

ties between a drug and the patient's body substance ["homeopathy"]; the shared attributes between an invading quasi-pathogen or humor and the body that receives these; the iconicity between an ecological niche, a particular humor, and a particular drug [see also Zimmermann 1978]. By contrast, Western biomedicine relies almost exclusively on indexical (cause and effect, allopathy) and symbolic ("somatization") modes of representation.

In the absence of a systematically developed, indigenously formulated semeiosis, and until such semeiosis is made available through further intensive fieldwork as well as relevant textual research, I must build up evidence for my hypothesis with regard to the culturally preferred semeiotic gradient by seeing whether there are parallel processes in the culture outside the strict domain of signs. I do think that I have such a domain in the field experience recorded in chapter 7. The domain I speak of is that of the acquisition of knowledge.

In chapter 7, apart from bringing the substance theory to an all-encompassing denouement, I attempt to examine my village informants' views on what knowledge is and what processes are involved in its acquisition. This theory of knowledge is far more explicit in the ethnographic material than the theory of signs I have hypothesized for the ethnographic data of the four preceding chapters. By juxtaposing this indigenous theory of knowledge against Peirce's theory of knowledge as expressed through his three phenomenological categories, I will show how the former, though expressible in almost identical terms, is processually the inverse of the latter. Given that Peirce's phenomenological categories are taken to be the generative of his semeiotic categories, it becomes even more reasonable for us to believe that a similar (though inverted) set of phenomenological-*cum*-epistemological categories in the Tamil cultural context should generate a similar (but inverted) set of semeiotic categories as well.

7 Equilibrium Regained

We opened this study in the Introduction with a parochial variant of the Sāṅkhya creation myth in which the creative process was seen also as a degenerative process. According to the myth, this generative-degenerative process was triggered by the disturbance of a state of perfect equilibrium and equipoise. This myth opened the curtains to reveal a culture and life of a people endlessly and obsessively concerned with establishing, if not restoring, equilibrated-*cum*-compatible relationships between themselves and other entities of the phenomenal universe, such as ūr, house, and sexual partner, as well as with establishing and preserving substantial equilibrium within their own bodies, between kuṇam and karmam, bile and wind. The opening anecdote in chapter 2 was about the ANV expatriate gentleman who returned to his natal village (conda ūr) to make arrangements for his son's visit. This event introduced a subdominant theme of this study, namely, that of self-knowledge, which theme in fact may be seen as an inseparable corollary to the theme of compatible and equilibrated substances. I now turn to this theme.

Knowledge about "the other" and knowledge about

"oneself" may appear to be different and distinct. In the Tamil world view, however, knowledge about the other, or object knowledge, is but an extension of self-knowledge. This double-edged knowledge can be acquired in two ways. In Tamil, the first mode of acquisition of knowledge is called *inaippāl arital*, and the second is known as *pakuppāl arital*. *Inaippu* means join, unite, coalesce, to be alike, connection, copulation, sameness, and so forth. *Inaippāl arital*, then, means to know by establishing relationships of unity, sameness, coalescence, to know by connecting, joining, and so on. We may approximately translate this kind of knowledge as "synthetic" knowledge. In *pakuppāl arital*, the root *paku* means many, divide, distribute, apportion, allot, classify. Thus, *pakuppāl arital* is to know by dividing, classifying—in short, by making distinctions. We may render this kind of knowledge as "analytic" knowledge.

If the goal of synthetic knowledge is to discover the self in the other or to know the self by getting to know in the other that which is also in the self, then analytic knowledge aims at knowing the self by knowing that which is in the object that is *not* in the self. The former seeks to find that which is common between self and other and the latter seeks to distinguish the self from the other by noting how differently they are constituted.

Both synthetic knowledge and analytic knowledge place object knowledge at the service of self-knowledge, but synthetic knowledge distinguishes itself from analytic knowledge in that it aims at the incorporation of object knowledge by self-knowledge, or conversely, its aim is to expand self-knowledge so that it completely consumes object knowledge. At the point at which object knowledge is completely incorporated or engulfed in this manner, not only is there no longer object knowledge, but there is also no longer self-knowledge, which is defined against object knowledge. What remains is pure knowledge (*arivu* or *vidyā*).

According to the Tamil, then, synthetic knowledge may be said to serve self-knowledge (and by extension, knowl-

edge itself) more effectively than does analytic knowledge, even though, paradoxically, this synthetic knowledge culminates in the extinction of self-knowledge itself, which, after all, depends on its opposite, object knowledge, for its epistemic and ontological integrity.

My guru¹ emphasized over and over again that in ordinary life, even as the distinction between self-knowledge (*tannarivu* or *akapporularivu*) and object knowledge (*puppōrularivu*) cannot be transcended, so can one not transcend the distinction between synthetic knowledge and analytic knowledge. They are two sides of the same coin.

I believe that among the Tamils, however, the emphasis on and the awareness of synthetic knowledge cannot be missed; that it is valorized (to borrow a term from Louis Dumont) cannot be denied. I believe that this is so because of the central place that substance, in its transactability, transformability, and compatibility, occupies in Indian thought. This fact is best and most frequently exemplified in contexts when strangers meet.

When one stranger wishes to get to know another stranger, the most often employed opener is the question "What is your *ūr*?" He hopes, of course, that the *ūr* that is named will be known to him. He hopes not so much to discover that there is something about the *ūr* that he knows but rather that there is some person already known to him in the named *ūr*. If such a person is of the same *jāti*, or better still, a kinsman, then he feels that he knows that *ūr* even better than if the said person is but an acquaintance belonging to another *jāti*. The underlying principle here is the cultural belief that two kinsmen share more of a common bodily substance than do nonkinsmen of the same *jāti*, and that nonkinsmen of the same *jāti* share more of a common bodily substance than do mere acquaintances or friends

¹The guru referred to here is Krishnaswamy, under whose guidance several of my fellow pilgrims and I prepared ourselves for the pilgrimage (to be described below).

belonging to different jātis. By knowing someone with whom you can lay some claim to shared substance, you may also claim to know the *ūr* whose substance that person shares, and hence whose substance you, too, share by a transitive-*cum*-substantial logic. This is why Devadas felt he knew Pondicherry when he found out that one of his kinsmen was already living there and had established substantial compatibility with that *ūr*.

In knowing an *ūr* synthetically in this manner, you get to know an aspect of yourself "out there," so to speak, and based on the principle of shared substance, that entity out there is an extension of yourself, which is tantamount to saying it is a part of yourself. From this point of view, you may say that in knowing the *ūr* in this way, your knowledge of yourself has been synthetically extended. It is in this sense, then, that object knowledge and self-knowledge are seen as corollaries, if not one and the same thing; at the same time, in the synthetic mode of its acquisition, the object is incorporated into the self.

In keeping with my guru's emphasis on the inseparability of the synthetic from the analytic and the object from the self, we have seen that Tamils, despite what they valorize, are nonetheless preoccupied if not obsessed with making finer and finer distinctions between their own substance and other substances, such as those of an *ūr*, a house, and so forth. By making such distinctions, a Tamil strives to maintain substantial compatibility and equilibrium. Yet equilibrated states are continually disturbed when substances move around. Everything in the manifest world is in flux, calling for incessant vigilance and effort to restore what is lost or disturbed. Insofar as such efforts are motivated by an inferior, analytic knowledge which is sustained by the making of distinctions and categories, however, they can only be exhausting and endless. There comes a point when one realizes this fact and seeks a way out.

In the pilgrimage I am about to describe, several of the pilgrims with whom I walked a grueling forty miles had

reached such a point, either on their own or through the teachings of the guru. As a pilgrim the discontented person sets himself a new goal, a goal to move away from differentiated knowledge and differentiable substance to essential unity of all substance. With this knowledge, the endless striving for relationships of compatibility has no relevance, since substance is once more undifferentiated and in perfect equilibrium. As will be demonstrated, this kind of knowledge is experienced rather than apprehended. The pilgrimage itself is a ritual, a karmam—a very powerful and efficacious karmam at that—that seeks to generate this kind of knowing experience, which is expected to help the pilgrim to eventually obtain perfect knowledge, or *vidyā*.

Given that the value of anthropology lies in its contribution to cross-cultural understanding, I wish to compare the cultural attitude toward knowledge and the knowing process that one encounters among Tamil Hindus with that extant in the West. This exercise is not intended to minimize the variations encountered in both traditions: India has its Pāṇinis as much as the West has its Bergsons. Even here, however, one cannot miss the synthetic quality of Pāṇini's grammar, even as one cannot miss the analyticity of Bergson.

In order to represent, for purposes of contrast, the valorized epistemology of the West, I have chosen as its representative the views of C. S. Peirce. The choice is not a capricious one. First, Peirce's theory of knowledge, as embodied in his three phenomenological categories, is directly related to his semeiotic categories, dealt with extensively throughout Part I. In the interest of continuity, then, it is only reasonable that with respect to "knowledge," I should, once again, explore the appropriateness of Peirce's views. Second, I believe that the link between a Tamil theory of knowledge and Peirce's epistemology is even more overt than that which relates his semeiosis with a

hypothesized Tamil theory of signs. By arguing backward, so to speak, I wish to imply that the link between the systematically formulated Peircean semeiotic and the unsystematized Tamil semeiotic is a closer one than might have been initially imagined. Third, Peirce's view of knowledge and the systematic acquisition of it is *broadly* representative of Western commonsensical as well as philosophical traditions. In other contexts and for other purposes, the differences between Peirce and Descartes, Peirce and Locke, or Peirce and Kant may be quite remarkable, acute, and crucial as well. Yet for the purpose at hand, the purpose of establishing a broad epistemological gradient or directionality, these differences do not matter. In fact, the learning theories of such psychologists as Jean Piaget and George Kelly (to mention the two whose writings I am most acquainted with) turn out to be Peircean orthodoxy.

Peirce's phenomenological categories most lucidly sketch the epistemological value structure of Western rationality. By virtue of their being descriptively and analytically so precise and sensitive, the categories also turn out to be equally fine accounts of the Hindu knowing process, albeit in its inverted form. Furthermore, Peirce's categories tend themselves in many ways (again though as an inversion) to capture the knowing process as *experienced* in the pilgrimage itself. For these reasons I shall elucidate Peirce's categories at some length, for in grasping Peirce's categories one can also begin to grasp, in anticipation, intellectually (though inversely) that which is intended to be grasped empathetically in the description of the pilgrim's experience which follows.

One of Peirce's least obscure accounts of his three categories can be found in his Lowell lectures. He starts with a general formulation of them: "My view is that there are three modes of being, and [I] hold that we can directly observe them in elements of whatever is at any time before the mind in any way. They are the being of positive qualita-

tive possibility, the being of actual fact, and the being of law that will govern in the future" (1.23).

The being of positive qualitative possibility is what he calls Firstness; the being of actual fact is Secondness, and the being of law is Thirdness.

Let us take up the three categories in detail by beginning with Firstness. Firstness, in other words, is the felt quality of experience in toto—present, immediate, uncategorized, prereflective, the manifold of sensuous impressions (in Kantian terms) before thought, either analytical or synthetic, has taken place. In Peirce's words, Firstness is "what the world was to Adam on the day he opened his eyes, before he had drawn any distinctions, or had become conscious of his own existence" (1.357).

In one of the most forceful and elegantly constructed passages, Peirce goes on to describe Firstness as "that which is first, fresh, new, original, spontaneous, free, vivid, conscious, and evanescent. Only remember that every description of it must be false to it." He insists that "the First has to be present and immediate so as not to be a Second to a representation. It must be fresh and new, for if old, it is a second to its former state" (1.357). Insofar as it is vivid and conscious, "it avoids being the object of some sensation. It precedes all synthesis and all determination. It has no unity and no parts. It cannot be articulately thought. Assert it and it has already lost its characteristic innocence; for assertion always implies a denial of something else. Stop to think of it and it has flown" (1.357).

Firstness is not an abstraction. That the sky appears to us positively now as blue before we make any judgment may not be apparent to every mind. Peirce maintained that at least it was not apparent to Hegel. "When anything is present to the mind," he wrote in 1903, "the first and simplest character to be noted in it is its presentness or immediacy" (5.44). So far, Peirce's Firstness is not unlike Hegel's sense of immediacy. Peirce and Hegel part com-

pany, however, when Hegel makes immediacy an abstraction. To use a well-known example from the *Phenomenology of Mind*, the *now* that is nighttime becomes the *now* that is day. As nighttime it is not day; as daytime it is not night. Thus far the *now*, or pure immediacy temporally viewed, is not immediate but something mediated for Hegel, determined through and by means of the fact that something else, namely day or night, is not. It is for Hegel a universal, so immediacy in its presentness becomes an abstraction.

This was not so for Peirce. What is present to the mind is present immediacy—the present “is just what it is regardless of the absent, regardless of the past and future. It is such, as it is, utterly ignoring everything else. Consequently it cannot be abstracted” (5.44).

For obvious reasons, “Firstness is the most elusive of Peirce’s categories, since it signifies the thing in itself, or that primary limit to our thought which can never be conceptually grasped in its original state” (1.357—Stearns 1952: 199). Firstness “is identifiable with feeling before the latter has been introspected and has thereby undergone change” (Stearns 1952; see also 1.303 and 1.304). “Firstness is fresh, free, and pregnant with variety” (1.302). Peirce’s Firstness has much in common with Turner’s *communitas* and liminality, despite liminality’s specifically sociological implications and derivatives (Turner 1967). In this commonness lies much of *communitas*’s and liminality’s allure as well as elusiveness, which have moved its admirers to respect and its detractors to skepticism.

Beyond a category of being, however, “Firstness possesses a ‘may-be’ character which nonetheless still belongs to the mere idea unrealized” (1.304). The ideal First is then identified by Peirce as “quite singular and quite out of consciousness” (5.311) and as possessing a “may-be” quality or as “a mere idea unrealized” (1.342). In other words, Firstness is not merely a mode of being, but it is a mode of becoming. Now let us move on to Peirce’s Secondness.

Stearns gleans from several passages of Peirce scattered among his *Collected Papers* the essential characteristics of the category of Firstness, and she highlights them quite lucidly, saying:

If Firstness for Peirce has the status of a dream, a quality in itself unanchored to any laws, being a mere “may-be,” fugitive and evanescent. Secondness on the other hand represents the encounter with hard fact (1.324; 6.95), the undeniable shock of contact with the outer world (1.334–336). Secondness is the category of effort, of struggle and resistance (1.320, 322, 284); it is the category of existence become manifest or indeed possible. . . . [It is] only in the polarity of Secondness that Self and Not-Self becomes precipitated out against each other. (1.324; Stearns 1952: 201)

There is a real world, a sensuous, reactant world, independent of thought although thinkable, which is characterized by Secondness. It is the area of daily existence, where we come up against obstacles that will not give way to our fancies, against actualities that resist and oppose one another, where for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. Such is the world of existent fact; such is the nature of existence. To exist is not to be perceived but to stand against another, take a place, oppose bodies, resist and react, to belong to a time and a place.

Here is an example given by Peirce, which, in addition to being an illustration of Secondness, serves as a surprising revelation of his capacity for slapstick humor: “Let the universe be an evolution of Pure Reason if you will. Yet if, while you are walking in the street reflecting upon how everything is the pure distillate of Reason, a man carrying a heavy pole suddenly pokes you in the small of the back, that moment of brute fact is Secondness” (5–45). The moment of reaction that follows the encounter between the agent and patient, pole and polee, if you will, the moment of resistance, in short, the moment of “brute fact,” before

any sort of third medium or any sort of law of action enters the picture—that moment is the moment of Secondness.

Thirdness is the most subtle of Peirce's conceptions. Thirdness is the element of the "general" in our experience. In Stearn's rephrasing of Peirce,

the category of Thirdness is above all the category of mediation. Without it we may suppose that Firstness and Secondness as quality and event would remain completely out of significant relation to each other. Thirdness is the factor of final causation which manifests itself as a "gentle force" bringing together in a certain measure all that which without it must remain in arbitrary and unmediated opposition. Thirdness cannot in fact have any being apart from Firstness and Secondness. It exists in its role of mediation alone (5.121), and yet as general and as significant it always transcends that which it mediates. It goes beyond the actual instances to signify still other conceivable instances to which it may refer in the future. In terms of Peirce's conception of Thirdness we may understand the "general" as of the nature of rule, or better still, a habitual mode of behavior, a directive tendency which has meaning in relation to its instances to which still others could be substituted. (Stearns 1952: 203)

Its power is its ability to predict, and its strength is its generalizability; its essence—to phrase it in terms of social anthropology—is its structure, and its anchor is in culture viewed in Schneiderian terms as a system of symbols and meanings.

These are Peirce's triadic categories in outline. Now let us consider his epistemology, defined here as the "knowing process." The pilgrimage is an exploration and exercise in epistemology. It is also an exploration of cosmology, even as Peirce's categories explore the evolution of the cosmos. For the Hindu pilgrim, the explorations in epistemology and cosmology are conjoined in an autological quest, the quest after the answer to the question "Who am I?"

Ideally for Peirce, and intrinsic to the nature of the phaneron,² both cosmos and knowledge, matter and reason, fact and value, body and mind,³ evolved from Firstness to Thirdness. The synecchistic⁴ arrow points in the direction of a perfectly rational system. In terms of social structural organization, the synecchistic tendency is toward greater social integration, greater specialization of roles, and greater limitation on the possible varieties of individual behavior. Progress, for Peirce, results "from every individual merging his individuality in sympathy with his neighbor's" (6.6294).⁵ Peirce's ideal of Thirdness is to be achieved only when impulse and spontaneity give way to custom and then to law, law being a function of reasoned habit. Victor Turner, in his several studies on the ritual process, observed that the movement from *communitas* to *societas*, or from liminality to structure, was characterized by a movement from the "ludic" to the "ergic" (1974: 221–223; Turner and Turner 1978: 35–37). Peirce's Thirdness is Turner's ergic, sans its encounter with resistance. For Peirce, development, like knowledge, essentially involves a limitation of possibilities. In his words, "There is a tendency, as action is repeated again and again to approximate indefinitely toward the perfection of that fixed character, which would be marked by the entire absence of self-reproach. The more closely this is appreciated, the less room for self-control there will be" (5.418). Peirce, however, is also aware here of the increasingly confining and self-alienating direction of his epistemology and cosmology. One cannot miss the echo of Weber's tyranny of bureaucratization, Durkheim's anomie, Marx's alienation,

²The phaneron is understood by Peirce as all that appears to the mind and wherein the mind itself is part of that appearance (1.280–287).

³Peirce's anti-Cartesian writings, especially with respect to Cartesian dualism, are well known. The Hindu, I am convinced, will take the side of Peirce in treating matter as *effete* mind (6.25).

⁴Synecchism is defined as "the doctrine that all that exists is continuous" (1.172).

⁵For this and other parallels between Peirce's Pragmatism and Marxism, see Karl-Otto Apel's *Charles S. Peirce: From Pragmatism to Pragmatism*.

and even de Tocqueville's apprehensions about a totally individualistic egalitarian society. For this reason, Peirce does a double take. He provides his Thirdness with a crucial ingredient, namely, that of indeterminacy or chance, which he called tychism. The modal nature of Firstness is that of logical possibility; the modal nature of Secondness is actual fact; but the modal nature of Thirdness is that future conditional that must be regarded as a real potentiality both in our experience and in nature itself. The doctrine of Thirdness is, then, an assertion that the imaginative freedom has its roots in the habit-taking character of the universe itself. But this habit taking is never so final that it does not permit exceptions; indeed, a new and fruitful tendency may arise. The "general" is, in fact, in the process of growth through its instances; it does not bind them but receives its implementation to a greater or lesser extent through them.

The Hindu pilgrim is less optimistic about Thirdness and its aspect of tychism. In Thirdness he discovers the exaltation of that form of knowledge, namely, analytic knowledge, that his culture at its core devalues. He finds Thirdness and analytic knowledge binding, since this type of knowledge emphasizes the discontinuity of his substance and the substance of his *ūr*, house, kinsmen, and so on through its incessant concern with the categorization and ranking of substances. To him, the emphasis on rules, laws, theories, categories, distinctions that are a part of Thirdness is the very kind of "knowledge" that alienates him from a true synthetic knowledge of the oneness and continuity of all substance. Therefore, he must strive to move away from the world of theories and laws, through Secondness, which dissolves the rules and theories that classify "the other" into just one other (in the case of the pilgrimage, *pāini*), which looms out against the self, to Firstness, where the "other" is experienced in such immediacy that it is no longer clear where self ends and other begins. Firstness, is beyond all self and other distinctions, even beyond the mediacy of perception. In Firstness, the pilgrim leaves

behind his temporal, differentiated identity and exists only as the *ātman*, a pure, unmanifest, and undifferentiated form of substance. It is no longer meaningful to speak of self or other or of perception, since there are no distinct entities to perceive. Knowledge in this state is synthetic knowledge at its most complete, where one knows the self through having incorporated the other so completely that there is no longer any self or other. Incorporative, substantial oneness is then Firstness—*pūrṇa vidyā*—pure knowledge.

Now I will turn to the pilgrimage itself, an exercise in the progressive and processual acquisition of knowledge and the corresponding shedding of ignorance. Less abstractly, its purpose is to visit Lord Ayyappan, who sits upon a mountain, known as Sabari Malai, located amid the hills of central Kerala in southwest India.

Lord Ayyappan, as legend has it, was born to Śiva and Viṣṇu, two major sectarian deities of India. How was Ayyappan born to two male deities? Well, Viṣṇu was not quite male when this happened. There was (I am making a very long story very short) a buffalo demoness who had received a very dangerous boon from Brahma, the creator. The boon was that she could not be killed by anyone born from the union of male and female. With this boon in hand, the demoness went about wreaking havoc on everything in her path. She overthrew Indra's *tejalōkani* ("heavens, abode of the gods"), captured the earth in one day, and exalted the netherworlds to such dizzy heights of power that the whole universe trembled at her footsteps. So one day, Indra went to Śiva and Viṣṇu for help. As a result, Viṣṇu took on the form of Mohini, a beautiful female, and then proceeded to bathe in the river that flowed by the place where Śiva was meditating under a tree. Struck by this beauty incarnate who Śiva saw "clinging to her dripping silk wrap," Śiva's semen "sprang like an arrow from his lingam [phallus] and impregnated Viṣṇu in his Mohini-rūpa, or Mohini form. Nine months later, Ayyappan was born. To make a shortened story shorter yet, Ayyappan, being the son of male

and male, was not subject to Brahma's boon and so was able to slay the awful demoness. Yet no sooner had the demoness fallen to the ground dead than she rose again, reincarnated as the most beautiful maiden. While the young Ayyappan stood there beauty-struck, the young goddess thanked him for redeeming her from her terrible previous birth and expressed her wish to marry him. Ayyappan knew that it was his *kāma* ("fate") to marry her, but he also had other promises to keep. So being the son of clever Śiva and tricky Viṣṇu, he made a conditional promise. He said, "on whichever year a virgin pilgrim does not come to Sabari Hill to worship me, on that year I shall marry you." The goddess in turn made her solemn vow to wait, even if it took forever. So to this day, the god and goddess are waiting on their respective hills in their respective shrines. An examination of Lord Ayyappan's iconic representation or the abundance of lithographs of this deity will reveal his very interesting squatting position. The weight of his body rests on his toes, and his knees are held up by a strap at an odd angle. One pilgrim assured me that if I were ever to be struck by an unvanquishable ithyphallic condition, all I had to do was to get into the Ayyappan position and I would be assured of flaccid relief. In any event, it has worked for Lord Ayyappan for the last seven or eight centuries.

In 1976, I, in my small way, as one among thousands of other "virgin pilgrims," helped Ayyappan preserve his bachelorhood. In Tamil Nadu and Kerala, Lord Ayyappan has become the lord of celibacy par excellence. Consequently, only those who have taken a strict vow to celibacy can approach his shrine. No females, except the non-menstruating kind—prepubertal and postmenopausal—are allowed on this pilgrimage.

The pilgrimage to Sabari Malai is seasonal—between December 15 and January 15. Preparations for the pilgrimage are elaborate; it is probably one of the most elaborate of any pilgrimage in India. Among these preparations are

several vows of austerity that must be taken forty-five to sixty days prior to beginning the journey. These austerities involve: no sex, no shoes or sandals, no more garments than two changes of vēṣṭis, which must not be in any color other than black, blue, or other, no meat or eggs, no intoxicating beverages, no meals in other people's homes, three baths a day, three pūjās a day, as many visits to as many temples as possible, giving of alms, no losing of one's temper, no verbal, physical, or mental abuse toward others, no violence (even toward the smallest of insects), no sleeping on beds or mattresses but only on a mat or on the bare floor, no unclean thoughts (mainly sexual), avoidance of the company of any woman (be she your wife, mother, sister, or stranger) and so on.

During the forty-five to sixty days from the day the vow is taken to the day of the trip to Sabari Malai, the pilgrim begins to be weaned away from society. In our village, for instance, everyone addressed us as "Swami," and we in turn addressed everybody else as "Ayyappa Swami." In other words, everybody became an Ayyappan for us. Our external appearance—the wearing of a black, blue, or other vēṣṭi and holy ashes across our chests and foreheads, along with the consecrated beaded necklace—marked us as not belonging to the social order of the village. None can command an Ayyappan pilgrim, however lowly the pilgrim may be, in the caste structure. Everyone knew that we abstained from sex, and that made us very powerful in the eyes of the villagers, for our curse, if we were to curse, would stick.

On the eve of the pilgrimage, the pilgrims undergo an initiation rite in one of the local temples, in which a two-pouched cloth bag called the *iru muṭi* (literally, "double crown") is placed on each pilgrim's head in such a way that the waist of the bag rests on the head, with one pouch suspended in front of the head and other behind. The pouch in front contains coconuts, ghee, camphor, turmeric,

joss sticks, and other offertory items intended for the deity. The other pouch contains the pilgrim's own provisions for eating and sleeping. While this rite on the eve of the pilgrim's departure is called the *iru muṭi* rite, it contains within it, besides the placing of the *iru muṭi* on the pilgrim's head, several subrituals. Important among these is a miniature death ritual, which friends and kinsmen of the pilgrims perform by throwing three handfuls of raw rice into one of the pouches of the *iru muṭi*. This is not unlike the throwing of rice on a corpse before it is taken to be cremated. By this act, friends and kinsmen symbolically complete their duties toward one who is renouncing the world and shall henceforth be as good as dead.

After the *iru muṭi* was placed on our heads, we left the shrine by walking backward until we reached the temple courtyard. At this point we were stopped and told to turn around three times, even as a corpse is turned around three times on its way to the crematorium. After the third turn we faced the "wilderness," that is, away from the temple. We continued to stand in this position while our friends, kinsmen, and almost anybody and everybody who happened to be in the temple or was passing by in the street came and prostrated before each one of us in order to gain merit by this very act. They were cautioned not to touch us, however, lest we be polluted, and our power be too much for them to bear. While all this prostrating went on, the pilgrim was expected to look straight ahead; by no means was he allowed to turn around to look at what he is about to leave behind. After all the people gathered there had worshipped us to their hearts' content, our pilgrimage began in earnest.

There were seven of us in our group, and we traveled to Kerala by car until we reached a place called Eru Meli. (In days gone by, pilgrims must have done the entire trip on foot. But in these times, given the practical difficulties of getting leave and so forth, one has little choice but to travel the two-hundred-odd miles to the base of the hill, Eru Meli,

by automobile or bus.) On our way, of course, we visited every single temple of any importance, especially temples of the goddesses, in order to obtain from them śakti, or power, that would sustain us throughout the arduous walk from Eru Meli to Sabari Malai.

Eru Meli was the actual starting point of our pilgrimage, from which the forty-seven-mile trek to Sabari Malai began. The forty-seven-mile footpath is not by any means the most direct route. There are two other paths to Sabari Malai, one a six-mile track and another a nineteen-mile track, both these being easier, safer, and shorter than our forty-seven-mile route, which winds its way through forests infested with elephants, bears, leopards, and all manner of creepy-crawly creatures, and, of course, very many less dangerous beasts and a few rather pleasant ones—birds, squirrels, and butterflies. The path is circuitous and goes up and down several hills before it gets to Sabari Malai. But our path, though less traveled, was special, because it is the very path that Lord Ayyappan walked on his way to Sabari. By sharing in this historical experience of our Lord, we became special pilgrims, Ayyappans in the true sense; for our efforts we gained special rewards and privileges when we got to the getting place.

When we got to Eru Meli it was about one in the afternoon, and thousands of pilgrims were gathered in groups around temporarily constructed hearths or a guru or a *bhagiri* leader. There were stalls in Eru Meli where commercial activities were as spirited as those seen in the bazaars of big cities, but here an atmosphere of festivity reigned. Pilgrims and merchants alike seemed caught up in a spirit of freedom and celebration. The atmosphere seemed somewhat like that of the second novena in the fiesta of three kings described by Victor Turner (1974: 194): "It stressed the commercial and festive aspects of the total situation which contained three major foci in space and time. These were solemnity, festivity and trade, all three representing types

of the liminal disengagement from day to day participation in structural role playing and status incumbency."

After we had laid our loads down, taking great care to place our *iru mutis* on a special sacred mat, we proceeded toward the stream to perform our first ritual of the day. This was none other than ritual defecation and urination. We were to rid ourselves, to the best of our ability, of the contents of our bowels and bladder, which belonged to a world we were leaving behind. To me and to many other pilgrims—most of whom were urban, middle-class individuals—this was quite a liminal experience. We had never done this in public before, in the company of ritual defecators to the right, left, front, and back, each only two feet away, solemnly doing his thing while precariously perched on two felled tree trunks thrown over trenches, with no walls around nor roof above.

Following this sublime rite, we walked up a little hill to a small shrine, where we proceeded to daub one another with multicolored powdered dyes. It is true that my fellow villagers had not addressed me as "sir" for over sixty-odd days, ever since we jointly took our vows and became Ayyappa pilgrims. There still remained, however, a vestige of a deferential attitude in their behavior toward me, as a guest and as a foreigner. I seemed to receive special treatment in so many subtle ways, even though such treatment was forbidden by the spirit of the pilgrimage. Yet as my fellow pilgrims—*cum*-fellow villagers, several of them belonging to lower jātis, began to paint colored spots all over my face and body, I saw a new glow light up their faces. I was being transformed, and the last residue of social differences of rank and status was beginning to disappear even as my features were being creatively disfigured and transformed. They all broke out in laughter, and so did I when I finished painting their faces and bodies.

Following our transformation into brightly spotted, new individuals, we were given a tree branch. With this green branch in hand, the group broke into song, and we

danced in circles to the rhythm of the drums. We proceeded down the street, still dancing, still singing, "Swāmi tintakattom, Ayyappa tintakattom." This is believed to be a song sung by Ayyappa and his hunters returning with the day's booty. Singing and dancing, we worked our way down to the Islamic shrine and tomb of the Muslim saint Vāvar.

A combination of legend and history traces the entry of this Islamic figure into the Ayyappan cult to around the eleventh or twelfth century. It is believed that Ayyappan is a variant, or transform, of the sentinel deity, Aiyanar. Aiyanar is seen in Tamil villages to this day, mounted on a horse and armed with bow and arrow (Dumont 1959). Krishna Chaitanya (1972) speculates that the early occupants of Kerala were migrant groups that made their way through the mountain passes of the Western Ghats. Quite clearly, the biggest obstacles facing these early settlers were the thick jungles and dangerous wildlife. As a consequence, the sentinel deity of the plains village was transformed into Ayyappa, who was no longer a warrior mounted on a steed but a hunter whose hunting pack consisted of tigers.

In the eleventh century, the Chera empire began to disintegrate in its wars with the Cholas, and the Pandya kings of the east extended their rule over many parts of the country, west of the Ghats. The famous marauding and plundering Maravar tribes increased the frequency and intensity of their forays into the plains of Kerala, taking advantage of the absence of a strong and integrating kingship. On one of these pillaging expeditions, the Maravars captured a princess from the small kingdom of Pantalām, located in central Kerala. This princess, the story goes, was rescued by a Brahmin youth and taken to a refuge near Sabari hill. There they were married, and she gave birth to a princely child, who it is believed was Ayyappan incarnate. The boy was schooled by his father in the rigors of the spiritual as well as the martial life. When he reappeared in the king's court, the king of Pantalām instantly recognized

the lad to be his long-lost sister's son and commissioned him to be the captain of his army.⁶

In another variant of the legend, a childless king and queen are said to have been led to a place in the forest where the baby Ayyappan had been laid to rest by Viṣṇu. The royal couple adopted the child and raised him to be a great warrior.⁷

Regardless of which legend we choose, it is reasonable to assume that there was a famous captain of the army in the little kingdom of Pantalām. It is also a fact that while Maravar plunderers spoiled from the east, the coastal regions of Kerala had to contend with Arab seafaring traders and pirates. The most famous of these pirates was one named Vāvar. The young Ayyappan is said to have engaged in military combat with Vāvar and to have successfully subjugated him and his army. The vanquished turned devotee and most-favored lieutenant of Ayyappan, whose powers were by now recognized to be divine. With Vāvar's assistance, Ayyappan put an end to Maravar incursions, and peace and prosperity were restored to Pantalām. In time Ayyappan disappeared into his retreat in the hills of Sabari. Vāvar, the Islamic Arab, died and was entombed in Eru Meli, at the foot of Sabari. National hero, traditional deity, and Muslim saint all combine to give the Ayyappa cult its fascinating syncretistic quality. Of sociological and cultural importance is the fact that the shrine of Vāvar, like Sabari Malai itself, provides a place where all distinctions, including religious ones, are broken down. It is also worthy of note that a local Muslim festival known as *koṭikūttu*, celebrated in the Kanjiramattam mosque, takes place on the

⁶This version of Ayyappan's incarnation on earth may be found, among other places, in Krishna Chaitanya's *Keralā* (1972) and in *Sūkarinālai and Its Sasthā* by P. T. Thomas (1973).

⁷This version is favored by most of the Tamil writers. See, for instance, E. V. Pillai (1974), T. K. Muthuswamy Sastrigal (1972), and the popular booklet in English by Pyyappan, *Lord Ayyappan the Dharmā Sasta* (1973).

day that the stellar configuration known as *makaram* makes its appearance in the sky (in late December or early January). This is also the same day that the *makara vilakku* festival is celebrated on Sabari Malai by Ayyappan pilgrims (see Menon 1979: 174).

At the Islamic shrine of Vāvar, my fellow pilgrims broke coconuts and worshipped Allah in the way they knew best. Some also offered gifts to a follower of Vāvar, a member of the Vaipūr Muzaliar clan (P. T. Thomas 1973: 11; Menon 1979: 170). Suddenly a pilgrim (who I later came to know was a Christian) broke into song. He had rendered into song the devotional poems of the ninth-century Śaiva saint Mānikkavācakar. I did not know at that time that Mānikvācakar's *Tiruvācakam* was the source of his songs, and at that time I wasn't able to tape them. I did hear the following refrain, in modern Tamil, however, which was repeated at intervals, between the singing of the ninth-century lyrical poems:

inku matiyāṭuvōm
nām veriyāṭuvōm
pittan pittan pōl
urunṭāṭuvōm
inku pārpārillai
kēlvi kētpārillai
Civananpil mūrki
onṭrākuvōm

Fellow pilgrims soon caught onto the refrain and sang along with the singer. In order to provide the reader with the kind of poems that were sung on this occasion and with an idea of the devotional intensity contained and conveyed by these poems, I provide the following translation of a selection of lines from the *Tiruvācakam*. From my notes, it is at least clear that most of the poems sung were selections from the same section in the *Tiruvācakam* from which the follow-

ing translation was wrought, and the following verse(s) were indeed sung by our Ayyappa devotee:

He grabbed me
lest I go astray

Wax before an unspent fire,
mind melted,
body trembled.

I bowed, I wept,
danced, cried aloud,
I sang, and I praised him.

Unyielding, as they say,
as an elephant's jaw
or a woman's grasp,
was love's unrelenting
seizure.

Love pierced me
like a nail
driven into a green tree.

Overflowing, I tossed
like a sea,

heart growing tender,
body shivering

while the world called me Demon!
and laughed at me,

I left shame behind,
took as an ornament the mockery of the local folk.
Unswerving, I lost my cleverness in the bewilderment
of ecstasy.^a

^a*Tiruvācakam*, 4: 59–70, in Ramanujan 1981: 118–119.

Refrain followed verse, refrain followed verse, until he was drowned out by the chorus that he sparked, and communitas prevailed.

By about four that afternoon, after our first ritual bath in which we washed our bodies free of the dyes, we ate a hurried and frugal lunch, sharing our food with whomever happened to be near us, with no distinction between Brahmin and Parayan, Nayar and Turumban. If the Maharashtrian pilgrimage described by Karve stopped short of inter-caste commensalism, among Ayyappans no caste distinctions remained for caste commensalism to be practiced (Karve 1962: 19). I am somewhat ashamed to admit that I was the only pilgrim who jealously guarded his precious little boiled water, for reasons you will soon appreciate. After our meal of steamed farina, we solemnly placed our iru mutis on our heads and started on the long and arduous trek of forty-five miles.

Unfortunately for the pilgrim traveling between sunrise and sunset, the forest area flanking the path has been subjected to much deforestation, thereby exposing the weary pilgrim to the scorching sun. The selective deforestation, needless to say, was carried out by the Kerala government, whose best of intentions was to make it easier for the pilgrim. The path was either covered by sharp-edged stones and gravel or by the softest and finest earth. It so happened that there were very few round, smooth stones on which the traveler might have placed his tender bare feet, thereby avoiding the piercing of jagged stone edges. The areas covered by soft earth would have been so very welcome, if only the path had not been exposed to the direct sun. As it was, this soil merely absorbed and retained the heat of the sun and blistered the soles of the pilgrims' feet, which had already been lacerated and made tender by the stone-strewn pathway. Given the choice between the stony path and the soft earth, one invariably feels that the kind of path one happens not to be walking on at any given

moment is preferable to that on which one happens to be walking. The same is true of the ascents and descents. The track to Sabari takes one up four steep hills and down two steep descents. When one is climbing up the hill, one's feet long for the alternative—the descent; when one descends, one's feet long for the ascent.

The mountain track involves as well the crossing of two rivers and two or three streams. The icy-cold water flowing over sore and blistered feet gives pleasure—this being the only physically pleasurable experience of the entire pilgrimage, besides the physical relief experienced when one lies under a shady tree to rest or is free to quench the thirst with cool, clear water. Experienced pilgrims dissuade one from indulging in any one of these pleasures for too long. Soaking the feet in the stream softens the callouses on soles, hastening the blistering process and correspondingly retarding the healing process. Resting too long under a tree allows the limbs and muscles to set and become stiff, so that the recommencement of the walk becomes extremely difficult and painful. According to local medical theories, to drink plentiful cool water when the body is hot from walking in the sun can result in the sudden cooling and contraction of the stomach and intestines, causing colics. I had my own germ theory, which kept me away from the same cool water.

Even though many pilgrims make the trip at a more leisurely pace (that is, in three to four days), getting to the Sabari shrine as soon as possible is highly valued because it calls for great physical exertion on behalf of the Lord and indicates a burning desire on the part of the devotee to get to His feet without being distracted by the comforts of rest and other activities en route. If there is one single sensation that predominates over all other sensations, in terms of sheer intensity and quantity, it is the sensation of pain. The aim of the pilgrim is to conquer pain and also to conquer all other less intense sensations with pain. These less intense sensa-

tions are (as gathered from fellow pilgrims): disgust, hate, frustration, irritation, anger, hunger, thirst, lust, joy, peace, and compassion. In this pilgrimage, the sensation of love (I use the term *sensation* instead of *emotion*, because the Tamil equivalent, *uniarcci*, stresses the relationship between the feeling and the sensory organ, which relationship I wish to maintain) may be so called only insofar as it is associated with the love for Ayyappan. This sensation of love, it is believed, must gradually build up, so that when pain has conquered all other sensations, pain itself will be conquered by love. Eventually, however, "love itself when grown to its fullest dimensions must burst or swallow itself so that at the point of union with the Lord, no sensation should exist, even that of love." These were the words of the leader of our group of pilgrims.

I will omit the details of the pilgrimage itself: the number of stations on the way, the various shrines, the sacred topography, the holy baths, the beggars, the mythology, and much more. Before bringing this chapter to a close, however, I will elucidate the connection already hinted at between Peirce's categories and the pilgrim's progress.

For Peirce, Thirdness was the realm of law, and laws in their most developed forms not merely describe and determine but also predict. Not unlike Peirce's being of Thirdness, the Hindu villager's life is fraught with attempts to predict and with experiences in prediction; he is preoccupied in devising, if not discovering, laws of a general order which will determine and describe his personal existence. One might even go so far as to say that the Hindu is obsessed with prediction. The bhajans (devotional singing) and *pranikams* (sermons) that we attended during our sixty days of preparation were concerned as much with predictions about what we could expect on the pilgrimage as with stories of the life of Lord Ayyappan.

During the Sabari Hill pilgrimage's preparatory phase, when I asked pilgrims why they were going on this pilgrim-

age, their responses were many. Some (exceptionally few) said that they were going to obtain mental peace; others expected some material gain from Lord Ayyappa upon the successful completion of the pilgrimage; still others said it was a miniexperience in *moṭcam* ["liberation, heaven"], and so on. The pilgrimage itself, however, was an exercise in prediction and thus an exercise in Thirdness. The level of abstraction that each pilgrim built into his predictions varied, but prediction was invariably present. Never was there a doubt that the anticipated result would be obtained if the rite (the pilgrimage) were performed correctly. The effect, the boon, gift, or *moṭcam*, was encoded in the cause (the pilgrimage) itself, and therefore the question of doubt did not arise.

On the first night, I talked to a group of Brahmin pilgrims who were convinced that the pilgrimage was a path to salvation. I asked them whether they considered this *bhakti* ("devotion"), *karma* ("action"), or *jñāna* ("knowledge") *mārga* ("path"). After much discussion and debate it was generally agreed that all three paths to salvation—the paths of devotion, action, and knowledge—were present herein and that with the progression of the pilgrimage, all three modes were going to increase before the pilgrim finally merged with the Lord. Discussions with many others brought agreement on this point. It became evident that there was little use in speaking of devotion, action, and wisdom as distinct alternatives as far as this pilgrimage was concerned. Over and over again the point was made that there could not be devotion without knowledge or knowledge without devotion; nor could there be devotion and knowledge together in the absence of action, which was what the entire pilgrimage was about.

Since I had recently become interested in the "knowing" process, I made it a point to discuss with pilgrims what they really meant by "knowledge" and "to know." On the first evening, before the commencement of our walk up the hill,

our discussion on the subject of knowledge went off particularly well; and it became noteworthy that many responses emphasized the predictive aspect of knowledge or knowing. Some sample responses are:

First Informant (henceforth Inf.): I say that I know someone when I've seen him once and can tell you what he looks like. The better I know him the more detailed my description of him will be for you to recognize him when you see him for the first time. [Note the predictive aspect.]

Second Inf.: I say I know Ayyappa Swami because I know that he will grant me my prayer.

Third Inf.: Knowledge is to know the purpose of something.

A.: And what is the purpose of this pilgrimage?

Third Inf.: For me it is to experience *mōtcam*. For someone else it can be something else. Once you know you are doing this [the pilgrimage], that in itself is knowledge. [Note the mutual immanence of cause and effect.]

There were two responses, however, that were to prove quintessential to my understanding of the pilgrim's progress and the knowing process. The first came from a blacksmith who was treated by the others as the least sensible and most inarticulate of the group. After he listened to my lengthy interview with the others, he turned to me and said: "You know only about all our knowledg[es]. You have come here with us only to try and know how we know, but *you* really don't know. You don't have knowledge. Not even as much as I have . . . even though you know what each and every one of us knows." He seemed to indicate that I, who had "meta-knowledge," or the most abstract kind of knowledge, in fact had the least knowledge.

The second piece of information that I was to find most enlightening and which prepared me to anticipate what I

was to subsequently inquire about was given to me by an old Brahmin who had been privy to the first three responses above, and of informants with many other similar responses. When this Brahmin found himself alone with me he told me:

They [referring to the informants] now think that they know, because they all expect a certain result. This is knowledge of a certain sort, which I don't deny. But you will see this knowledge get sharper as we progress and the walking gets rougher. They'll even say, "I don't know why I came on this pilgrimage." But when you hear them say things like that, don't think that they really do not have knowledge. On the contrary, it is then that they will be beginning to really acquire knowledge.

Insofar as we treat the progress of the pilgrimage as a progressive process in the acquisition of knowledge, we shall find that Peirce's Secondness follows his Thirdness, and not vice versa. Let us briefly turn to Peirce's own exposition of the category of Secondness.

An explanation of Secondness must consist mainly in directing attention to it—an ostensive definition, for Secondness lacks the "genuine" generality of Thirdness and even the "negative" generality of Firstness. However, of the three categories, the

practical exigencies of life render Secondness the most prominent. . . . This is not a conception, nor is it a peculiar quality. It is an experience. It comes out most fully in the shock of reaction between ego and non-ego. It is there, the double consciousness of effort and resistance. That is something which cannot properly be conceived. For to conceive it is to generalize it; and to generalize it is to miss altogether the hereness and the nowness which is its essence. (8.266)

Secondness may be illustrated by the following excerpts from my diary.

My first holy bath

The water of this tank was holy, very holy, or so everyone said. This tank was nothing more than a banded area, a hole really, the size of which was no larger than a standard swimming pool. Water trickled into this tank from a stream, which pilgrims used for what is euphemistically referred to in Tamil as washing one's feet, after the said stream's shores had been used as a latrine by the same pilgrims. When there was more water than the tank could contain, water flowed over the western bund and continued on its downward course.

Thousands of pilgrims were in the tank, and several times that many were either drying themselves with their towels or else waiting to enter the water. I entered the pool, toe tips first, wishing that this was all only a bad dream. The water was not more than four feet deep. I crept through the praying, spitting, dipping, dripping, nose-blowing pilgrims, trying to find an area that had the least number of human beings per square foot. My futile search was interrupted by a Brahmin pilgrim who informed me with a smile that the water was so much cleaner than last year this time. My unspoken response was, "You mean to say that you are going through this a second time? How could you?" But my spoken response was, "But it is so filthy!" "You mustn't say such things," he advised, "this water is cuttam [Skt. *siddha*, "pure"]. Call out the names of Ayyappa and immerse yourself. You will receive His *aru!* [grace]."

I held my nose, shut my eyes, tucked in my lips between my teeth, counted one, two, and three, gurgled the name of Ayyappā in my throat, and immersed myself in the holy water that refreshed the thousands around me, the millions that preceded me in ages past, and the millions that were likely to follow me in years to come. As I came out of the water, a pilgrim on my left called out to another pilgrim, "Ayyappā, Ayyappā!" [On this pilgrimage, once the vows have been taken, the pilgrim addresses everyone else as Ayyappā.] Failing to draw the attention of the second, he prefixed the name of Ayyappā with a "Dr.," yelling, "Dr.

Ayyappā! Dr. Ayyappā! Look!" The pilgrim who was being called was briskly massaging his scalp with his fingertips, periodically dipping them into the water as if the latter were some precious hair lotion divinely prescribed for his gathering baldness. So he is a doctor, I thought. He finally heard his friend's call and turned around to face his friend. With a grin sparkling in the sunlight, the friend raised his holy black vēṣī, which he had been rinsing in the holier water, and held it up for the doctor, saying, "Look!" Strands of lumpy phlegm of pilgrims who had cleansed their lungs and throats by expectorating into the water outside were seen clinging to the fabric. "It is all the grace of Ayyappā," was the doctor's only response. I felt the question "How do you mean, Dr. Ayyappā?" feebly rise in my throat, which, however, was instantly choked down by a gagging sensation that forcefully arose antiperistaltically from the pit of my stomach. The doctor's friend received the doctor's advice with a pious "Śaranam Ayyappā" (translated "Ayyappā, my refuge") and returned to rinsing his vēṣī. Another joked about not having to use starch on the vēṣīs washed in this holy tank. The doctor returned to massaging his scanty scalp, and I scrambled out of the water as fast as I could, lest I retch into a public bathing pool and pollute it. As I neared the edge, all other sensations disappeared; there were no other pilgrims, there was no pilgrimage, there was no fieldwork, there was no dissertation to be written, there was no pride, no hate, no love, no animosity, no admiration, no resentment—there was nothing except me and the phlegmy water around me.

My second holy bath

The river was called Arudā. The water that flowed in it was, according to mythology, the tears of the goddess. In all, over 100,000 pilgrims were either bathing, about to bathe, or had just finished bathing in the river. The rocky/gravelly shores were covered with squatters in the morning twilight. It would have taken an acrobat to tiptoe his way through the piles of human excrement, which seemed to be

as numerous as the stones and pebbles that covered the shores. I was of half a mind to turn back, to hide, to vanish into the mist, to do something or anything else besides having to take my holy bath. But there was no way out or around. Pilgrim pressure was indefatigable. I felt as if thousands of eyes were fixed on me and me alone, to see that I did not escape. I slugged and slid my way into the water and quickly immersed myself but once and returned to the river bank feeling helplessly filthy. I fetched my comb from my knapsack and let it slide through my dripping hair. I looked at the comb and saw something brown adhering to its teeth. I lifted the comb to my nose. It stank of night soil. For a few moments, which in fact seemed like forever, nothing else existed besides me and the world outside me. This world, however, was not differentiated into pilgrims, a river, trees, stones, huts, campfires, or any other sensation that reached the five senses. The world outside was reduced to a oneness: It was all shit! And I was the only "other" existing apart from this world, acutely and painfully sensitive to its brutal force on all my senses.

My climb up Arudā hill

The hill was steep. The path was so straight and so long that it seemed like a modified version of Jacob's ladder. When I lifted up my eyes to see if I could see the end or at least the point where the climb ended and the descent was to begin, all I saw were heads and heads and more heads of the crawling throng of pilgrims who had gone ahead of me. They had accomplished so much! Could I possibly equal them, I wondered. I felt so feeble at the very sight and thought of the task. With me was a group of pilgrims which responded in unison to a leader's recitative chanting of praises to Ayyappan. We were all familiar with the 108 "recitative calls" and their appropriate "recitative responses."

It was tacitly agreed that group leaders [or Guruswāmies, as they were called here] were to carry out the recitative calls, and the others were expected to respond. There was

no hard and fast rule as to the sequence in which the 108 stanzas had to be recited. However, frequent repetition of the same line by a Guruswāmy indicated limited knowledge, bad memory, or a lack of familiarity with the verses. A perfect reciter would repeat a line but once in fifteen to twenty lines. The lines thus repeated tended to belong to the first five lines, indicating that when memory failed reciters tended to go back to the lines that were first committed to memory, in somewhat of a Jakobsonian fashion.

The pattern in the recitation changed as the climb progressed. These changes may be noted to occur in several stages.

First stage

1. The leaders of the various groups led the recitation, and the followers responded to the call of their respective Guruswāmies.
2. The lines were recited loudly, clearly, and energetically.
3. The members of each group walked together, around their leader.
4. When one group overtook another, each group leader shouted out his recitative call so that his call would not be drowned out by the call of the other leader, and also so that the members of his group could shout out the recitative response appropriate to that call and not to the call of the Guruswāmy of another group.
5. The pace of walking was relatively constant and maintained an approximate rhythm with the recitation.

Second stage

1. The Guruswāmy gave up reciting the call, which duty was assumed by another member of the group (usu-

ally one who tended to be more aggressive than the rest), and the leader joined the others in reciting the responses instead of leading with calls.

2. The substitute leader's call continued to be loud and clear because of its newness, but the responses were beginning to dim.
3. The group continued to stay together. A slight increase in spacing was beginning to be observed, however.
4. The pace of walking slowed down but continued constant.

Third stage

1. The call was recited by various members of the group, each one calling only for short periods, with long lulls in between when one caller stopped and another assumed the calling.
2. The calls and responses were less loud and not as clear, because the pilgrims were beginning to run out of breath.
3. Repetition became more frequent, a line among the first five familiar lines being repeated every fifteen lines or oftener.
4. The distance between members of the group began to increase even further, which resulted in many members falling outside the sound area of their caller and lagging into the sound area of another caller belonging to a strange group. This drifting resulted in the breaking up of the group and a state of affairs in which everyone was willing to respond to any caller, regardless of whether or not the caller belonged to the respondent's own group.
5. The pace of walking became extremely erratic; "staggering" would be an apt description.

Fourth stage

1. The distinction between call lines and response lines was lost. Often the caller cried out response lines, and the responders replied with call lines.
2. Calls and responses sounded more like feeble cries for help.
3. The group split up into pairs of individuals, with one calling and the other responding, neither one knowing or, for that matter, caring whether what he recited was the call or the response.

Fifth stage

1. Individuals tended to pick out a single line, regardless of whether it was a call line or a response line, regardless of whether anybody called or responded; they merely kept repeating the same line over and over again.
2. The most common line recited was either the call or the response of stanza one, so that each on his own was gasping out the call, "Oh Lord! Oh Lord!" or "Ayyappō, Ayyappō . . ."

This final stage, or phase of physical and emotional reduction and exhaustion is another example, I believe, of Peirce's category of Secondness. In the words of one pilgrim who reflected on this phase of the climb, "there is nothing else I knew, heard, or felt. I was too tired to feel tired. All I heard was my voice calling out, "Ayyappō, Ayyappō, Ayyappō." Nothing else existed except my call and I. This was when I began to know my Lord in the true sense. And then I realized how little I knew him when I took the short six-mile trek last year." To know through Secondness is to become acutely aware that there is nothing else

besides yourself and that one other sensation coming from the exterior, which makes you acutely aware of yourself as against that "other."

Secondness is once again illustrated in the pilgrim's experience of pain in his climb down the hill called Kari Malai (the mountain of elephants). The path here is rough and rugged, covered with root stumps and sharp-edged stones. At the beginning of this trek one experiments in mini-exercises of Thirdness. One says to oneself, "If I place my foot in such and such a manner at such and such an angle, the pain will be minimized." Or one plans and schemes how one should dodge the roots and rocks. One tells oneself, "I shall walk on this side or that" or "Look! There's a patch of grass. Let me go and walk on that. It will make my feet feel good, even though the patch is only three feet long." During this phase, one is able to differentiate between the pain caused by the blisters under one's toenails and those on one's heels. Then again, one is able to distinguish between the pain caused by blisters, wherever they happen to be, and the pain arising from strained calf muscles and tendons. One knows or speculates that if one places one's leg at such and such an angle on such and such a surface of one's foot, the pain in one's knee will be alleviated. The headache caused by the heat of the noon sun and the load of the iru muti can be distinguished from the pain resulting from the straps of the knapsack biting into one's shoulders. So one adjusts the iru muti and the shoulder straps in order to reduce the pain in the head and the shoulders.

Sooner or later, however, all the different kinds of pain begin to merge. You stop predicting. Your knowledge via Thirdness begins to cease to function. It is replaced by Secondness. The experience of *pain* makes one acutely aware of oneself (ego) as the victim, and the outside (undifferentiated as roots, stones, and hot sand) as the pain-causing agent. This again is Secondness.

True to the old Brahmin's prediction, several pilgrims, when asked what or how they felt about the pilgrimage or why they came on it, said that they really did not know or, for that matter, care. Many of these were pilgrims who in their reflective Thirdness had come out with lengthy explications on the whys and the wherefores of their pilgrimage. Now they ceased to predict. But they still said they loved the Lord. However, all of them said that their predominant—if not sole—sensation was that of pain and that they did not (for the most part) know or care who was around them or what was said. Some of the responses on Secondness I obtained when the weary pilgrims paused to rest. Needless to say, my task was a difficult one, not only because I myself had to extricate myself from the state of Secondness and transport myself to the general level of Thirdness in formulating the questions but also because I had to force my interlocutors out of their own Secondness. Much of what Secondness was about I was to learn later, when aches and pains had been rested and soothed away, from pilgrims who were eager to reflect upon their experiences.

Pain also has an element of Firstness. This is a further step in the direction of knowledge. With time, pain stops having a causative agent, and ego is obscured or snuffed out because it has nothing to contrast itself with or stand against. Ego is no longer a victim, as in Secondness, because the identity of the pain-causing agent is lost. There is a "feeling" of pain, of course, but it is a sensation that has no agent, no tense, and no comparative. One does not know whence the pain came, how it is caused, or whether it is more or less intense than the pain a moment or an hour ago; for there is no before or after. Pain is the only sensation belonging to the eternal present.

Here now is a quote from Peirce about Firstness: "If we imagine that feeling retains its positive character but absolutely loses all relation (and thereby all *vividness*, which is only the sense of shock), it is no longer exactly what we call

feeling. It is a mere sense of quality. It is the sort of element that makes *red* to be such as it is, whatever anything else may be" (8.267). If we were to substitute *pain* for Peirce's "red," the definition would still hold, and our point would be made.

As stated earlier, of all the sensations informants talked about, pain was the sensation that was emphasized over and over again, as predominant. Several pilgrims seemed to believe, however, that after a while, pain, having become so intense, began to disappear. In the words of one pilgrim from my village, "At one moment everything is pain. But at the next moment everything is love (*aiyuu*). Everything is love for the Lord."

Again, this experience of love, I believe, is an experience in Firstness. The old Brahmin (henceforth B) who was with us insisted that the worth of a true devotee is established only when he begins to feel no pain.

A: Must he feel love then?

B: Once pain is conquered, love is there whether you feel it or not.

A: Is this love a special kind of love?

B: It is a love that cannot be contrasted with hate. It has no opposite. No before or after. It was never there before, and yet it was always there. Its existence does not depend on its being felt.

This statement begs to be compared in its simplicity with Peirce's illustration of Firstness containing his favorite example of red: "The mode of being a redness, before anything in the universe was yet red, was nevertheless a positive qualitative possibility. And redness in itself even if it be embodied is something positive *sui generis*. That I call Firstness" (1.25). In the old Brahmin's understanding of love, love, too, is a positive qualitative possibility. Quoting Tirumoolar, the Tamil Siddha poet, the old Brahmin con-

tinued to explain the concept of love as follows: "The poet said, 'those who say that love and God are two are ignorant.' True knowledge comes in learning that love is God. As long as the love one talks about is separate from God, that love is contrastable with hate; it has a before and an after. But when Love is God you have nothing to contrast it with."

At the very end of the long and arduous trek, just before the pilgrim reaches the presence of Lord Ayyappan, there are eighteen neatly built steps to climb. Each one of these steps is symbolic. Together they are symbolic of the entire pilgrimage. Taken individually, the eighteen steps stand for the five senses, the three *kūṇams*, or reals, the eight *rāgas*, *avidyā*, and *vidyā*.

The eight *rāgas* and their approximate English equivalents are as follows: *kāman* ("lust or desire"), *krōḍam* ("jealousy, envy"), *lobham* ("greed, avarice, stinginess"), *mōham* ("presumptuousness, pride, conceit, recklessness"), *mātsaryam* ("arrogance"), *tīṭikṣā* (whose meaning was unknown to all but whose attempted translation was, "the fixing of one's mind on a single object", or "persistence") and *ḍambam* ("flamboyance" or "showiness"). The pilgrimage, symbolically a progressive movement in the direction of salvation and knowledge, involves and demands the overcoming of these eight *rāgas*.

The five *intiriāms*, or senses, are the most talked about by the pilgrims of the eighteen entities. It is interesting that the elimination/vanquishing/transcendence/collapsing/coalescing (all these being words used by informants themselves) of the five *intiriāms* is done in a certain sequence. The first to go, so to speak, is the sense of hearing. Here is an excerpt from my field notes.

Inf.: I cease to hear the chatter and talk of those around me. I cease to hear the beggars by the roadside call out. That is why I stopped answering you after Kari Malai. [I found

it curious that he knew that I had been speaking to him after Kari Malai but claimed that he still didn't hear me—but I did not press the issue.] I cease to hear even the vendors selling oranges to quench my thirst. I see them, but I don't hear them. All I hear are the recitative lines in praise of Ayyappan.

A: Isn't hearing these recitative lines "hearing"? How can you then claim that you transcend [*mūlōṅku*] that particular intiriām?

Inf.: I begin to feel, not hear.

A: Where or how do you feel?

Inf.: All over my body. My skin, my heart, my head, . . . my whole body.

A: You *feel* in your ear?

Inf.: Yes. I feel in my ears, but I do not hear with them.

The argument seemed at first a little strained, overdone, and trapped in contradictions. The informant was a youth of twenty-one, of the Nāidu caste and a high school graduate. In my other discussions with him he had always been coherent. I therefore, had enough reason to treat his statements regarding the sense of hearing seriously. Subsequently I was to discover the same pattern in the responses of several other informants. The distinction made was not merely one between hearing and listening. It was generally believed that the ear, as a sense organ, stopped hearing, and began to feel (as a tactile organ would).

The next intiriām to be affected was the sense of smell. With respect to this particular sense, my prize informant was a young Ayyangar Brahmin, a bigot outside the context of the pilgrimage.

Inf.: I stopped smelling things after Aṇḍā Nati. [As you will remember, the shores of Aṇḍā emit but one odor, strong and clear, that of human excrement.] I could have

spent the next night in the gutter. I wouldn't have known the place by its smell. And mind you, this is a great achievement as far as I am concerned. For when I started the journey at Eru Meli, I could smell the foods of all the pilgrims cooking. And you know, I could tell you which was non-Brahmin food, even though all the cooking there was vegetarian. In fact, my sense of smell is so strong that I could tell a non-Brahmin from a Brahmin simply from his body odor. But after Arudā Nati I overcame my sense of smell.

A: Did you not even smell the camphor and incense sticks offered at the various shrines on the way after Arudā?

Inf.: You might say I felt it. I didn't smell it.

The next intiriam to fall under is that of sight. Below is an excerpt from my diary. This experience of mine was supported and corroborated by those of the many fellow pilgrims with whom I talked.

We had walked a mile or so down Arudā Hill. I was overcome by fatigue and felt that I would collapse before long. The blisters on my feet had long since broken and been torn open, and the gravel had begun to cause me excruciating pain by lacerating the tender skin underneath the now nonexistent cuticular layer. The shoulder strap of my knapsack ate into my flesh, and the iru muti on my head had just begun to give me a headache, which thumped contrapuntally between temples and medulla oblongata. Our pace of walking had been reduced to a crawl now, since there had been somewhat of a traffic jam caused by the falling across our path of an ancient banyan tree. Since the girth of the fallen tree was so massive, no one was able to climb over it and cross over to the other side. Instead, the pilgrims had dug a hole in the ground underneath the fallen tree's trunk, through which we tunneled across. The sun glared at us despotically from a cloudless sky. My response to the recitative calls had become mechanical. I reasoned to

myself that to open my mouth any more than absolutely necessary would cause dehydration through evaporation of saliva, dehydration which I could not afford, given that my water bottle was now empty. But my eyes were alert, studying every stone, slope, and root stump along my path. Halfway down the hill, something strange happened: I stopped looking. I don't think it would have made any difference if I had been blind. I did not care whether I slipped or stepped on stone or stump. I simply walked on and on, led by an unguided momentum, until the sun had set and darkness had made the leaves of the forest trees indistinguishable against the black night. Only then did I realize how little the light and my sense of sight had mattered.

Informants were not clear about what exactly the sense organ *the mouth* represented. Some thought it indicated taste, while others associated it with speech or the sensation of speech. Most informants tended to believe that the mouth, or *vīi*, referred to both speech and eating, with the emphasis on eating.

If the last six miles to the top of the shrine is climbed as prescribed, the devotee is expected to abstain from all food and drink. Only two of the fifteen pilgrims I observed closely refrained even from quenching their thirst during this last lap of the journey. These two claimed to have temporarily overcome hunger and thirst.

Pilgrims were stricter in their observance of the vow to silence. Obviously, the use of the speech apparatus for reciting praises to Ayyappan was not considered a violation of the vow to silence. When questioned about this apparent discrepancy in the execution of the vow of silence, one informant told me: "By the time I reached the last six miles my tongue began to function in a detached manner. I derived neither pleasure nor pain from it. It went on praising God while I remained silent. I was not aware of the activities

of my tongue. It acted on its own without it knowing what it was doing." This was the only informant who was able to formulate his response in such a well-articulated manner. The rest were by and large surprised by the inherent contradiction when it was pointed out to them. The upshot of their responses, however, was that "praises to the Lord are as good as silence." Another informant said, "I feel my tongue move and sounds come out. But I really don't talk. All I do is feel."

The pattern is clear. The four senses of sight, hearing, smell, and taste merge into the fifth sense of touch, or feeling. The organ that receives and reacts to touch or feeling, *unārcci*, is called *mei* in Tamil. The word *mei* refers to the entire body or *śārīra* (Skt.). Those schooled in Siddha theories of the body or Siddhanta metaphysics will tell you that *mei* refers only to the two outermost body sheaths, or *kośas*, namely, to the *sūkṣma* and *stūla* śārīras, and does not include the three inner bodies or body sheaths.

The sense associated with the sense organ known as the *mei* is called *unārcci*. *Unārcci* may be roughly equated with tactile sensations and is the last sense to be overcome. As has already been indicated, the sensation of pain is the predominant if not the only one that impinges upon the sense of touch. Pain, to begin with, is multiple and differentiated. With time, the various kinds of pain merge into a unitary sensation of pain. This pain persists for some time and is then replaced by numbness (in my case) or the sudden disappearance of pain, with love taking its place (in the case of most of my fellow pilgrims). This "love" is also spoken of as acting upon the *mei*. Yet the perfect pilgrim must not merely stop feeling pain, he must also stop feeling love. He symbolically does this, in fact, in the final ritual of breaking the coconut filled with ghee and pouring the ghee on the image of Ayyappan. Before we say anything more about this fascinating, ghee-filled coconut, I will elaborate on the term *intiriam*.

If a villager is asked what the five *intiriyas* are, he will seriously recite out loud the names of the five senses. If, however, you were to ask a villager what *intiriam* meant, the response would usually be an embarrassed giggle. *Intiriam*, in and of itself, refers most commonly to male and female sexual fluids (usually semen). As is well known and amply documented, for the Indian, semen is the essence of all body substances, even as ghee is the essence of all food substances. Thus, *intiriam*, besides referring to the five senses in general, refers in particular to the sexual fluids, and sexual fluids are associated with sensation par excellence, the essence of all the sensations as well as the sum of all the sensations experienced by the *mei*. This is why the taboo that demands the strictest observance is the taboo against sexual intercourse. All the other vows of abstinence and austerity are only intended to help the devotee observe the sex taboo; they are ancillary and complementary, not central.

The aim of the pilgrim, then, is to overcome the *mei*. The transcendence of the *mei* is the goal with which he begins his pilgrimage, but the actual triumph over the *mei* must wait for the very last, after all the senses have been overcome.

After having climbed the steps of the eight *rāgas* and the five *intiriams*, one has to climb the steps of the three *kuṇams*, or reals. Pilgrims were able to tell me that the three *kuṇams* were *tanmas* or *tāmatam*, *rajas*, and *sātvikam* and also what they implied. All that man is due to the existence of the three *kuṇams* in different proportions within us. In each human being, the proportion is different. The proportion of the three *kuṇams* in human beings in general is relatively similar when compared to the corresponding proportions in animals, plants, or any other entity in the phenomenal universe.

In man, *tamas* is said to cause inaction, lethargy, mental dullness, and base thoughts; *rajas* is physically activating

and supplies brute strength; *sātvīkām* causes mental keenness, enlightenment, patience, love, and all other noble qualities.

Pilgrims indicated that before they set out on the pilgrimage, *tamas* dominated their constitutional being. Physical, mental, and spiritual lethargy dominated their existence. The rise of *rajas* at the expense of *tamas* was marked at Erumeli, when they began to "walk like kings, warriors, and hunters of old" the long and rugged trek to Sabari Hill. (Kings, warriors, and hunters, according to the *varṇa āśrama dharma*, are believed to be *rajasik* personalities.) After a certain point along the way, when *rajas* had equalled *tamas*, the unchecked growth of *rajas* is prevented by the rise of *sātvīkām*. *Sātvīkām* was always there but only in a docile, subdominant state. *Sātvīkām* was first sparked to action when the decision to make the pilgrimage was taken, but its growth really began only when the five senses became extra sensitive to the bombardment by hitherto unexperienced forces. *Sātvīkām* reaches its fullness, beyond which its growth is checked, when pain is replaced by love.

What, then, is symbolically represented in the entire pilgrimage as well as by the crossing of the three steps that stand for the three *guṇas* is that the three *guṇas* are brought into a state of equilibrium and equipoise, as it was "in the beginning," where no one *guṇa* is said to have dominated. Only after this state has been achieved is one ready to cross the seventeenth step, symbolizing *avidyā*.

A clear exposition of the concept of *avidyā* is a task too great for a short account, such as this, to handle. *Avidyā* may be approximately translated as "ignorance, illusion, lack of knowledge, unenlightenment," and so on—with the emphasis on the qualification *approximate*.

The last and final step, the eighteenth step, is the step of *vidyā*, that is, all that is opposed to *avidyā*. "At this point," a pilgrim informed me, "one can truly say that one knows."

These eighteen steps, as I have said, are symbolic. A further elaboration on these eighteen steps makes them

more than symbolic, however. It is believed that a pilgrim becomes one with Ayyappa only after he has come on this pilgrimage eighteen plus one times. On his first journey he does two things. First, by symbolically crossing all eighteen steps he symbolically previews what he has to overcome before final union with the Lord. Second, on this first journey, one of the eight *rāgas* is singled out for permanent annihilation. In the stone of this step lies concealed the specific *śakti* required to burn a given *rāga*. On the second year, the *śakti* inherent in the stone of the second step consumes a second *rāga*. On every consecutive year, the *śakti* of a new step is activated and consumes a new *rāga* or *intiriām*, or *kuṇam*, and so on, until on the eighteenth year, *vidyā* itself is consumed by the *śakti* of the eighteenth step, making the devotee completely free to fuse with the Lord in permanent union on the nineteenth year. The fact that these eighteen entities are in turn substantially conceptualized is evidenced by devotees' belief that with each consuming step, they lose some weight, appropriate to the given entity's dominance in one's life.

After this eighteenth step of *vidyā*, or knowledge, is crossed, a simple but important ritual is performed, a ritual that is the climax and fulfillment of the whole pilgrimage.

You will recall that the *iru muti* has two pouches, the rear one of which contains various provisions for the journey. As the pilgrimage progresses, this pouch is gradually depleted of its contents, thereby making a statement that a world with its own material needs is being exhausted, even as it is left behind. The front pouch contains various offertory items for the shrines and deities on the way. The most important and sacred of items contained in this pouch is the ghee-filled coconut that the pilgrim receives when he leaves his village temple after having the death ritual performed for him. This coconut must be protected with the greatest care until the very last. When the pilgrim reaches the deity in his shrine, the coconut is broken and the ghee is poured over the deity. In order to understand the significance of

this coconut, we need to understand, in outline, the body-sheath theory, to which we now turn.

The Five Body Sheaths or Bodies (*Pañcamayaśośas*)

In everyday language, the word *utampu* or *uṭal* refers, in its unmarked sense, to the body as a totality. In its marked sense, *utampu* or *uṭal* contrasts with *uḷḷutampu* or *uḷḷuṭal* ("inner body") or *coppāna uṭal* ("dream body"), the former being gross and the latter (inner body, dream body, ethereal body, and so on) being subtle. Villagers will also tell you that the ātman is concealed within the *uḷḷutampu*. Some do know that there are five bodies in all, one inside the other, but rarely, if ever, are they able to name these other bodies, except to say that the three innermost bodies are enclosed by the *utampu* and *uḷḷutampu* and, unlike the last two, are formless.

The Ayyappan pilgrim is instructed on the five bodies or body sheaths in greater detail than is the average villager because of the sacred ghee-filled coconut he carries in the front pouch of his *iru muṭi*. He knows that this coconut is the symbol of his body, since the coconut, like his body, has five sheaths. The coconut's five sheaths are the outer skin, the husk, the shell, the inner skin, and the kernel. In the very center of the coconut, ghee is poured. As anyone familiar with Hindu dietetics knows, cow's milk is considered to be the essence of all food. By boiling down milk to its essence, one obtains ghee. As an essence it corresponds to man's own essence, his *jīvātmā*, which flows freely with the *paramātmā* ("the universal soul"—the Lord Ayyappan) only when the other body sheaths are torn asunder or broken, as in the case of the coconut which must be broken for the ghee to flow on, over, and with the deity. What follows is a brief account of the five sheaths of the body,

starting from the outermost sheath and moving to the center.

Ayyappa pilgrims learn to substitute the Sanskrit word *śārīram* for the Tamil *utampu* or *uṭal*. The gross body, or *vēḷi utampu*, comes to be known as the *stūla śārīram*. The *stūla śārīram* is formed through the transformation, evolution, and modification of the five elements (*pañca pūta piramā-nattāluntākum śārīram*). This body has weight and form. The name of a person is attached to this body only as long as it is conjoined with the subtle *uḷḷutampu*, also known as the *sūkṣma śārīram* which it covers (*pōrttal*). The moment the *sūkṣma śārīram* leaves the *stūla śārīram*, the latter becomes immobile and is called a *piṇṇu*, *cavani*, or *kaṭṭai* ("corpse").

As a sheath, this body is known as the *annamaya kośam*, because it is sustained by *annam* (rice in particular, but food in general).

The *stūla śārīram* is also the body wherein the humors move around. Bodily ailments caused by humors affect the *stūla śārīram*.

The *uḷḷutampu* or *coppāna uṭal* is also known as the *sūkṣma śārīram*. The *sūkṣma śārīram* is ensheathed by the *annamaya kośam*, and its own sheath is the *prāṇa maya kośam*. This body is also called the *yādānā śārīram* (from *yādānai*, which means pain; it is the body that feels pain because it is the body that undergoes suffering in hell). This body is also known as the *pukarutampu* (the body that reacts to or senses praise or fame).

As a sheath it is known as *prāṇa maya kośam* because it is impelled (*iyaḷkkuṭtal*) to action by the ten *dasavāyus* ("vital airs or vital forces") of which *prāṇai* is the leader. The ten *dasavāyus* are as follows:

1. *Prāṇan* impels the heart to beat and the lungs to function.
2. *Abhānan* resides slightly behind and below the navel

between anus (*kūṭam*) and genitals (*kuyyam*) and aids in excretion.

3. *Viṇṇāṇ* resides in the joints of the body and creates fatigue and thirst.
4. *Uḍḍāṇ* resides in the navel and causes the conversion of food into blood by moving through the throat up into the head when it is necessary to promote digestion.
5. *Sanīṇṇāṇ* resides in the nerves and makes digestion pleasurable.
6. *Nāḡaṇ* resides in the throat and causes hiccups and yawning and also aids in speech.
7. *Kīrmaṇ* resides in the eyes and controls one's waking and sleeping, besides causing horripilation from fear.
8. *Dēṇḍattai* is that which causes shock on hearing a sudden noise, increases heat with the rise in one's anger, and controls the horripilation associated with pleasurable experiences.
9. *Danaiṇṇāṇ* controls the fattening and thinning processes of one's body.

The *sūkṣma śarīram* is identical in form to the outer *stūla śarīram* and even has hair and skin color that are the same as that of the *stūla śarīram*. The *sūkṣma śarīram*, however, lacks weight. Furthermore, the organs and the body parts of the *sūkṣma śarīram* cannot be felt by the sense of touch. Needless to say, "the *sūkṣma śarīram* also has either male or female genitals, and this is why when a person dies it is said, 'May he or she (as the case may be) reach tevalōkam.'"

In one's waking state the *sūkṣma śarīram* has to carry the dead weight of the *stūla śarīram*. Only in the dream state can the *sūkṣma śarīram* leave the *stūla śarīram* behind and roam wherever it chooses. When the *sūkṣma śarīram* leaves the *stūla śarīram*, even for a moment or two, to wander around in the dream state, the *stūla śarīram* is a *piṇam*, or corpse. This is also why the early morning bath on awaken-

ing is so important, because it purifies the *stūla śarīram*, which has become *acuttam* ("impure"), having been a corpse several times during the night.

Paṭṭiyam ("madness") can be caused either by the malfunctioning of the *stūla śarīram* or of the *sūkṣma śarīram*. The *paṭṭiyam* of the *stūla śarīram* is comparable to Deborah Bhattacharyya's (1977) "deep level *paḡlāmi*" and is often called *mūḷaikkālāru* (literally, "a disturbance or malfunctioning of the brain"). This is a state in which the brain of the *stūla śarīram*, because of a malformation, disturbs and distorts information sent by the *sūkṣma śarīram*, causing the person to behave in an irrational or "mad" manner. Certain deliriums during high fevers are also believed to belong to this category. This kind of *paṭṭiyam* contrasts with that of the *sūkṣma śarīram*, which is the kind that one gets during spirit or any other kind of possession. "It takes hold of the *sūkṣma śarīram*," as an informant put it. In such cases the messages for behavior generated by the *sūkṣma śarīram* are thought of as "crazy" or "irrational" or else merely extraordinary.

The *sūkṣma śarīram* is also the seat of emotions, such as love and hate. It has desires and preferences. A story is told of a teenage Brahmin girl who was possessed by the spirit (*pēi*) or *sūkṣma śarīram* of a Naidu woman who happened to have died in an accidental fire in which "her *stūla śarīram* was burned." Once possessed by the Naidu woman's *sūkṣma śarīram*, the young Brahmin girl began to demand nonvegetarian foods, as would have the Naidu woman who was used to a nonvegetarian diet.

The *sūkṣma śarīram* is also a source of *pelam* or śakti. This was seen to be established by the fact that the possessed Brahmin girl was able to carry a heavy pot of water on her hip and another on her head, when before her possession she was able to carry but one small pot of water on her hip.

The five sense organs—the ear, nose, eyes, mouth and mei (body as a tactile organ)—have two aspects each, namely, the gross and the subtle aspects. The gross aspects

belong to the stūla śarīram and are called purajñānētrikaṅkaḷ ("outer sensory organs"), and the subtle aspects, which belong to the sūkṣma śarīram, are known as akajñānētrikaṅkaḷ ("inner sensory organs"). The perceptions of the five sensory organs are, in the same order, *ōcai* ("sound"), *maṇam* ("smell"), *uruvam* ("form"), *cuvai* ("taste"), and *uṇarcci* ("tactility").

The five motor organs (*kaṇmētrikaṅkaḷ*) are also divided into external (gross) and internal (subtle) ones, associated with the stūla and sūkṣma śarīrams, respectively. These five motor organs are hands, feet, mouth, anus, and genitals. The actions of the five motor organs are: hands for *koṭai* ("giving"), legs for *naṭai* ("walking"), mouth for *pēccu* ("speech"), anus for *karippu* ("excretion"), and the generative organs for *iṇṇam* ("enjoyment").

During the waking state, the uyir (sometimes called *āvi* or *āttumā*) is in the lalāḍastānam of the sūkṣma śarīram, the lalāḍastānam being located in between the eyebrows. When in this position it is able to link the five senses of the stūla śarīram to the five senses of the sūkṣma śarīram. The seats of the five senses are arranged in such a manner that the ears, eyes, nose, and mouth are in the front, and the locus of the sense of touch is in the back of the head. (Note the sense of touch's special if not unique position, suggesting a possible parallel between this position and the specialness of the intrirām mei in the pilgrimage.) From the lalāḍastānam the uyir is able to control the five senses.

In the dream state, the uyir leaves the lalāḍastānam and moves to the kaṇḍastānam (near the medula oblongata). In this state the sūkṣma śarīram does not have to carry the dead weight of the stūla śarīram with it. Freed from the load of the stūla śarīram, the sūkṣma śarīram can pass through solid matter, such as walls. In this freed state the sūkṣma śarīram is more relaxed than when it is conjoined to the stūla śarīram.

However, deep sleep (*āṇṇa tikkam*) is achieved only when the āvi leaves the kaṇḍastānam and moves to the

irutayastānam, located in the chest. While the uyir is in the kaṇḍastānam, the apprehensive powers of the senses are sharpened (*viśayikarikkum śakti kūrmayākum*). *Viśayikarittal* means to cognize, with the added connotation of possession or inheritance derived from the phonetically paradigmatic word *aṇṇikarittal*, which means to possess and/or inherit, also to accept or approve.

When the uyir is in the irutayastānam, this state is called *aviccai nilai* and in fact can be maintained at will only by yogis. In this state cognizance of the five senses is completely neutralized, and only *ajñānam* ("ignorance"), *māyai* ("illusion"), and *āṇavam* ("pride") remain as the soul's impurities.

The uyir, under appropriate yogic conditions, is able to migrate further down from the chest to the *nābhi*, or navel. Here, *prāṇan* is cognizant of itself alone (*tannaiyē viśayikarikkum maṇa nilai; turiya nilai*).

When the uyir moves to the *mūlādāram* (a cakkaram, or nerve plexus in the body, described as a four-petaled lotus [*muṇṇikkar tannarai*] situated between *kuṇṇam* ["genitals"] and *kuṭam* ["anus"]), this state is described as the *turiyāṭṭa nilai*. The mūlādāram was also described to me by our guru in the pilgrimage as the seat of one's orgasm (*kāma inṇam uccik-kum iṭam*), especially that experienced in one's early youth—"say, when twelve years of age" (note that Lord Ayyappan was twelve years old when he reached the hill of Sabari). In this state, the uyir may be called ātman or *āttumā*, in the true sense of that word. For here the soul becomes cognizant of the essence, or *māttirai*, of *aviccai* ("ignorance, illusion, pride").

The word *māttirai*, which I have translated as "essence," is quite enlightening because it indicates a fleeting fraction of a second, a primordial unit, a short vowel; more contemporaneously it also means a capsule or a pill. In one of the Tamil dialects of Sri Lanka, it means a flash of good luck or fortune. The state of *turiyāṭṭam*, then, is not only one that reveals the "momentariness" and fleeting quality of

aviccai, but insofar as it stands for a state in which the soul enters eternal self-apperception, it transforms this fleeting moment into an eternity.

The three innermost bodies are collectively known as *kāraṇa sūkṣma śarīram*, and this is to be distinguished from the ordinary *sūkṣma śarīram*, or dream body. It is also known as the *purīyaṭṭaga śarīram*. This body cannot be perceived by the five senses and is not impelled or controlled by the twenty-five *taṭtvarūpīs* ("basic gross substances"). This body is indestructible and knows no beginning or end. This is the body that enters a new *yōni* each time it is to be reborn. The *purīyaṭṭaga śarīram*, unlike the *sūkṣma śarīram* and the *stūla śarīram*, is formless. This body encases the soul and moves with it from one place to another inside and outside the *sūkṣma śarīram*. The *purīyaṭṭaga śarīram* has three body sheaths.

The outermost sheath is known as the *manomayakośam*, because it is the locus of the four intellectual faculties, or the *ānḍakaraṇikaṇkal*, which consist of *manam* ("mind") as the leader (hence the name *manomayakośam*), *putti* ("intellect"), *cittam* ("will"), and *akankāram* ("primordial power for action"). As a body, it is also known as the *kuṇa śarīram*, because it is here that the three *kuṇams* are located.

The next innermost body is the *kāñjuga śarīram*, whose sheath is known as the *viñṇānamayakośam*. This is the seat of *kālam* ("time"), *niyati* (same as *ūrvīnai*, "destiny," also *karmam*), *kalai* ("art"), *vittai* ("science"), and *arālūm* ("absence of desire").

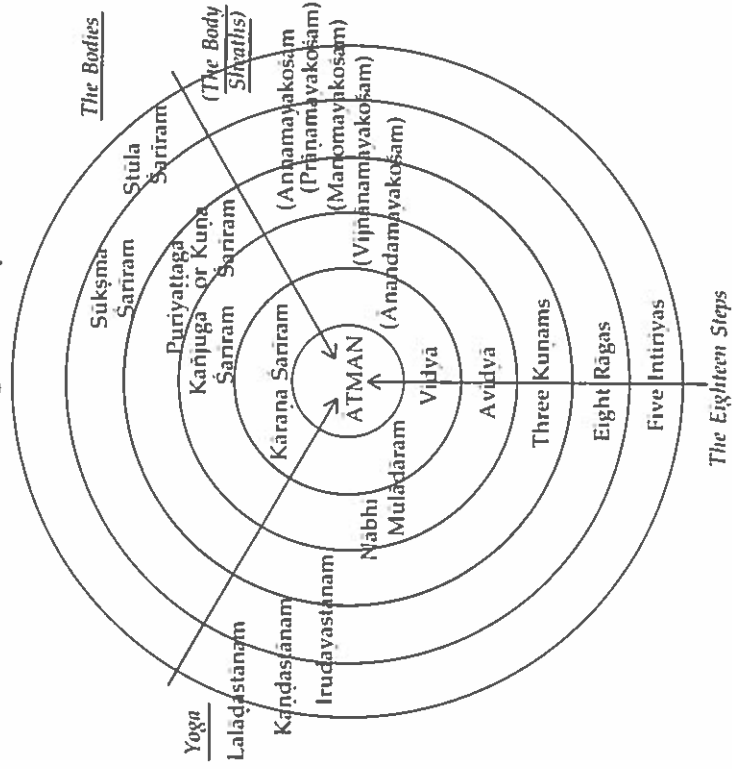
Finally, the innermost body, enclosing the soul, is known as the *kāraṇa śarīram* and its sheath as the *ānāṇḍamayakośam*. This is the seat of *vidyā*, or knowledge. One attains true *ānāṇḍam* ("happiness" or "bliss") when one taps this innermost source of *vidyā*.

The progression parallel to the yogi's route to self-realization is the pilgrim's attempt to know himself by crossing the eighteen steps and moving inward into and

through his five body sheaths, which may be diagrammed for possible comparisons (see figure 4).

With the crossing of the eighteenth step, especially for the eighteenth time, *avidyā* is vanquished, making the soul free to become one with all that had once been an exterior, an other. In the formulation of the Hindu great tradition, this, as is well known to every beginning student of Indian religions, is seen as the merging of the *ātman* with the universal soul, or *brahman*. Such a formulation by humble pilgrims (especially the unschooled ones), though not entirely absent, was certainly not prevalent. Of those pilgrims I walked with and talked with, however, none failed to

Figure 4. The Synthesis of Body Sheaths, Yoga, and the Eighteen Steps



express—even if only in the most inarticulate of ways—the experience of having lost their identity and individuality, even if it had been only for a fleeting moment. This sense of union was often not expressed in words (quite appropriately so) but in states of trance. These moments of loss of self-consciousness and even consciousness were later referred to as the purpose and the highest point of the entire pilgrimage—if not of their entire life. Many expressed the wish that death would have claimed them at that time so that they could have merged with the Lord permanently.

In this final merging, there are no analytic distinctions to separate self from other (Thirdness); no rude consciousness of the other (Secondness). In Firstness the pilgrim is able to know (if not say), "Now I really know." For Peirce, as for the dominant Western tradition he represents, the epistemological movement is from Firstness to Thirdness, from synthetic to analytic knowledge. For the Hindu pilgrim, however, the knowing process moves from Thirdness to Firstness, from analysis to synthesis and then further, to where there is nothing left to know either through analysis or synthesis. This is *pūrṇa vidyā*, perfect knowledge.

This is how our guru described the moment of *vidyā*, which he equated with that moment when the *uyir* reaches the *lalāḍastānam*. Note the use of the word *māṭṭirai* in his description:

Ajānam, māyai, āṇavam, ivai mūntrum innilaiyil minnal pōl tōntrum. Immūntru aviccai minnal pōntralla, minnal māṭṭiraiyentrē kūralām. Atō minnal, itō nān entru colluvatatrkillai. ituvē vittiyam. Ituvē jānam . . . ituvē nittiyam.

Which may be translated as:

Ignorance, illusion, and pride, these three will "appear" like lightning. These three *aviccāi* [their appearance] may be called not merely as lightning but as a "fraction of the time

taken for lightning to flash." One cannot say, "Behold there! That is lightning" and "Behold here! This is me." Such is wisdom. Such is knowledge. . . . Such is eternity.

When the weary pilgrim approaches the deity, his body is as good as broken and torn, with his senses defeated and *rāgas* overcome. His three *kuṇams* are in a state of equilibrium and equipoise. There is nothing left that conceals his true essence or soul.

When the pilgrim descends the eighteen steps on his return to where he will spend the night on the eastern slopes of the hill, he sees a huge bonfire rage to the sky, fed by the shells of the coconuts that were sacrificially broken over the deity. Karma burns itself in its own flames, thereby kindling in the devotee the awareness of his unburnable identity, his soul, which has now become one with the soul of his Lord.

FLUID SIGNS
Being a Person the Tamil Way

E. Valentine Daniel

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS
Berkeley Los Angeles London

For Vanessa

University of California Press
Berkeley and Los Angeles, California

University of California Press, Ltd.
London, England

Copyright © 1984 by The Regents of the University of California

First Paperback Printing 1987

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Daniel, E. Valentine.
Fluid signs.

Bibliography: p. 303
Includes index.

1. Tamils. I. Title.

DS432.T3D3 1984

306'.089948

84-163

ISBN 0-520-06167-5

Printed in the United States of America

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9