *Cēvai koṇcam tēvai* (A spirit of service is needed).
- (15.3.1994) *Pāṭip paranta kīḷi* (She who lived for others).
- (29.3.1994) *Kāṭṭik koṭutta kākkiccaṭṭai* (The kaki shirt revealed the lie).
- (19.4.1994) *Vilai pōkum vālipaṅkaḷ* (The bartered youths).
- (10.5.1994) *Aṅkum iṅkum* (Here and there).
- (17.5.1994) *Tān āṭaviṭṭāḷum* (Blood is thicker than water).
- (26.7.1994) *Vaṭikāl* (Outlet).
- (9.8.1994) *Ēkkam* (Yearning).
- (16.8.1994) *Eṇ kaṭamai* (My duty).
- (6.9.1994) *Īram illā neṇcaṅkaḷ* (Feelingless hearts).
- (13.9.1994) *Anutāpa vārtaikaḷ* (Compassionate words).
- (27.9.1994) *Ātmā tīrūpti* (Deep satisfaction).
- (25.10.1994) *Nāl nalla nāl* (A good day).
- (1.11.1994) *Veḷiccam veḷiyē illai* (Light does not come from outside).
- (8.11.1994) *Antak kaṅkaḷ* (Those eyes).
- (22.11.1994) *Avanē kāraṇam* (He did it).
- (13.12.1994) *Ippaṭiyum cila* (Some people are like this).
- (7.2.1995) *Kaṇavu kalaintatu* (The destroyed dream).
- (21.2.1995) *Vāṭṭiyār pāṭam karkirār* (The teacher learns a lesson).
- (28.2.1995) *Pāvam oru pāṭam* (A bitter lesson).
- (14.3.1995) *Kāṇpatellam uṇmaiṭā?* (Is all one sees true?).
- (21.3.1995) *Cantaik kōḷi* (The fighting cock).
- (4.4.1995) *Atircci vaitṭiyam* (Shock treatment).
- (16.5.1995) *Maḷai peyta puṇṇiyam* (Thanks to rain).
- (30.5.1995) *Orē vaḷi* (Only in one direction).
- (13.6.1995) *Inṇaiyillāviṭṭāl nāḷai* (If not today, tomorrow).
- (4.7.1995) *Pākappirivu* (Partition).
- (1.8.1995) *Kuṭumpat tarācu* (The family is like a pair of scales).
- (19.8.1995) Ordinary program.
- (22.8.1995) *Vairākkiam* (Firm resolve).
- (29.8.1995) *Kuṇaiyil oru nīrai* (Fortune in misfortune).
- (5.9.1995) *Nikaḷi māriṭ pōrāl* (If the situation changes).
- (10.10.1995) *Cumaitāṅkikaḷ* (Carrying burdens).
- (28.10.1995) *Karumpu kacakkiratum* (Bitter sugarcane).
- (7.11.1995) *Kāṇāmarpōṇa āṭu* (The lost sheep).
- (14.11.1995) *Vēṇṭum intak kuḷantai* (I want this child).
- (21.11.1995) *Marumakaṇē marumakaṇē* (My dear son-in-law).
- (28.11.1995) *Maṇaivi* (The wife).

- (26.12.1995) *Vaṭṭattukkuḷ vāḷkkai* (Living in a vicious circle).
- (9.1.1996) *Muṭivukaḷ mārum* (Decision change).
- (13.2.1996) *Tappu ceytavan* (The one who committed a fault).
- (27.2.1996) *Palaiya caṭṭai* (The old shirt).
- (5.3.1996) *Avarē eṇ niḷal* (He is my shade).
- (12.3.1996) *Avarē eṇ niḷal* (He is my shade).
- (19.3.1996) *Avarē eṇ niḷal* (He is my shade).
- (26.3.1996) *Avarē eṇ niḷal* (He is my shade).
- (22.4.1996) *Āṇ varkkam* (Males).
- (7.5.1996) *Paṇam maṭṭum pōtumā?* (Is money alone enough?).
- (4.6.1996) *Kuṭikkāraṇ makaḷ* (The drunkard's daughter).
- (9.7.1996) *Maṇṇum poṇ ākum* (Even earth can become gold).
- (6.8.1996) *Etiṟpārpṇukaḷ* (Expectations).
- (13.8.1996) *Ellām Uṇakkuttāṇ* (All is for you).
- (3.9.1996) *Vāḷvin etirolī* (Echo of life).
- (10.9.1996) *Cinṇa malar cirikkaṭṭum* (May the little flower smile).
- (17.9.1996) *Avar conṇa vāḷku* (His prophecy).
- (24.9.1996) *Putu vētam* (A new moral code).
- (15.10.1996) *Tiyāka teyvam* (The youth who sacrificed his love).
- (12.11.1996) *Nī vara vēṇṭum* (You must come).
- (19.11.1996) *Pakkattu viṭṭu paccōntikaḷ* (Chameleon-like neighbours).
- (26.11.1996) *Valakku* (Dispute).
- (3.12.1996) *Āṇ eṇṇa peṇ eṇṇa?* (Boy or girl, what does it matter?).
- (10.12.1996) *Avaraip purintu kolluṅkaḷ* (Try to understand him).
- (17.12.1996) *Vīra tirumakaḷ* (The heroic divine woman).
- (24.12.1996) (Christmas play).
- (31.12.1996) *Putiya nampikkai* (New hope).
- (4.2.1997) *Nampikkai turōkam* (Betrayal of trust).
- (25.2.1997) *Tāymaikkū vilai* (A mother's price).
- (4.3.1997) *Calavaikku vanta eṇṇankaḷ* (Thoughts to be cleansed).
- (11.3.1997) (Punishment for evil intent).
- (22.4.1997) *Maṇaivimārkaḷukku maṭṭum* (For wives only).
- (29.4.1997) *Taṇi maram alla* (No lone tree).
- (6.5.1997) *Eṇkaḷ aṇṇam taṅka aṇṇaṇ* (My brother is perfect).
- (27.5.1997) *Atircci avaciyam* (Shock is necessary).
- (24.6.1997) *Avanait tēṭi* (Searching for him).
- (26.8.1997) *Taṇṭaṇai* (Punishment).
- (2.9.1997) *Kūṭi vāḷntāl kōṭi naṇmai* (Living together much better).
- (23.9.1997) *Eṇṇamā kaṇṇu cauṅkiyamā* (Are you all right, my dear?).
- (30.9.1997) *Cāṭṭāṇiṇ caṅkitam* (The devil's siren song).
- (18.11.1997) *Yārukkum aṭi carukkum* (Anybody can slip).
- (14.12.1997) Ordinary program.
- (30.12.1997) *Putu marumakaḷ* (The new daughter-in-law).
- (3.2.1998) *Maṇitarāy iruppataṇ arttam* (What it means to be human).
- (10.2.1998) *Ivarkaḷ vittiyācamāṇavarkaḷ* (They are different).
- (10.3.1998) *Tātī* (Grandfather).
- (14.4.1998) *Naṭikaṇ* (The actor).
- (21.4.1998) *Jātikaḷ illaiyaṭi* (There are no caste-dear).
- (28.4.1998) *Ceyyāta kūrṇam* (The crime not committed).
- (5.5.1998) *Kuṭumpattukku oru talaivaṇ* (A head of family).
- (12.5.1998) *Palikkup paḷi* (Retaliation).

- (19.5.1998) *Eṇ antastu enna, eṇ kauravam enna* (My status and my dignity).
- (27.5.1998) *Tiyāka cūṭar* (A emblem of selflessness).
- (9.6.1998) *Taṇṭikkappaṭṭa tūppukaḷ* (Punished judgements).
- (16.6.1998) *Paṭi tāṇṭum kaṇavan* (The husband who passes the limits).
- (23.6.1998) *Maṇacil iram vēṇṭum* (Be compassionate!).
- (7.7.1998) *Pōtai teliyum* (Intoxication clears up).
- (21.7.1998) *Putiya appā* (A new father).
- (28.7.1998) *Kaṭṭāya oyyu* (Forced retirement).
- (4.8.1998) *Uḷṇāṭṭup pōr* (Intestine war).
- (11.8.1998) *Oru putiya maṇitan* (A new man).
- (18.8.1998) *Tāy uḷḷam* (A mother's heart).
- (25.8.1998) *Uṇmai purintu koṇṭēṇ* (I have understood the truth).
- (8.9.1998) *Maṇam pōṇa pōkkilē maṇitan pōkalāmā?* (Can one do as one likes?).
- (15.9.1998) *Aṭimaikaḷ* (Slaves).
- (22.9.1998) *Payan pōkum paṭippu* (Useful teaching).
- (13.10.1998) *Itu tān kalappaṭam* (This is mixture).
- (20.10.1998) *Pōṇṇukut tēti vantāccu* (The girl's wedding date has been fixed).
- (1.12.1998) *Ellām maṇacu pōla* (All as desired).
- (8.12.1998) *Nijaṇkaḷ colluvatillai* (Not telling the truth).
- (5.1.1999) *Uḷaitta kācu* (Earned money).
- (12.1.1999) *Uṇavu tēṭum uḷḷam* (Yearning for grandfather's love).
- (9.2.1999) *Vērrikkani* (Fruit of victory).
- (16.2.1999) *Nampikkaikaḷ* (Truth).
- (2.3.1999) *Avaḷum makaḷtān* (She is also our daughter).
- (16.3.1999) *Pāvam paṭṭa kācu* (Sinful money).
- (13.4.1999) *Pantayam* (The wager).
- (20.4.1999) *Viṭiyāta vēlai* (It will never dawn).
- (4.5.1999) *Kaṇavil varum appā* (The father who advises in dream).
- (11.5.1999) *Kaṇṇāl kāṇpatum poy* (What you see is false).
- (25.5.1999) *Tūrattup paccai* (The grass is greener on the other side).
- (22.6.1999) *Cīru turumpum* (Even if is a small piece of straw).
- (13.7.1999) *Pūkkalaip parikkātir* (Don't pluck the flowers).
- (27.7.1999) *Kurram virattukiratu* (Crime pursues you).
- (10.8.1999) *Anru vitai inru viḷaiacal* (As you sow, so you reap).
- (17.8.1999) *Kurraṇvāli* (The thief).
- (26.10.1999) *Kaikāṭi maraṇkaḷ* (Signposts).
- (2.11.1999) *Vāḷkkai vaittiyam* (Treatment for life).
- (16.11.1999) *Kurraṇkaḷ kuraivattillai* (Crimes do not decrease).
- (7.12.1999) *Innoru murai* (Once more).
- (21.12.1999) *Paricu kiṭaittatu* (She got her gift).
- (18.1.2000) *Ēṇ muṭiyavillai?* (Why should I not be able?).
- (14.3.2000) *Nāṇē uṇ tāy* (Now I am your mother).
- (28.3.2000) *Kaṭai tēṅkāy* (Falsehood).
- (9.5.2000) *Cekku māṭu* (An oilpress bull).
- (30.5.2000) *Paṇamā maṇamā?* (Money or mind?).
- (6.6.2000) *Nērvaḷi payamillai* (No need to be afraid if one is honest).
- (13.6.2000) *Nanpaṇā pakaivanā?* (Friend or enemy?).
- (25.7.2000) *Paḷip pōṇa antastu* (Wrong status consciousness).
- (1.8.2000) *Maṇa aḷaku* (The beauty of the soul).
- (8.8.2000) *Paṭippinai* (The teaching).
- (22.8.2000) *Nērmaiye nī enikē?* (Where is honesty?).

— (19.9.2000) *Kal maṇam* (A heart of stone).

— (30.1.2001) *Pācamā paṇamā?* (Love or money?).

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