

The Power of Courtiers¹

One day, at the age of twelve, Ariyanatha Mudaliyar was sleeping outside when a passing Brahmin spotted a cobra using its hood to protect the boy from the rays of the sun. Feeling that this auspicious sign foretold a glorious future, the Brahmin paid his respect to Ariyanatha, saluting and feeding him. Later, on the Brahmin's advice, Ariyanatha travelled north, where he entered into service with a Vijayanagara courtier. At the imperial court, Ariyanatha soon stood out for his wisdom and prowess. He accurately analysed the emperor's horoscope and explained how the head of a buffalo must be cut off with one blow. Ariyanatha was then employed as a courtier himself and displayed his magnificence by bestowing numerous gifts. Next, he crushed disorders in Madurai and reinstalled its Pandya king. Leading several other victorious battles for Vijayanagara, guided by the goddess Durga, he was adopted as the emperor's son. But rather than ascending the imperial throne, Ariyanatha divided the realm into three parts and appointed rulers in Madurai, Tanjavur, and Mysore, while he himself remained the chief commander of all those kingdoms. Subsequently, he fought more wars, fortified towns, installed local chiefs, cultivated lands, and endowed temples and Brahmins.²

Reading this summarised Tamil account of Ariyanatha Mudaliyar's career, one might be excused for thinking that this man was well on his way to found yet another house ruling one of Vijayanagara's successor states. Many elements here remind us of the dynastic origin myths discussed in Chapter 1. Like the heroes in those texts, Ariyanatha is associated with martial feats, ties to the imperial house, recognition of a religious kind, natural miracles, migration, and the cultivation of land.

Other stories glorify Ariyanatha even more, saying he cut off the buffalo's head himself, surpassed all Vijayanagara officials in mathematical skills, received special honours from the emperor, won a wrestling contest, built Madurai's future capital Tiruchirappalli, and served the Madurai, Tanjavur, and Mysore kingdoms not only as generalissimo but as chief minister, too. It is also said that Madurai's

¹ This chapter's section on Ramnad is partly based on: Bes, "The Setupatis, the Dutch, and Other Bandits," 550-2, 556-64; idem, "Friendship as Long as the Sun and Moon Shine," sections of chs 3-5, 7.

² Taylor, *Oriental Historical Manuscripts*, vol. II, 113-16. This text belongs to the so-called Mrtyunjaya manuscripts, collected by Madurai's chief Brahmin in the early nineteenth century.

first Nayaka, Vishvanatha, presented Ariyanatha with two rings symbolising this double military-civilian dignity, as well as other jewels, valuable clothes including a quadrangular turban, and the privilege of adorning his forehead with a “civet beauty spot.” Notwithstanding all this, however, he never was to assume royal status because, according to one text, his background as a farmer (belonging to the Vellala caste) precluded that.³

Rather, as historians believe, Ariyanatha Mudaliyar was a very powerful courtier under Madurai’s first few Nayakas from the mid- to the late sixteenth century. While there is little evidence for activities at the Vijayanagara court, his influence and stature in Madurai were exceptional indeed. He is thought to have held two of the kingdom’s most important positions—*pradhāni* (prime or finance minister) and *daḷavāy* (chief general)—for several decades and to have played a major role in organising Madurai’s territorial division among the Palaiyakkarars (subordinate chieftains). Further, he commissioned several temple buildings and was co-granter of religious endowments alongside the king.⁴

As such, Ariyanatha Mudaliar provides an example of a courtier who grew so powerful that his position appeared to nearly match that of a king, or that is what the texts praising him seem to suggest. His exalted status, albeit non-regal, evidently justified the composition of such laudatory works. But Ariyanatha was not the only official in the Vijayanagara successor states whose standing was glorified in literary texts. Two other examples concern heirs of the empire not systematically discussed in this study: Mysore and Senji. Under the Nayakas of the latter kingdom, a whole dynasty of ministers legitimised its prominence through a tale that again brings royal foundation myths to mind. One version of this story has been translated in a manuscript titled “Historical account of Gingee.” It relates Senji’s history from the fifteenth century, when it is described as a village of herds-men under Tanjavur rule, up to its fortunes as a kingdom until the late eighteenth century. A summary of the text’s initial sections, with the original spelling of names, runs as follows:

³ BL/AAS, OI, no. I, pt. 22: “Kings of Tritchanopoly from 1509,” f. 239; MG, no. 4, pt. 4: “Mootiah’s chronological & historical account of the modern kings of Madura,” f. 48; Rangachari, “The History of the Naik Kingdom of Madura,” *Indian Antiquary* XLIV, 62-5, XLV, 83-7; Nelson, *The Madura Country*, vol. III, 90-1, 104; Taylor, *Oriental Historical Manuscripts*, vol. II, 117-20.

⁴ Sathyanatha Aiyar, *History of the Nayaks of Madura*, 51-3, 58-62, 73-4, 79-80, 84-6, 236, 340, 342; Susan Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings: Muslims and Christians in South Indian Society, 1700-1900* (Cambridge, 1989), 211-12; Heras, *The Aravidu Dynasty of Vijayanagara*, vol. I, 139, 345-6; Francis, *Madura Gazetteer*, 42-3; Sewell, *List of Inscriptions*, 2. It is said that an equestrian statue in the thousand-pillared hall of the Minakshi Sundareshvara Temple at Madurai town portrays Ariyanatha Mudaliyar, but this claim has been contested. See Nagaswamy, *Studies in Ancient Tamil Law and Society*, 113.

One day, a herdsman from Chenjee [Senji] named Aununda Coana [Anandakona] brought his sheep to an overgrown hill. There, some of his animals went missing. Unable to find them, the herdsman returned home with the rest of his flock. Four years later, when Aununda Coana let his sheep graze at the same place, he chanced upon his lost animals, who had remained on the hill. Trying to drive them down, he found a den in which a holy man was living. The later explained to Aununda Coana it was his task to develop this land, and revealed to him the location of a nearby treasure of money and precious stones, to be used to build a fort, temples, and agraharoms [*agrahārams*, lands donated for Brahmin settlements]. The herdsman should go to Tanjore [Tanjavur] to inform Veejaya Renga Naik [Vijayaranga Nayaka, unidentified ruler] of these matters, whereupon, so the holy men predicted, Veejaya Renga Naik's and Aununda Coana's descendants would rule as respectively king and minister of the new Chenjee kingdom for eleven generations.

Although feeling insecure and reluctant, the herdsman travelled to Tanjore and spoke to Veejaya Renga Naik, who was greatly pleased and presented him and his own son, Vyapa Naik [Vaiyappa Nayaka], with cloths and jewels. In the Mussulman year 852 [c. 1442 CE], accompanied by military forces, Aununda Coana and Vyapa Naik arrived in Chenjee. Having recovered the treasure, they employed people to remove the jungle, cut stones, and erect three enclosing fortifications, as well as palaces, offices, and houses. Further, Aununda Coana commanded his own troops and installed his son Kistnapilla [Krishna Pillai] as *pradhane* [*pradhāni*]. Thus his house was established.⁵

The text goes on to list the successors of King Vaiyappa Nayaka (possibly the historical founder of Senji's Nayaka house)⁶ and of *Pradhāni* Krishna Pillai, all the sons of their predecessors. As foretold by the holy man, both the royal and ministerial houses continue for ten more generations, spanning 225 years, after which the Mughals are stated to have conquered Senji in 1667.⁷

⁵ BL/AAS, MG, no. 9, pt. 13e: "Historical account of Ginge," ff. 138-41. This work, whose original language is unknown (possibly Marathi), labels itself as *kaifyat-bakhair* ("kyfyat bakhyr"), which might be literally translated as "compiled local narrative." For a comparable manuscript account, see BL/AAS, MM, no. 118, 1st pt.: "Kypheat of Ginge." See also MG, no. 9, pt. 13a: "Kyfyat of Ginge," ff. 121-2. For discussions of these and related texts, see: S.M. Edwardes (ed.), "A Manuscript History of the Rulers of Jinji," *The Indian Antiquary: A Journal of Oriental Research* LV (1926); C.S. Srinivasachari, *A History of Ginge and Its Rulers* (Annamalainagar, 1943), 80-92; Subrahmanyam, *Penumbra Visions*, 207-17; Alf C. Hiltebeitel, *The Cult of Draupadi*, vol. 1, *Mythologies: From Ginge to Kuruksetra* (Chicago, 1988), 17-19, 57-9; Cotton, Charpentier, and Johnston, *Catalogue of Manuscripts in European Languages*, vol. I, pt. II, 85-7; Narayana Rao, Shulman, and Subrahmanyam, *Textures of Time*, 151 (n. 14).

⁶ For Vaiyappa Nayaka, see: A. Krishnaswami, *The Tamil Country under Vijayanagar* (Annamalainagar, 1964), 246-50; Nobuhiro Ota, "A Study of Two *Nāyaka* Families in the Vijayanagara Kingdom in the Sixteenth Century," *Memoirs of the Research Department of the Toyo Bunko* 66 (2008), 111-18; Karashima, *Towards a New Formation*, 17, 22, 40 (n. 18); Srinivasachari, *A History of Ginge*, 78-82.

⁷ BL/AAS, MG, no. 9, pt. 13e: "Historical account of Ginge," ff. 141-4.

This work appears somewhat confused in its erroneous dates and it is difficult to identify some people with historical persons. Also, the story of Anandakona's rise to power is not supported by other sources. Indeed, his very existence, and that of his successors, is uncertain. Besides, the text's original version may have been corrupted with a particular agenda in mind, considering it was obtained in 1803 from someone claiming descent from the line of Anandakona. Yet, this account is another instance of courtiers attaining an exalted standing that is linked to motifs also found in royal foundation myths. In addition to a natural miracle, religious acknowledgement, ties to a royal family, and land development—figuring in texts on Madurai's Minister Ariyanatha Mudaliyar, too—one now encounters the acquisition of wealth and even hereditary continuity.

One more example of a courtiers' dynasty with its own foundation story is the Kalale family, which provided Mysore's Wodeyar rulers with *daḷavāys* during major parts of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Indeed, according to some texts the Kalales had a formal agreement with the Wodeyar dynasty stipulating that only they were entitled to serve as *daḷavāy*. Between the 1730s and 1750s, they came to dominate the Mysore court, imprisoning and installing kings as they pleased. Unsurprisingly, boosting their status, literary works on the family's origins include the motifs of descent from chieftains, military achievements, southward migration,⁸ and dynastic links through marital ties with the Wodeyars themselves.

The Kalales' perception of their own position seems well illustrated in a drawing on the frontispiece of a Kannada manuscript chronicle of the house, the *Kaḷale doregaḷa vaṃśāvaḷi*, recorded around 1800. As the drawing's captions explain, it depicts the Wodeyar ruler Krishnaraja II (r. 1734-66) and two members of the Kalale house, *Daḷavāy* Devarajayya and his brother, Chief Minister Nanjarajayya (active in the 1720s-50s). While the king's official status is recognised by the fact that only he is shown sitting on a kind of throne and being attended by a servant, the Kalale brothers are drawn much larger, hold swords (unlike the king), and clearly dominate the scene (see illustration 8).⁹

⁸ The family's founding brothers are said to have moved from Dvaraka in Gujarat (north-west India) to the Kannada region. Interestingly, the same is stated about Mysore's Wodeyars themselves in their origin myths. See, for example, Caleb Simmons, "The Goddess and the King: Cāmuṇḍēśvari and the Fashioning of the Wodeyar Court of Mysore" (unpublished dissertation, University of Florida, 2014), 109-12.

⁹ For literary works on the Kalale family, see: M.H. Krishna, "The Dalavāi Family of Mysore," in N.K. Sidhanta *et al.* (ed.), *Bhārata-Kaumudī: Studies in Indology in Honour of Dr. Radha Kumud Mookerji*, pt. I (Allahabad, 1945); "The Dynasty of Kaḷale," *Annual Report of the Mysore Archaeological Department for the Year 1942* (Mysore, 1943), 78-99, plate XIII. For the Kalales, see also: A. Satyanarayana, *History of the Wodeyars of Mysore (1610-1748)* (Mysore, 1996), 111, 116-22, 131, 225-7; K.C. Prashanth, "The Dalavai Project in Trichinopoly: The Evaluation of a Mysore Historian," *The Quarterly Journal of the Mythic*

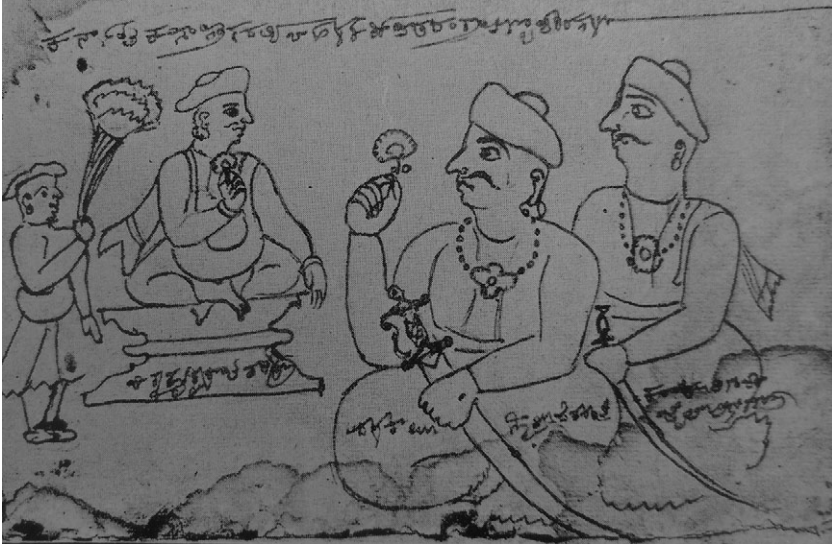


Illustration 8: Drawing of Krishnaraja Wodeyar II of Mysore with courtiers Devarajayya and Nanjarajayya of the Kalale family, frontispiece of the *Kaḷale doregaḷa vaṁśāvaḷi*, c. 1800 (source: “The Dynasty of Kaḷale,” *Annual Report of the Mysore Archaeological Department for the Year 1942* (Mysore: University of Mysore, 1943), plate XIII, no. 2).

In fact, the long-lasting hereditary offices of Mysore’s Kalale and (perhaps) Senji’s Pillai lineages and the exalted standing of Madurai’s Ariyanatha Mudaliyar, as well as the glorification of these officials in literary works, were not that common among Vijayanagara’s heirs.¹⁰ Yet, together these examples indicate various general aspects of the position of courtiers in these kingdoms: some of these men—and occasionally women—became exceedingly prominent, regardless of their official function; courtiers might hold different positions at the same time; kinship could be an important factor in their careers; and rivalry easily emerged between individuals or factions at the court. As shown in Chapter 2, courtiers played an important part in succession struggles. But both Indian and foreign sources make

Society XCVI, 1-2 (2005); Simmons, “The Goddess and the King,” ch. 4; Hayavadana Rao, *History of Mysore*, vols I-II; Vikram Sampath, *Splendours of Royal Mysore: The Untold Story of the Wodeyars* (New Delhi, 2008), 129-37; Mark Wilks, *Historical Sketches of the South of India in an Attempt to Trace the History of Mysore from the Origin of the Hindu Government of that State, to the Extinction of the Mohammedan Dynasty in 1799*, ed. Murray Hammick (n.p., 1810), vol. I, 251-5.

¹⁰ But see also the *Ramappaiyaṇ ammaṇai*, dealing with Madurai’s *Daḷavāy* Ramappaiya, referred to in the section on Ramnad in Chapter 2.

clear that in between these transitions they were equally influential in dynastic and other political developments.

Therefore, the present chapter focuses on the role of courtiers in court politics. Central questions are how courtiers acquired their positions, how their formal functions were related to their actual activities and influence, how their power was manifested, and how they interacted with one another and with their rulers. Neither for Vijayanagara nor for its heirs have courtiers as a group been the subject of systematic research. Historians have looked at several individual courtiers, however, and demonstrated for instance that they could become very influential, combined different kinds of activities, and came from diverse backgrounds.¹¹ The findings of this chapter confirm these conclusions but also expand on them.

The composition and terminology of offices at south Indian courts varied over time and space, but functionaries generally comprised ministers and other councillors, treasurers and chancellors, secretaries, military commanders, poets and other artists, provincial governors and revenue-farmers, people with religious or mercantile duties, and ambassadors—as well as personal assistants of the ruler, including chamberlains, bodyguards, and bearers of regal paraphernalia such as fans, betel-leaves, spittoons, parasols, and fly-whisks. Further, some functions existed among the king's close relatives, like crown prince (*yuvarāja*), queen-mother, and chief queen. Moreover, members of the royal family could occupy regular court positions, for instance councillor, governor, and general. Additionally, outside the court proper, there were all sorts of subordinate chiefs and other leading figures with regional power who occasionally stayed at court.¹²

Therefore, in this study the term “courtiers”—used in the absence of a better word—denotes a very heterogeneous group of people, that could include members of dynasties (blood relatives and in-laws), court functionaries of various kinds and ranks (civil and military), personal servants, local chiefs and representatives, court

¹¹ For the successor states, see for example: Sanjay Subrahmanyam and C.A. Bayly, “Portfolio Capitalists and the Political Economy of Early Modern India,” *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* 25, 4 (1988), 406-8, 411-12; Shulman and Subrahmanyam, “Prince of Poets and Ports”; Subrahmanyam, *The Political Economy of Commerce*, ch. 6, especially 298-300; C.S. Srinivasachariar, “Muslim Adventurers in the Kingdoms of Tanjore and Madura,” in S.M. Katre and P.K. Gode (eds), *A Volume of Indian and Iranian Studies: Presented to Sir E. Denison Ross ...* (Bombay, 1939); Venkatesam, “Govinda Deekshita”; Vink, “Encounters on the Opposite Coast”; S. Somasundara Desikar, “Viceroys of the Nayaks of Madura,” *Journal of Indian History* XVII, 2 (1938). For a critique of the first three works, see Kanakalatha Mukund, *The Trading World of the Tamil Merchant: Evolution of Merchant Capitalism in the Coromandel* (London, 1999), 60-1, 164-5. See also Radhika Seshan, *Trade and Politics on the Coromandel Coast: Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Centuries* (Delhi, 2012), 65-7.

¹² See for instance: Ali, *Courtly Culture and Political Life*, 44-5, 52, 56-7; Scharfe, *The State in Indian Tradition*, 148-52; Mahalingam, *South Indian Polity*, 18, 60-5, 104-27, 132-3, 141-52.

merchants, and heads of professional and religious groups. Basically, “courtier” refers here to anyone present at court other than the monarch.¹³

As this chapter shows, the distinction between “official” courtiers and “unofficial” ones (influential persons from beyond strictly courtly confines) does not appear to have been sharp. For example, regional chieftains and heads of mercantile communities could have influential positions at court, even if they did not occupy clearly defined court ranks. Neither was the division between the abovementioned offices absolute, since different functions could well be held by one person at the same time. Adding to the fluid nature of the body of courtiers, the power that came with particular positions varied greatly, both among different individuals and over time. Unlike Ariyanatha Mudaliyar and the Kalale and Pillai families, most courtiers never earned something of an exalted reputation or managed to establish a kind of dynastic continuity over several generations. But several grew so powerful that they overshadowed their kings or queens, practically ruling the kingdom, reducing the monarch to a formal figure, and shaping court politics according to their will.

This chapter is largely organised in the same manner as the previous one. It first considers the sources, which comprise Indian texts—including political treatises on the power of courtiers in general—and European reports. Subsequently, it zooms in on the individual states, discussing the organisation of court offices, the fortunes and influences of various individuals, and long-term patterns. The chapter’s conclusion compares the courts, attempts to explain differences and similarities, and analyses the overall role of courtiers in court politics.

Unlike the preceding chapter, which covers all rulers, the present one cannot be exhaustive. It is impossible to treat every courtier of some standing in Vijayanagara and its heirs during their entire existence. Not only would this amount to hundreds of people, but the sources, particularly European materials, contain far too many references to all be analysed here. Besides, it appears that numerous courtiers do not figure in the surviving sources and we rarely have something approaching a complete picture of a court’s prosopographical composition. Therefore, the focus lies on particular careers and moments that, first, emerge clearly from the source materials on hand and, second, seem illustrative of general developments or provide noteworthy exceptions.

Because of the paucity of texts specially devoted to courtiers—like those described at the beginning of this chapter—references in local sources are somewhat scarce and rather scattered. Chronicles, inscriptions, and other south Indian works tend to mention courtiers only intermittently and seldom list large numbers

¹³ For a discussion of the term “courtier” and the need to define it, see: Duindam, “The Court as a Meeting Point,” 80; Duindam, *Dynasties*, 235–6.

of them in a single occasion. Aimed at the glorification of dynasties, these texts focus on monarchs and their close relatives. In the rare cases where courtiers are included, it is mostly because they stood out for heroic deeds, or, in a few instances, usurped the throne. Courtiers who largely stuck to performing their duties or dominated the court without formally deposing the ruler, were frequently left out of south Indian sources or appear only in the margins of dynastic narratives.¹⁴

While local texts are comparatively silent on individual courtiers, several Indian treatises discuss the role of this group in general. An often recurring notion in this literature is that of the kingdom's seven limbs or constituents (*aṅga, prakṛti*). Mentioned already in such ancient Indian texts as the *Mahābhārata* (XII 59:51, 69:62-3), the *Manusmṛti* or *Mānavadharmasāstra* (IX 294-7; VII 157), and the *Arthaśāstra* (VI 1:1-18), this idea holds that a polity consisted of seven essential elements, arranged according to their importance: king, minister, territory, fort, treasury, army, and ally. Listed as second, the minister (*amātya, mantri*) was apparently seen as one of the kingdom's mightiest limbs.

This concept appears in several later texts too, including works produced at the courts of Vijayanagara and its heirs. It is briefly referred to in the Telugu *Āmuktamālyada* (IV 211) of Emperor Krishna Raya (r. c. 1509-29), elaborated upon in the Kannada text *Śrī kṛṣṇadēvarāyaṇa dinacārī* (I)—probably dating from his reign as well—and mentioned in passing in the Telugu *Rāyavācakanu*, thought to be composed at Madurai's Nayaka court. In his Sanskrit poem *Śivatattva ratnākara*, Ikkeri's ruler Basavappa Nayaka I (r. 1697-1713) presents an alternative version of the model, now comprising seven limbs of the king himself: queen, heir apparent, wealth, sword, minister, horse, and elephant (V 15:29-30). Although here placed as fifth, ministers were evidently regarded as a principal factor in Ikkeri, too. That Basavappa Nayaka seemed well aware of the ambivalence of the courtiers' central position, however, transpires from his warning that the worst kingdoms are those governed not by kings but by ministers alone (V 7:4-12).¹⁵

¹⁴ See also Talbot, *Precolonial India in Practice*, 150.

¹⁵ Krishnamurthy, *Sivatattva Ratnākara of Keladi Basavaraja*, 23, 35-6, 59; Chitnis, "Sivatattvaratnakara with Special Reference to Polity," 220; Krishna(deva) Raya, *Sri Krishna Deva Raya: Āmuktamālyada*, 315; A. Rangasvami Sarasvati, "Political Maxims of the Emperor-Poet, Krishnadeva Raya," *Journal of Indian History* IV, III (1926), 65; Wagoner, *Tidings of the King*, 89; Vyasa, *The Mahābhārata*, vol. 7, book 12 (pt. 1), *The Book of Peace*, 307, 344; Wendy Doniger and Brian K. Smith (eds), *The Laws of Manu* (New Delhi, 1991), 144, 229; Kautilya, *The Kauṭilya Arthaśāstra*, pt. II, 364-7; Shukracharya, *The Śukranitiḥ*, 20; Nagar, *Kingship in the Śukra-Niti*, 37-8; Ali, *Courtly Culture and Political Life*, 73; B.A. Saletore, *Ancient Indian Political Thought and Institutions* (Bombay, 1963), 293-8, 344; Dallapiccola and Kotraiah, *King, Court and Capital*, 151, 165; Chitnis, *Keladi Polity*, 62. See also V. Balambal, "The Saptanga Theory and the State in the Sangam Age" [summary], *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 52 (1991).

Several political discourses consider the delicate relationship between kings and courtiers. They regard the king as the sovereign and foundation of the realm, but also recommend that he share his powers and duties with his ministers, thereby benefitting from their expertise, reducing his own burden, and demonstrating his superior status. As a consequence, however, while the king is thus formally recognised as the sole embodiment of royal sovereignty and courtiers presumably act only in his name, the latter are likely to exercise much effective power, resulting in a high potential for friction between the monarch and his ministers.¹⁶ An observation in a Dutch report from 1677 about the delegation of authority among courtiers in Madurai underscores the risks involved:

The Naiken [Nayakas], or kings of Madura, executed over the ... lands and people a ... sovereign government [*souveraine regeering*]. But as these heathen kings seldom took a fixed decision about a matter, and did not or little interfere with the government, the courtiers [*hovelingen*], and principally the Braminees [Brahmins], who by their nature possess sharp ingenuity and are no less sly and cunning, had the heart of the king and the government entirely in their hands ...¹⁷

The danger of courtiers growing too mighty is also acknowledged in Indian treatises. Indeed, the *Arthaśāstra* states that the most serious threat to the king are his close officials, rather than his common subjects or foreign powers (VIII 2:2-4; IX 3:9-19). Other texts give advice on how to keep ministers under control. According to the *Śukranīti*, functionaries should be checked by peers and rotated regularly to curb their power (II 109-17). The section on *rāja-nīti* ("king's policy") in Krishna Raya's *Āmuktamālyada* proposes that trustworthy Brahmins be appointed to important positions, for instance as commanders of forts, because they are knowledgeable, legitimise kings rather than strive to replace them, and are not rooted in particular lands (IV 207, 217, 261). Other passages in this work recommend that officials be watched by spies and promoted only gradually to avoid arrogance and allow time to test their loyalty (IV 208, 238, 260, 265). Both this text (IV 254) and Somadevasuri's *Nītvākyāmṛta* (XVIII 66) urge kings to exploit envy and rivalry among courtiers, for then they do their best to stand out and their activities will not remain hidden.¹⁸ As the *Āmuktamālyada* phrases this last suggestion:

¹⁶ Ali, *Courtly Culture and Political Life*, 57-60; Saletore, *Ancient Indian Political Thought and Institutions*, 344-5; Shukracharya, *The Śukranīti*, 108-14, 134-83; Burling, *The Passage of Power*, 81; Venkata Ramanayya, *Studies in the History of the Third Dynasty*, 95-6.

¹⁷ NA, VOC, no. 11306, ff. 122-3: description of the Nayakas of Madurai by Holst, 1762 (citing Adolph Bassingh's description of 1677); Vink, *Mission to Madurai*, 309, 353 (translation by Vink and myself).

¹⁸ Scharfe, *The State in Indian Tradition*, 59, 67-8, 152, 158; Mahalingam, *South Indian Polity*, 128-30; idem, *Administration and Social Life under Vijayanagar*, pt. I, 30-1; Kautilya, *The Kauṭilya Arthaśāstra*,

The king should encourage competition among subordinates and soldiers.
That is how their qualities, good and bad, will come out.
They will be so obsessed with winning the king's attention and honour,
that they will have no time for treacherous plots.¹⁹

Another quote from the abovementioned VOC report shows that this divisive strategy was in fact tested by Madurai's Nayakas. As for its effectiveness, the Dutch author arrived at a different conclusion from the one reached by Krishna Raya:

The councillors [*raads personen*] whom these kings used were neither chosen nor appointed ... But they [the kings] took those whom they deemed fit, today these, tomorrow others again—so that the courtiers were generally possessed by very great jealousy, sprouting from the imagined envy or hate or friendship the one enjoyed over the other. They never were just friend or enemy among each other, but both at the same time.

The king speculated on this and thus relied on his courtiers all the more, thinking that because they were very jealous of each other, therefore they—each out of fear of being spied on by the others—would dare to undertake nothing to the damage or detriment of the lands and him [the king]. In this he was gravely mistaken, so that the political government of the lands was owned more by the courtiers than by the kings ...²⁰

Apparently, at least according to the Dutch, following recommendations from political treatises did little to curb the courtiers' powers in Madurai. Besides, the Dutch report's first quote suggests that the very Brahmins advocated by Krishna Raya controlled not only the government but the king as well. As the later sections of this chapter demonstrate, events regularly followed a similar course in Vijayanagara's other heirs.

pt. II, 451-2, 479-80; Nagar, *Kingship in the Śukra-Nīti*, 78-9, 132; Shukracharya, *The Śukranīti*, 146-8; Narayana Rao, Shulman, and Subrahmanyam, "A New Imperial Idiom," 83, 88, 90-2, 97, 100-2; Krishna(Deva) Raya, *Sri Krishna Deva Raya: Āmuktamālyada*, 313-16, 326, 328-9; Rangasvami Sarasvati, "Political Maxims of the Emperor-Poet," 65-6, 72-3; Nilakanta Sastri and Venkataramanayya, *Further Sources of Vijayanagara History*, vol. III, 153-4, 162; Narayana Rao and Subrahmanyam, "Ideologies of State Building," 221-2. See also idem, "History and Politics in the Vernacular," 46, 49-50, 56, and its slightly modified version, "Notes on Political Thought in Medieval and Early Modern India," 195, 198-9, 201, 205.

¹⁹ Narayana Rao, Shulman, and Subrahmanyam, "A New Imperial Idiom," 100 (IV 254). See also: Krishna(Deva) Raya, *Sri Krishna Deva Raya: Āmuktamālyada*, 328; Rangasvami Sarasvati, "Political Maxims of the Emperor-Poet," 71; Nilakanta Sastri and Venkataramanayya, *Further Sources of Vijayanagara History*, vol. III, 161.

²⁰ NA, VOC, no. 11306, ff. 123-4: description of the Nayakas of Madurai by Holst, 1762 (citing Adolph Bassingh's description of 1677); Vink, *Mission to Madurai*, 309, 353 (translation by Vink and myself).

We know this mostly from Dutch and other European sources, because unlike many south Indian texts, this material contains a wealth of information on individual courtiers. Their contacts with Europeans were both frequent and diverse: in day-to-day business, during diplomatic missions, and in times of conflict, courtiers of ranks high and low served as intermediaries between European powers and south Indian parties ranging from royals to craftsmen. References in the Dutch records are legion and allow us to trace the careers of several courtiers simultaneously, thus providing insight into the often changing relations between them.

One illuminating class of VOC documents are lists of gifts presented by the Company to courtiers during its embassies to the courts. The distribution of those gifts among different individuals reflected the standing and influence of each of them, at least as perceived by the Dutch.²¹ Naturally, monarchs always received the most precious and numerous presents, but otherwise their worth and quantity depended on the courtiers' actual power rather than their official functions. The VOC's views in this regard generally seem to have been quite accurate. The many complaints by court functionaries about the Company's gifts usually pertained to their value, number, and kind, but rarely concerned their distribution among courtiers. The presents were often inspected beforehand by the court and only in a few cases do embassy reports mention requests to adjust this distribution.

Notwithstanding, it must be kept in mind that the Dutch (and other Europeans) got in touch chiefly with certain kinds of courtiers. These comprised provincial governors and other local representatives in coastal regions where the VOC maintained settlements, and functionaries at the central court dealing with affairs related to the Company's activities, such as commercial, diplomatic, and military matters. In fact, courtiers regularly combined such central and local offices. People in the capital with other portfolios and officials in inland areas stood a much smaller chance of figuring in the VOC archives.

One example is a certain Vira Tevar ("Werra Teuver"), who according to a Dutch source served as a general (*velt-oversten*) of Tanjavur's ruler Ekoji Bhonsle I for a considerable period. Despite his prominent position, it seems that Vira Tevar is not mentioned in regular VOC documents. The reason we know of him is because in November 1678, after he had died in battle, eight of his widows performed *sati* (death on a husband's funeral pyre). This event was deemed so shocking by some VOC servants who witnessed it, that when a personal account by one of them reached the Dutch Republic in 1680, it appeared there in print in an eight-page

²¹ For a similar Portuguese approach, see Melo, "Seeking Prestige and Survival," 678.

pamphlet.²² If it were not for this newsletter, Tanjavur's General Vira Tevar would likely have remained absent from surviving sources, like so many other courtiers.

In addition to being limited, VOC sources are not always clear or consistent in their terminology for courtiers. Functions are sometimes mistaken for personal names and vice versa, south Indian court and governmental terms may be corrupted beyond recognition, and some Dutch translations or interpretations of these words provide little clue to their originals. Thus, one comes across vague or fabricated designations like "state governor" (*rijxbestierder*), "state confidant" (*rijxvertrouwer*), "ordain-it-all" (*albeschik*), and the often-used generic "greats of the court" (*hofsgrouten*). Yet, although these and other European sources can be confused and incomplete, they still give a picture of the dynamic relations between courtiers and of their dominant role at court.

Vijayanagara

In the empire, the group of people who may be termed courtiers (as defined above) was probably even more varied than in the successor states. Besides all sorts of functionaries in the capital, Vijayanagara's extensive territory included numerous regional officials and subordinate chiefs, who possessed greatly varying levels of power and autonomy. For example, several of the most distinguished provincial governors—*mahāmaṇḍalēśvaras*, often called viceroys in secondary literature—were members of the imperial family, by blood or through marriage. Some of them, in particular the emperors' sons and brothers, were among the first in the line of royal succession and might ascend the throne themselves. As mentioned in the previous chapter, one prominent provincial governor, Saluva Narasimha, was related to the imperial dynasty only through a somewhat distant marital link but became such a powerful general that he simply took the throne and founded Vijayanagara's second house. The third and fourth imperial dynasties were also established by courtiers, the Generals Narasa Nayaka and Rama Raya respectively, after they took over the central court.

Some other provincial governors founded local dynasties, which turned into the royal houses reigning over the empire's successor states. Yet, on certain

²² *Vrije Universiteit (VU) Library, Amsterdam, Special Collections*, no. XW.07161.-: "Waarachtig verhaal van 't schrikkelijck en vrywilligh verbranden van acht vrouwen, van seker velt-oversten, van den vorst Egosia Ragie, genaemt Werra Teuver, ..." [True story of the terrible and voluntary burning of eight women, of a certain field-lord, of the King Ekoji Raja, named Vira Tevar, ...], c. 1680, ff. 1-8. Vira Tevar is perhaps very briefly mentioned in the VOC archives as Ekoji's commander "Weta Teuver," killed in a war against Ramnad in late 1678. See NA, VOC, no. 1333, f. 294: letter from Nagapattinam to Colombo, Dec. 1678.

occasions these rulers were still expected to fulfil duties at Vijayanagara's court. The Nayakas of Senji, Tanjavur, and Madurai continued to symbolically occupy the imperial offices of bearers of the betel box, fan, and spittoon, traditionally held by their founding fathers as the emperor's personal servants. One of Ikkeri's early Nayakas, Sadashiva, also had a formal rank at the imperial court according to some local literature, serving as the main *daḷavāy* (general) of Vijayanagara's Rama Raya during the latter's final battle in 1565.²³

Thus, on the one hand, imperial courtiers could become so powerful that they replaced the reigning dynasty, subsequently were recognised as sovereign rulers themselves, and even seemed to be considered more or less direct successors to the previous house, thereby continuing the empire's existence. Apparently, dynastic usurpation from within the court was not perceived as a fundamental rupture leading to a new state. On the other hand, the empire's courtiers included many men stationed so far away from the capital that they could build up their own power base and grow into largely autonomous rulers—of which the Nayaka houses studied here are obvious examples.²⁴

Both observations, while typical for Vijayanagara, do not, or hardly, apply to its heirs. There, no courtier ever managed to formally take over the throne to establish a new dynasty, despite the exalted position of people like Madurai's Ariyanatha Mudaliyar and the Kalale and Pillai families in Mysore and Senji. Because of the relatively small size of these kingdoms, courtiers attaining regional autonomy and threatening the central court were also very rare. Clearly, in those respects Vijayanagara and its successors differed considerably and cannot be well compared. Therefore, this section focuses on prominent offices and persons at Vijayanagara's central court, allowing for a valuable comparison, and pays little attention to provincial governors and other regional representatives.²⁵ It does however consider those few exceptional men who crossed the divide between minister and monarch.

²³ BL/AAS, MG, no. 3, pt. 5: "Ram-Rajah Cheritra," f. 180. This account of Rama Raya's last period in power exists in several versions and languages, for which see the section on Vijayanagara in Chapter 4.

²⁴ See for instance also: Stein, *Vijayanagara*, 92; Mahalingam, *Administration and Social Life under Vijayanagar*, pt. I, 26-8.

²⁵ For general overviews of provincial government in Vijayanagara, see for example: Venkata Ramanayya, *Studies in the History of the Third Dynasty*, 143-59; Mahalingam, *Administration and Social Life under Vijayanagar*, pt. I, 175-205; Y. Subbarayalu, "Administrative Divisions of the Vijayanagara State," in P. Shanmugam and Srinivasan Srinivasan (eds), *Recent Advances in Vijayanagara Studies* (Chennai, 2006). For extensive lists of provincial governors, see also: H. Krishna Sastri, "The First Vijayanagara Dynasty: Its Viceroys and Ministers," *Annual Report 1907-8: Archaeological Survey of India* (Calcutta, 1911); idem, "The Second Vijayanagara Dynasty"; idem, "The Third Vijayanagara Dynasty: Its Viceroys and Ministers," *Annual Report 1911-12: Archaeological Survey of India*, ed. John Marshall (Calcutta, 1915).

Unfortunately, we do not have a complete picture of Vijayanagara's courtiers at any given time. Inscriptions, literary works, and visitor's accounts only mention certain functions and individuals, rather than providing detailed and comprehensive surveys. Besides, it seems that various terms were used for largely similar offices or the same term could refer to different functions. Furthermore, the composition of court ranks is likely to have changed during the empire's three centuries of existence. Nevertheless, these sources give at least an idea of the most significant and powerful positions at court.

There was some sort of ministerial council, possibly numbering between eight and twenty persons, which comprised officials with administrative or military duties and members of the royal family. One literary text claims that Rama Raya, founder of the Aravidu dynasty, had eight chief ministers and seven heads of "the great departments," the latter dealing with fortifications, other defensive works, justice, armed forces, intelligence, towns, and religious buildings. The *Sāmrājyalakṣmīpīṭhikā* section of the anonymous Sanskrit work *Ākāśabhairavakalpa*—thought to be connected to Vijayanagara's Tuluva court—lists no less than seventy-two court functions and mentions that the king should meet every day with four or eight ministers as well as other officials, such as the treasurer (63:4-17, 70:23-50, 76:3-10, 77:4-8).

The term *daṇḍanāyaka* was probably used as a general denomination for the highest court ranks, one of which was the (*mahā*)*pradhāni* or *pradhāna*, the chief minister heading the empire's overall administration. An important scribal function was known as *rāyasam*, usually translated as (royal) secretary. Its place in the hierarchy appears not to have been entirely fixed, and some people in this role may have acted as prominent ministers. Besides, treasurers of several ranks were designated as *bhāṇḍāgārika* or *samprati*.

As for military positions, while various kinds of courtiers could be assigned temporary military tasks—for example to lead one particular campaign—permanent commanders-in-chief were usually called *daḷavāy*. In the religious sphere we find the *rājaguru* (king's preceptor) and the *purōhita* (royal or family priest). Further, some sources mention the *vāśal(kāriyam)*, the door-keeper or head of the palace guard, regulating access to the king. Finally, the fourteenth-century Sanskrit poem *Madhurāvijaya* by Gangadevi speaks of a *vidūṣaka* or court jester under the early Sangamas, and many later stories refer to the Brahmin jester Tenali Rama, who served Emperor Krishna Raya. But there seems no proof that either this function or Tenali Rama actually existed.²⁶ Obviously, there were numerous other functions

²⁶ Neither Indian nor European sources appear to refer to real court jesters in Vijayanagara's successor states. For Vijayanagara court jesters, see for example: Shulman, *The King and the Clown*, 180-200; Narayana Rao and Shulman, *A Poem at the Right Moment*, 180-5; Narayana Rao, "Multiple

at Vijayanagara's court, for instance dealing with judicial, fiscal, commercial, and diplomatic affairs, but the abovementioned offices appear to have been the most influential and constant ones.²⁷

For most of Vijayanagara's existence, little is known of the individuals occupying these central positions, let alone how actual power was divided among them. Epigraphic records give the names of many chief ministers, generals, and other dignitaries at the capital. But in most cases, these sources are silent on their backgrounds and how their careers developed. Since personal names and official designations seem to have been used interchangeably, it is often unclear whether certain courtiers were relatives. Thus, some terms suggest that the people using them belonged to the same family, but they could also merely denote a similar rank. These complications concern the empire's first two dynasties in particular.

Sangamas and Saluvas

Under Vijayanagara's initial Sangama house (c. 1340s-1485), there were few courtiers for whom the sources provide much context. One of them is Vidyaranya, a minister under Emperor Bukka (r. c. 1355-77). Some scholars claim he was also the Brahmin sage of that name mentioned in Vijayanagara's foundation stories. If true, he combined political and religious duties. We know a bit more about General Kumara Kampana, a son of Bukka, who around the 1360s subjugated the Indian peninsula's far south for Vijayanagara. He is one of the few courtiers whose achievements are glorified in a literary work, in this case the *Madhurāvijaya* (or *Kamparāyacharitam*), composed by his wife Gangadevi. She relates how Kumara

Literary Cultures in Telugu," 66-8; Narayana Rao and Shulman, *Classical Telugu Poetry*, 292; D. Sridhara Babu, "Kingship: State and Religion in South India According to South Indian Historical Biographies of Kings (Madhurāvijaya, Acyutarāyabhyudaya and Vemabhūpālacarita)" (unpublished dissertation, Georg-August-Universität Göttingen, 1975), 125; Artatrana Sarangi, *A Treasure of Tāntric Ideas: A Study of the Sāmrajyalakṣmīpīṭhikā* (Calcutta, 1993), 288-9.

²⁷ Mahalingam, *Administration and Social Life under Vijayanagar*, pt. I, 28-39; Saletore, *Social and Political Life in the Vijayanagara Empire*, vol. I, 253-6, 261-73; Venkata Ramanayya, *Studies in the History of the Third Dynasty*, 95-119; Sridhara Babu, "Kingship: State and Religion in South India," 123-8; Sarangi, *A Treasure of Tāntric Ideas*, 282, 284-5, 301-6; Gode, "Ākāśabhairava-Kalpa," 122-3, 126-7, 136; Ganesh Thite, "Sāmrajyalakṣmīpīṭhikā of Ākāśabhairavakalpa: A Tāntric Encyclopaedia of Magicoreligion," *Sambodhi* 7, 1-4 (1978-9), 43, 47; BL/AAS, MG, no. 3, pt. 5: "Ram-Rajah Cheritra," f. 173; Sewell, *A Forgotten Empire*, 384-9; Patil, *Court Life under the Vijayanagar Rulers*, 60-6; Rao, "A New Perspective on the Royal Rāma Cult at Vijayanagara," 31-3. For discussions of connections between the *Ākāśabhairavakalpa* or *Sāmrajyalakṣmīpīṭhikā* and Vijayanagara—as well as Tanjavur's Bhonsles and Ikkeri's Basavappa Nayaka I and his *Śivatattva ratnākara*—see also: Suebsantiwongse, "Dating and Locating the *Sāmrajyalakṣmīpīṭhikā*"; Dinnell, "*Sāmrajyalakṣmīpīṭhikā*," 16-20; Sarangi, *A Treasure of Tāntric Ideas*, ch. 1.

Kampana grew up excelling in both learning and martial skills, and later became provincial governor at the newly conquered town of Kanchipuram. Next, he liberated Madurai from its short-lived dynasty of sultans with a sword presented by the Madurai goddess. In addition, inscriptions designate him with exalted titles like “lord of the great province” (*mahāmaṇḍalēśvara*) and “lord of the eastern, southern, western, and northern four oceans” (*pūrva dekṣiṇa pāchchima uttara nālu semudrādhīpati*).

Another early notable military commander was Saluva Mangappa (or Mangu or Mangi) Dandanatha, who accompanied Kumara Kampana on his southern campaign, during which he acquired the family title “Saluva” (hawk). His descendants also served the Sangamas, and even married into the imperial family, until his great-grandson General Saluva Narasimha replaced the dynasty with his own Saluva house.

Under the reign of Deva Raya II (r. c. 1423-46), Lakkanna Danda Nayaka appears to have been a particularly influential figure. Functioning as chief minister (*pradhāni*), general, and provincial governor (*mahāmaṇḍalēśvara*), he played an instrumental role in the emperor’s switch from the Vaishnava to the Shaiva strand of Hinduism, thereby promoting his own interests. Demonstrating his might, in a religious Kannada work Lakkanna Danda styled himself as Deva Raya II’s “increaser of wealth” and “intimate friend” (*unnata kēlaya*), while inscriptions call him “lord of the southern ocean” (*dakṣiṇa samudrādhīpati*) and someone “who knows the art of strengthening the seven organs of state” (*saptāṅga rājya vardhana kaḷādhara*). Moreover, he was entitled to issue his own coins.²⁸

During the brief rule of the Saluva dynasty (c. 1485-1503), again only some courtiers stand out. One was Thimma Raja, whose precise court rank seems unknown but who was powerful enough to command his own troops. After the death of Saluva Narasimha, Thimma wanted the emperor’s eldest son to ascend the throne. But he faced competition from General Narasa Nayaka, who favoured another prince, had Thimma killed, and thus solved the succession struggle. Narasa Nayaka was the son of one of two other generals who were prominent at the Saluva court: Ishvara Nayaka and Aravidi Bukka, whose offspring founded the third and fourth imperial houses respectively.²⁹

²⁸ For references, see the next footnote.

²⁹ Rāma Sharma, *The History of the Vijayanagar Empire*, vol. I, 29-31, 38, 42, 58-9, 64, 88; Saletore, *Social and Political Life in the Vijayanagara Empire*, vol. I, 256-60; Krishna Sastri, “The First Vijayanagara Dynasty”; idem, “The Second Vijayanagara Dynasty,” 165-9; Vasundhara Filliozat, “Relatives and Officers of Ballala III and IV Who Accepted Service under the Kings of Vijayanagara,” *Itihas: Journal of the Andhra Pradesh Archives* I, 2 (1973); Dodamani, *Gaṅgādevī’s Madhurāvijayaṃ*, passim, especially 14-21, 30-7; Krishnaswami Aiyangar, *Sources of Vijayanagar History*, 23-4; Audrey Truschke, *The*

Other than this handful of ministers and commanders, there were few or no courtiers under the Sangamas and Saluvas of whom more is known than their name and designation. Occasionally, ministers and generals are stated to be uncles, nephews, or other relatives of the emperor, and for some officials their kinship to other, non-royal functionaries is mentioned. Despite this fragmented information, one can surmise that during the first half of Vijayanagara's existence, it was regularly military men—and sometimes ministers with other portfolios or people combining different tasks—who became particularly powerful courtiers, capable of eliminating rivals at court and influencing the emperor himself. They were often members of prominent court families, frequently of a Brahmin background or belonging to the rulers' caste, considering their blood or marital relations with them.

Tuluvas

By and large, these conclusions are applicable to Vijayanagara's next one-and-a-half centuries, too, for which period more sources are available. A very prominent minister under the first two emperors of the Tuluva house (c. 1503-70)—Vira Narasimha (r. c. 1503-9) and Krishna Raya (r. c. 1509-29)—was the Brahmin Saluva Timmarasu. Despite his first name, he was not related to the Saluva dynasty and one text claims he came from a poor background. During Krishna Raya's many military campaigns, Timmarasu further held the office of general and served as a provincial governor as well. Also called Appaji (father), he may be the courtier with the most exalted status in the empire's history. Many inscriptions and literary works refer to the sound advice and noble deeds of this *mahāpradhāna* (great minister) and the great respect Krishna Raya had for him. As part of a ceremony to honour him, Timmarasu's name appeared with that of the emperor on a specially issued coin. The Portuguese horse trader Domingo Paes, visiting the capital in this period, wrote that Timmarasu commanded the entire court and that all officials behaved with him as they did with Krishna Raya himself.

As the Telugu work *Rāyavācakamu* has it, Timmarasu was the courtier to whom Krishna Raya famously complained about being controlled by his ministers,

Language of History: Sanskrit Narratives of Indo-Muslim Rule (New York, 2021), 76-89; Ajay K. Rao, "From Fear to Hostility: Responses to the Conquests of Madurai," *South Asian Studies* 32, 1 (2016), 72-6; *Epigraphia Carnatica*, vol. X, *Inscriptions in the Kolar District*, ed. B. Lewis Rice (Mangalore, 1905), 70 (1st numeration), 61 (2nd numeration) (both no. 203); Narayana Rao, Shulman, and Subrahmanyam, *Symbols of Substance*, 28-9; Mahalingam, *Administration and Social Life under Vijayanagar*, pt. I, 30-1; S. Srikanta Sastri, "Deva Raya II," *The Indian Antiquary: A Journal of Oriental Research* LVII (1928), 77-81; Debicka-Borek, "The Bravery of Sālūva Narasimha," 65; Chekuri, "Between Family and Empire," 82; idem, "'Fathers' and 'Sons'," 137-8; Devadevan, *A Prehistory of Hinduism*, 70; Venkata Ramanayya, *Studies in the History of the Third Dynasty*, 93-4.

making him wonder what his royal sovereignty really meant. The emperor would have sighed that were he to attempt to exercise his authority, the court would just ignore him. Some historians regard Krishna Raya's grievances as an indication of the courtiers' great powers in Vijayanagara during this period. But since it has been shown that the *Rāyavācakamu* was composed under the Nayakas of Madurai, this episode may say more about the might of court officials in Madurai than in the empire. In any case, after a tenure of about two decades, Timmarasu fell from grace, accused of being involved in the death of Krishna Raya's minor son and designated successor. Together with his own son and brother, the latter himself an important functionary, Timmarasu was blinded and imprisoned—for life, as some sources say, although several inscriptions suggest he was later set free and lived on until the 1530s.

Another key official during Krishna Raya's reign was the Brahmin *Rāyasam* (secretary) Kondamarasu, again an administrator serving as a general too. Not only does he prominently figure in the *Rāyavācakamu* as an advisor to the emperor, he is also mentioned in the account of the Portuguese merchant Fernão Nunes, staying in Vijayanagara around the early 1530s. According to Nunes, when Krishna Raya marched out of the capital to wage war against the Bijapur sultanate, he was followed by dozens of dignitaries, each accompanied by their own troops. In this procession, Kondamarasu allegedly headed 120,000 foot soldiers, 6,000 horsemen, and sixty elephants, more than any other official.³⁰

Nunes further wrote that Kondamarasu's son Ayyapparasu was chosen to succeed Saluva Timmarasu as chief minister and that Ayyapparasu had killed one of the sons and successors of Emperor Saluva Narasimha, founder of the previous dynasty.³¹ This courtiers' duo of father and son thus seems to have gone to great lengths to increase their power at the Vijayanagara court and to have done so successfully, securing their position especially after the downfall of Minister Saluva

³⁰ For other officials mentioned by Nunes, including the rebellious provincial governor of the Tamil region, Saluva Narasingha Nayaka alias Chellappa, see Stein, *Vijayanagara*, 48-51, 57, 98-9.

³¹ Rāma Sharma, *The History of the Vijayanagar Empire*, vol. I, 98, 122, 145-7; Wagoner, *Tidings of the King*, 47-9, 89, 101-4, 112-13, 142, 152, 160, 235, 245; V. Vijayaraghavacharya (ed.), *Inscriptions of Krishnaraya's Time from 1509 A.D. to 1531 A.D.* (Madras, 1935), 94, 96, 276; Narayana Rao, Shulman, and Subrahmanyam, *Textures of Time*, 122-5; Krishna Sastri, "The Second Vijayanagara Dynasty," 172-4, 183, 191-2; Sewell, *A Forgotten Empire*, 250, 310-15, 322, 326-7, 359-61; K. Veerasha, "Saluva-Timmarasu the Crafty Prime-Minister of Krsnadeva Raya," *Itihas: Journal of the Andhra Pradesh State Archives & Research Institute* XXI, 1-2 (1995); Chekuri, "Fathers' and 'Sons'," 152-7; Venkata Ramanayya, *Studies in the History of the Third Dynasty*, 96; Saleatore, *Social and Political Life in the Vijayanagara Empire*, vol. I, 260-1. For a discussion of the account of Domingo Paes, see Rubiés, *Travel and Ethnology in the Renaissance*, ch. 7.

Timmarasu. Upon Krishna Raya's death, however, they fell out of favour as other courtiers rose to prominence.³²

These included the Salakaraju brothers and their rival Rama Raya, who all had close marital ties with the imperial Tuluva family. A sister of the Salakaraju brothers was the wife of Emperor Achyuta Raya (half-brother and successor of Krishna Raya), while Rama Raya had married one of Krishna Raya's daughters. The elder Salakaraju brother, Peda Tirumala, first appears to have become prominent during Achyuta Raya's reign. Having earlier served as a provincial governor and military commander, he was installed as *pradhāna* in 1534 and further promoted in the subsequent years. His younger brother China Tirumala seems to have functioned as general or perhaps treasurer.

Together, they came to dominate the court in the 1530s, backing the claims to the throne of their brother-in-law Achyuta Raya and his infant son and *yuvarāja* (heir apparent) Venkatadri. When Peda Tirumala and Achyuta Raya died soon after each other (around 1540 and in 1542 respectively), Salakaraju China Tirumala no longer supported his sister's son, the new, minor ruler Venkatadri. As explained in Chapter 2, he usurped all power, became Venkatadri's regent but then killed him, and next was probably proclaimed emperor himself. His own death came soon, however, when he finally lost the power struggle against Rama Raya that had been going on all the while.³³

The later part of Rama Raya's career has also been related in the previous chapter. While he ended up as Vijayanagara's de facto—and perhaps de jure—emperor between the 1540s and 1565 and founded the Aravidu house, he started out as a rather ordinary warrior, originally not even employed in Vijayanagara. In the early 1510s, Rama Raya served the Golkonda sultanate as a military commander and landholder, despite his ancestors' past as high generals in the imperial armies, who included his father, the aforementioned Aravidu Bukka. Offering his military skills to Vijayanagara in 1515, Rama Raya stood out for his exceptional prowess in Krishna Raya's campaigns, making the emperor give him his daughter's hand.

³² For the strong influence at Krishna Raya's court of a religious leader, the Brahmin monastic head Vyasatirtha, see Valerie Stoker, *Polemics and Patronage in the City of Victory: Vyāsātīrtha, Hindu Sectarianism, and the Sixteenth-Century Vijayanagara Court* (Oakland, 2016).

³³ See in particular Venkata Ramanayya, *Studies in the History of the Third Dynasty*, 12, 18, 31-2, 56-7, 61-2, 74-89. The following literature sometimes speaks of only one Salakaraju brother or seems to confuse the elder and younger: Rāma Sharma, *The History of the Vijayanagar Empire*, vol. I, 171, 175, 180-3; Heras, *The Aravidu Dynasty of Vijayanagara*, vol. I, 4-12; Krishna Sastri, "The Second Vijayanagara Dynasty," 190; Saletore, *Social and Political Life in the Vijayanagara Empire*, vol. I, 261; Patil, *Court Life under the Vijayanagar Rulers*, 139-41; Nilakanta Sastri, *A History of South India*, 288-9.

From then on, Rama Raya increased his power, appointing relatives at strategic posts, endowing temples, and exploiting conflicts between and within the Deccan sultanates. Despite these activities and his position as minister, he initially faced strong competition from Emperor Achyuta Raya and many courtiers, particularly the Salakaraju brothers. But in 1542 Rama Raya defeated all his remaining opponents, placed his protégé Sadashiva on the throne, and became this minor ruler's regent. Besides, he installed his two brothers in the court's highest offices: Tirumala as chief minister and Venkatadri as commander-in-chief. As the empire's central figure Rama Raya was now in full control, gradually replacing Sadashiva as Vijayanagara's emperor during the next two decades.³⁴

Aravidus

When Tirumala became emperor, soon after the court fled Vijayanagara city in 1565, the rule of the Aravidu house (c. 1570-1660s) formally commenced. Despite the increasingly many European sources on south India for this period, we still know little more of most courtiers than their names. By and large, however, one observes the same patterns for this phase as for the earlier dynasties. The family of Gobburi Jagga Raya—mentioned in Chapter 2 for its role in the succession struggle following Emperor Venkata's death in 1614—serves as an example.

Jagga Raya was a son of Gobburi Oba Raya, a very prominent courtier and high military commander. In 1608, the Italian Jesuit Antonio Rubino described Oba Raya as the most significant among the dozens of the emperor's "captains," calling him "the right arm of the king [*braccio diritto del re*] in important matters." His exalted position also transpires from other Jesuit reports, stating that he enjoyed the rare privilege of sitting on the same carpet as the emperor. Besides, Oba Raya held close marital ties with the Aravidus: his daughter Obamamba (alias Bayamma) was an influential queen of Emperor Venkata, while his wife is thought to have been a daughter of Rama Raya.

Jagga Raya's own court office is not entirely clear but he is said to have controlled large quantities of troops as well as revenues, and may have held the rank of *dalāvāy* (general), as a text praising his opponent Velugoti Yacama Nayaka suggests. Further, he, his siblings, and their associates dominated the commercially significant region around the port of Pulicat, where the VOC set up a factory in

³⁴ Eaton, *A Social History of the Deccan*, 78-80, 87-8, 90-2; Stein, *Vijayanagara*, 113-20; Heras, *The Aravidu Dynasty of Vijayanagara*, vol. I, 27-40; P. Sree Rama Sarma, "Rāma Rāya's Policy," *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 36 (1975); Rāma Sharma, *The History of the Vijayanagar Empire*, vol. I, 185-6; Nilakanta Sastri, *A History of South India*, 285-9; Krishna Sastri, "The Third Vijayanagara Dynasty," 178-80; Saletore, *Social and Political Life in the Vijayanagara Empire*, vol. I, 261.

1610. While Jagga Raya governed the surrounding area, his sister Obamamba had received Pulicat itself as dowry. Here, this powerful queen had appointed her own “Governess” (*gouvernante*) Kondama, as the Dutch and the English called her, whom they considered a major figure at the court too. Furthermore, this governess’ son was the port’s *shāhbandar* (“harbour master”), supervising all mercantile activities and the collection of customs duties. When the Dutch got Emperor Venkata’s permission to settle in Pulicat, their Portuguese rivals offered the influential Jagga Raya 5,000 *pagodas* (later supposedly raised to 200,000) to use his connections to have the VOC expelled again. The Dutch could only prevent this by sending several embassies and expensive gifts to the emperor.

Some years later, after Jagga Raya was killed in the empire’s succession struggle of the mid-1610s, the daughter of his brother Etiraja was wedded to the new emperor, Ramadeva—marking the third generation of marital alliances between the Gobburi and Aravidu families. As the Dutch and English wrote, Etiraja now became governor of the Pulicat area and seems have been an important courtier in the following years, accompanying the emperor on military campaigns and peace negotiations.³⁵ Thus, while Jagga Raya had personally failed to hold full sway over the Vijayanagara court, the Gobburi family as a whole kept its powerful position, maintaining close links with the imperial house, holding a range of court positions, and controlling a region of great economic importance.

³⁵ NA, VOC, no. 1055, ff. 103-5, 149, 169-71, 174-5, 189-90; no. 1056, ff. 151-3v: letters from Pulicat and Vellore to Banten and Masulipatam, May, July, Sept.-Nov. 1610, Aug. 1613, Pulicat proceedings (*resolutions*), Aug. 1610; Joan-Pau Rubiés, “The Jesuit Discovery of Hinduism: Antonio Rubino’s Account of the History and Religion of Vijayanagara (1608),” *Archiv für Religionsgeschichte* 3, 1 (2001), 248; Frederick Charles Danvers and William Foster (eds), *Letters Received by the East India Company from its Servants in the East* ..., vol. I (London, 1896), 134; Foster, *The English Factories in India 1622–1623: A Calendar of Documents in the India Office and British Museum* (Oxford, 1908), 106, 139-40; Narayana Rao, Shulman, and Subrahmanyam, *Symbols of Substance*, 103, 252-5; Sewell, *A Forgotten Empire*, 224; Heras, *The Aravidu Dynasty of Vijayanagara*, vol. I, 24-5, 307, 465-7, 496-501; Nilakanta Sastri and Venkataramanayya, *Further Sources of Vijayanagara History*, vol. I, 326-7; Rāma Sharma, *The History of the Vijayanagar Empire*, vol. II, 69, 91, 127; L.C.D. van Dijk, *Zes jaren uit het leven van Wemmer van Berchem, gevolgd door iets over onze vroegste betrekkingen met Japan, twee geschiedkundige bijdragen* (Amsterdam, 1858), 24, 27-8, 30; MacLeod, *De Oost-Indische Compagnie*, vol. I, 134, 212, 452, 456, 464-7, 487, 491; Raychaudhuri, *Jan Company in Coromandel*, 22, 36; Terpstra, *De vestiging van de Nederlanders aan de kust van Koromandel*, 130, 132; Subrahmanyam, *Improvising Empire*, 196-202; Van Dam, *Beschryvinge van de Oostindische Compagnie*, vol. 2.2, 102; Om Prakash (ed.), *The Dutch Factories in India: A Collection of Dutch East India Company Documents Pertaining to India, Vol. II (1624-1627)* (New Delhi, 2007), 103, 114, 149, 158.

From this brief overview of courtiers under the empire's four dynasties, some general and continuous tendencies can be deduced. Powerful courtiers often occupied various ranks over time or simultaneously, regularly held family ties with the royal houses and nearly always with other courtiers, at least in some instances operated from a regional power base providing them with financial and personal support, and frequently got involved in rivalry, among themselves and with the emperors.³⁶ Among these people were men, and sometimes women, of various backgrounds. A fair number of officials—seemingly mostly in administrative functions like *pradhāni* (chief minister) and *rāyasam* (secretary)—were Brahmins. But others, many of them military commanders, evidently were not Brahmins since they or their relatives were able to marry into the imperial families, who belonged to Shudra or (as they claimed) Kshatriya castes. All in all, it appears that one's court function and caste ranking were hardly the main factors that determined how much power one wielded. At least as important seem to have been one's connections (familial or otherwise), ambitions, strategic skills, material means, and good fortune.

Successor States

The following sections analyse the positions of courtiers in Ikkeri, Tanjavur, Madurai, and Ramnad. Although we must focus on certain periods and people, the close relations of these courts with the Dutch and other Europeans allow us to go into much more detail than is possible for Vijayanagara. For each dynasty, we examine the system of court positions in general—largely on the basis of secondary literature—followed by discussions of the careers of some individual courtiers and the balance of power at court at a few specific moments.

Nayakas of Ikkeri

In his early eighteenth-century *Śivatattva ratnākara*, Ikkeri's ruler Basavappa Nayaka devotes considerable attention to courtiers. Besides explaining on which matters a king must consult with his ministers (*mantrin*, *saciva*) (V 7:16-37), he lists about twenty different court offices and the qualities these require (V 15:46-105). Among the main officials are the *purōhita* (family priest), *jyotiṣika* (astrologer), *senāpati* (chief commander), *daṇḍadhara* (administrator of justice), and *kośādhyakṣa* (treasurer). He also refers to various lower positions, ranging from bodyguards and gatekeepers to physicians and cooks. It seems the *Śivatattva*

³⁶ See also Chekuri, "'Fathers' and 'Sons,'" especially 155-6.

ratnākara portrays an idealised court, however, based on ancient political discourses, since other types of functionaries figure in inscriptions and chronicles produced under Ikkeri's Nayakas.

Most of those positions also existed in one or another form at the Vijayanagara court, such as the *pradhāni* (chief minister), *daḷavāy* (or *daḷavāyi*, general), *rājaguru* (king's preceptor), and *rāyasam* (secretary). Other officials appear to be typical of Ikkeri, including the *bokkasa* officer or (amongst other terms) *sēnabōva* (both treasurer or finance minister), *karaṇika* (accountant, scribe), *sabbunīsa* (high military commander), and *subēdār* (governor)—the latter two positions of Persian origin.³⁷

For Ikkeri's early period there is little information about the people in these functions besides their names. Even less is known about the influence of particular courtiers in relation to others and the king himself.³⁸ But from the mid-seventeenth century on, the increasing volume of European sources provides enough details to partially reconstruct the fortunes of some prominent functionaries over longer periods and the distribution of power among courtiers at certain moments. Obviously, those occasions and people concern cases in which Europeans were closely involved. Therefore, the following paragraphs are chiefly based on observations during diplomatic missions and other dealings with officials likely to come into contact with Europeans.

Given these limitations, the earliest courtiers in Ikkeri one can study in some depth are members of the Malu family. Active at least during the quarter-century between the early 1650s and the mid-1670s, they served under five kings and one queen. While they were primarily merchants, belonging to the community of Sarasvat Brahmins, they rose to great heights in Ikkeri's political constellation. First appearing in Portuguese documents, initially Vitthala Malu grew influential at court, selected by King Shivappa Nayaka to head an embassy to the Portuguese at Goa in 1652 and again the following year. In 1654, these sources mention his son Mallappa Malu as Ikkeri's representative to conduct peace negotiations with the Portuguese, while English records state he was authorised to actually conclude treaties.

In the period around the first Dutch-Ikkeri agreement in 1657, Mallappa begins to figure extensively in VOC records. He was the main or sole merchant with whom the Dutch were allowed to do business and their letters refer to him as "the king's trader." In the subsequent years, he and his brother Narayana Malu strengthened

³⁷ Krishnamurthy, *Sivatattva Ratnākara of Keladi Basavaraja*, 36-9, 60-4, 404-5; Chitnis, *Keladi Polity*, 67-73, 77-82, 164-7; Swaminathan, *The Nāyakas of Ikkēri*, 166-8.

³⁸ But see BL/AAS, MG, no. 6, pt. 11: "Historical account of Beedoonoor or Caladee Samstanum," f. 72v, for a passage in the *Keladi arasara vaṃśāvalī* about a minister attempting to overthrow King Venkatappa Nayaka I (r. c. 1585-1629).

their position in Ikkeri. VOC documents from 1660-1 describe Mallappa as the kingdom's most prominent merchant, who controlled the rice trade, was "mighty rich," enjoyed a good reputation with the king, had easy access to the court, and was privileged to travel by palanquin.

That the Malu brothers harboured not just commercial but also political ambitions, becomes clear from Mallappa's role in Ikkeri's succession struggles, related in Chapter 2. After King Venkatappa Nayaka II was killed and succeeded by his cousin Bhadrappa Nayaka in 1661, rumour had it that Mallappa had instigated both this violent transition and the alleged poisoning of the previous ruler Shivappa Nayaka in 1660. In any case, as the VOC reported, Mallappa's position at court was formally raised (*in qualiteijt verhooght*) once the throne was occupied by Bhadrappa, who seemed entirely dependent on him. Thus, the merchant's power increased to such an extent that in 1662 the Dutch considered the Malu brothers to "have the kingdom's helm in their hands."

But King Bhadrappa's passing around mid-1664 and the following power struggles made them temporarily fall from grace. Apparently, as soon as their protégé on the throne had gone, other courtiers could contest their position. VOC documents state that while Mallappa had conveniently left Ikkeri to head another embassy to Goa—supposedly deliberately planned by him as he foresaw the king's death and the resultant troubles—his brother Narayana found himself stuck at court with his rivals and barely survived the ensuing clash, suffering severe head wounds and being stripped of all his designations. Mallappa, extending his stay with the Portuguese as long as possible, eventually returned home, but, having fallen ill on the way back, died in July 1664.

This was far from the end of the Malu family's influence. Only a few months later, the Dutch and Portuguese both reported that Narayana Malu had replaced his brother as the chief broker between Ikkeri and European powers. Some sources claim that he himself re-established order at the capital and now became the protector of the new king, Somashekara Nayaka. However Narayana regained power, his subsequent career included more ups and downs. In April-May 1668, during a VOC embassy to Ikkeri's capital Bednur, he served as the main contact between the court and the Dutch and received more gifts from them than any other courtier (see table 9). Additionally, he and one Vitthala Malu—possibly his father or the son of his deceased brother Mallappa—were called the "court merchants" with whom the VOC was to conduct its trade. The Company's estimation of Narayana's high standing was proved accurate when in 1670 the Dutch received news that:

... His Highness Somsecraneijcq [Somashekara Nayaka] has honoured Narnamaloe [Narayana Malu] ..., above the quality of state merchant [*rijcx coopman*], with the seat [*zitplaats*]*—in His Highness' presence—of councillor [raats hr.]*, which puts the mentioned

Narnamoele in greater esteem [*aensien*] by the realm of Canara [Ikkeri] than any of his ancestors have had before.³⁹

While the king and the merchant-courtier thus maintained a close relationship, both fared badly during the succession struggles in the next year. In Somashekara's case, competition between courtiers, the involvement of the Bijapur sultanate, and his madness and absence from court led to his assassination. With respect to Narayana—said to be instrumental in the king's downfall by luring him from the countryside to the capital and delivering him to Bijapur's troops—the Dutch initially wrote that the new ruler, probably Shivappa Nayaka II, confirmed the merchant's privileges and bestowed even more honours on him.

The position of this king and his supporters quickly grew weak, however, making Narayana leave the court, store his possessions at the VOC factory in Basrur, and back another contender to the throne, the son of Kasiyya Bhadrappa, a member of the royal family. With him, Narayana returned to Bednur around mid-1672, but here he fell victim to the ongoing power struggles during the following years. When Kasiyya Bhadrappa clashed with a coalition of General Timmanna, Widow-Queen Chennammaji, and "state secretary" Krishnappa (*'s rijx schrijver* "Crusnia"), Narayana shifted allegiance to this faction.

Nevertheless, there was no trust within this coalition. Allegedly, Narayana and Krishnappa dared to appear at court only with a group of warriors to protect them. True enough, when General Timmanna finally convinced the two men to dismiss their bodyguards and they next paid a visit to the queen all by themselves, they were locked up and severely tortured. Accused of secretly supporting Kasiyya Bhadrappa, Narayana and Krishnappa were sentenced to donate large sums of money to finance the war against Kasiyya Bhadrappa. Having consented to do so, they were released and by November 1673 had been reinstalled as court merchant and state secretary respectively. Soon after, still according to VOC reports, Narayana was even dispatched as head of a military expedition against the Nayaka of Sonda, given back his money, and offered the post of governor of the Kalluru province. Perhaps impressed by Narayana's diverse and resilient career, the Dutch now called him "that politic man" (*dien politeijcken man*).

But Narayana's third rise to power would be his last. The campaign he led against the Sonda kingdom failed and he declined the office of provincial governor because, as the Dutch guessed, he preferred to oversee trade rather than lands. Narayana may indeed have grown tired of Ikkeri's court politics, which in the mid-1670s centred on the competition between Queen Chennammaji and General Timmanna. VOC documents from late 1675 declare that Narayana, who generally favoured Chennammaji,

³⁹ NA, VOC, no. 1274, f. 171: Basrur diary extract, June 1670 (translation mine).

felt so miserable because of this rivalry that he stopped eating and eventually poisoned himself. Counter-poison saved him just in time, but his misfortune did not end there. Together with Chennammaji, Narayana was now summoned by Timmanna to accompany him on an expedition against Mysore, so as to prevent the merchant and the queen from creating trouble during the general's absence. Less than two months later, in early 1676, the Dutch reported that Narayana had been put in prison, with all his possessions taken from him and "his entire family effectively ruined and scattered," while another court merchant was appointed in his stead.

By mid-1676 Narayana had died, as had Timmanna, who was killed in a battle that year.⁴⁰ The Malu family's great influence had now really ended. The VOC wrote that following Narayana's passing his nephew or cousin Venkatesh Malu ("Winkittezy Maloe") would possibly be installed by the queen as court merchant. Dutch records also refer to several other people bearing the name Malu until at least the 1730s, including men called Vitthala, Narayana, and Venkatesh, serving the Ikkeri court as brokers, governors, commanders, or (court) merchants. But there is no indication that these people were related to the erstwhile mighty Malu family, and after Narayana nobody named Malu seems to have attained a prominent and lasting position at court anyway.⁴¹

The precise reasons for Narayana's final downfall and the cause of his death are unknown. In fact, many details of his life are uncertain since they are only

⁴⁰ NA, VOC, no. 1231, ff. 515-16v; no. 1233, f. 595v; no. 1236, ff. 205-7; no. 1240, ff. 532-3, 602-3; no. 1245, ff. 355, 499; no. 1246, ff. 1399, 1432, 1445, 1619-20; no. 1268, ff. 1111-17; no. 1288, ff. 635-8; no. 1291, ff. 586v-7; no. 1295, ff. 264v-9; no. 1299, ff. 345v-7v, 406v-7v; no. 1304, f. 393; no. 1308, ff. 642v-3, 743, 746v, 777; no. 1315, f. 740; no. 1321, ff. 957, 961: letters of Shivappa Nayaka and Mallappa Malu to superintendent Rijcklof van Goens, from Barkur ("Backanoor"), Vengurla, Cochin, and Basrur to Batavia, Kannur (Cannanore), and Gentlemen XVII, from VOC merchant Lefer off the Kanara Coast to Batavia, from a VOC spy at Goa to Vengurla, Apr. 1659, Feb. 1661, May, Dec. 1662, Apr., Aug., Nov. 1664, July 1672, Apr., Nov. 1673, Feb., Dec. 1674, Apr., Oct.-Dec. 1675, Jan. 1676, Feb. 1677, report by *Commandeur* Adriaen Roothaas, June 1660, reports on Vengurla and Ikkeri, July 1664, May 1676, agreements with Ikkeri, May 1668, report of mission to Ikkeri, Apr.-May 1668; Coolhaas *et al.*, *Generale Missiven*, vol. IV, 120; Shastry, *Goa-Kanara Portuguese Relations*, 184, 192-5, 209-15, 218, 304-5; Foster, *The English Factories in India 1661-64*, 120, 343-4, 346, 349 (referring to Mallappa Malu as "Malik Mulla" and "Mollup Molla"), *idem*, 1668-1669, 109, 111-12, 124-5, 268, 270-1; Fawcett, *The English Factories in India* (New Series), vol. I, 298, 308-9, 320, 328, 337; Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "The Portuguese, the Port of Basrur, and the Rice Trade, 1600-50," in *idem* (ed.), *Merchants, Markets and the State in Early Modern India* (Delhi, 1990), 38, 44; R.J. Barendse, *The Arabian Seas: The Indian Ocean World of the Seventeenth Century* (New Delhi, 2002), 213; Rao, *Craft Production and Trade in South Kanara*, 61-2, 159-63; Pinto, *History of Christians in Coastal Karnataka*, 80-1, 86, 96-8, 109; Chitnis, *Keladi Polity*, 48, 79-80, 184-5; Swaminathan, *The Nayakas of Ikkeri*, 107-9, 113.

⁴¹ NA, VOC, no. 1406, ff. 920, 925; no. 2231, f. 2982; no. 2414, ff. 520-2, 541: report of mission to Ikkeri, May 1684, letters from broker Narayana Malu and merchant Venkatesh Malu to VOC official Hendrix and Cochin, Mar. 1732, Jan. 1737, report on meeting with Ikkeri envoys, Nov. 1736; Coolhaas *et al.*, *Generale Missiven*, vol. IV, 120; s'Jacob, *De Nederlanders in Kerala*, 273.

mentioned in VOC reports or in his own letters to the Dutch, both of which sources may not be entirely reliable. However, it is clear that the Malu brothers and their father held multiple, and sometimes simultaneous, functions at the Ikkeri court, acting as trader, ambassador, councillor, general, and—had Narayana accepted the offer—provincial governor. Their prominence as courtiers initially derived from their commercial enterprise, including their monopoly on the kingdom's rice export. Their mercantile connections with European powers appear to have paved the way for their diplomatic undertakings, in turn leading to other ranks and more power at the court—and to greater vulnerability for that matter. Narayana seemed well aware that his political adventures could backfire on his original economic activities. After his second comeback, he refused a position as governor, apparently preferring trade over rule, and the machinations at court frustrated him to the point of a suicide attempt. At any rate, his demise involved both his political and commercial careers, which had evidently grown intertwined.

The great but oscillating power of the Malu family left ample room for other courtiers. As noted in Chapter 2, while Mallappa Malu was allegedly involved in the murder of Venkatappa Nayaka II in 1661, General Shivalinga actually killed this king and initially took charge of the court. Further, Portuguese sources from late 1664 speak of hostilities between King Somashekara Nayaka's brother-in-law and the powerful Secretary Govayya and his brother, governor at the important port of Mangalore.⁴²

General Timmanna dominated the court in the early 1670s, eliminating pretenders to the throne, installing Chennammaji as puppet queen, and locking up officials. Indeed, the English voyager John Fryer reported that Timmanna had raised himself from a "toddy-man" (palm-wine trader) to the kingdom's "protector" and travelled with great pomp and circumstance, and the Dutch claimed he had himself saluted as the Nayaka of Ikkeri.⁴³ Thus, during much of the period of the Malu brothers' activities, power was shared by and fluctuated among different courtiers. Some insight into how influence was divided over various court factions about a decade later, when Chennammaji still sat on the throne, is provided by two VOC reports of 1683 and 1684.

The first of these documents relates that Ikkeri's then General Krishnappayya ("Crustnapaija") fell out with a group of courtiers, including Queen Chennammaji's father Sidappa Chetti ("Sidapchittij") and other associates of hers. They had grown

⁴² Shastry, *Goa-Kanara Portuguese Relations*, 209-12.

⁴³ It has been argued that in 1672-3 Queen Chennammaji sought and received assistance of the Maratha King Shivaji in tempering General Timmanna's power, but Dutch sources make no mention of this. See Suryanath U. Kamath, "Keladi Nayakas and Marathas," *The Quarterly Journal of the Mythic Society* LXI, 1-4 (1970), 66-7.

envious of Krishnappayya, who was leading a successful military campaign against Golkonda and Mysore. This jealousy developing into downright distrust, the queen allegedly felt compelled to issue a secret written order to have the general killed, but this document fell into the very hands of Krishnappayya. First contemplating not returning from his expedition and avoiding the capital, he eventually ensured himself of the support of his friends and troops, and then visited the queen. Chennammaji received him most courteously and presented a robe of honour (*eercelet*) to him. Krishnappayya politely rejected it, showed the paper ordering his assassination, and asked if that document was not a suitable enough robe of honour. This caused great distress and countless apologies were made to the general. He appears to have accepted these, as he remained Ikkeri's general for some time to come, but Chennammaji and many courtiers now feared his power all the more and worried he might start backing another pretender to the throne.⁴⁴ Adding to the tension, around the same time a former court merchant, considered a favourite of Krishnappayya, was stabbed to death just outside the Bednur palace.⁴⁵

This state of affairs seems to have been largely unchanged when less than a year later the VOC envoy Jacob Wilcken embarked on a diplomatic mission to Ikkeri. In April 1684 he arrived at the capital with the aim of obtaining better trading privileges than the Dutch had enjoyed so far. The Company wanted to pay lower tolls and get permission to buy rice from any trader rather than only the court's agents. The embassy proved problematic from the start. General Krishnappayya was supposed to serve as the court's contact for Wilcken, but he had little time to discuss matters, repeatedly saying he did not feel well or was busy entertaining an ambassador from the Golkonda sultanate. At one of his few meetings with Wilcken, the general made clear that he was personally well-disposed towards the VOC but had to reckon with other courtiers.

After a week without any progress, let alone an audience with Queen Chennammaji, Wilcken sought support from another influential courtier. This was, quite exceptionally, a woman, referred to by the Dutch as "Governess" (*gouvernante*) Maribasvama ("Maribassuama"). The VOC ambassador had hitherto refrained from contacting her, fearing this might offend Krishnappayya, but he changed his mind when he found out that the general and the governess were close friends. Wilcken's talks with Maribasvama were equally fruitless, however, revolving around the question of whether lowered tolls would reduce the court's

⁴⁴ This was possibly Shivappa Nayaka II, who seems to have escaped from his imprisonment in Ikkeri in this period. See the introduction and Ikkeri section of Chapter 2.

⁴⁵ NA, VOC, no. 1388, ff. 1975v-6: letter from Cochin to Batavia, July 1683; Fryer, *A New Account of East-India and Persia*, 58, 162. See also NA, VOC, no. 1379, ff. 2355-5v: letter from Cochin to Batavia, May 1682.

income or stimulate trade and thus increase profits. In the end, the governess repeated Krishnappayya's remark that much depended on other courtiers and she recommended Wilcken to stay in touch with the general and no one else.

Finally, two weeks after his arrival in Bednur, the Dutch envoy secured his first audience with the queen. She was accompanied by Krishnappayya, Maribasvama, and an official named Bhadrappa ("Badriaia"), described by Wilcken as "supreme governor" (*opperste gouverneur*). After consultations with the queen, all three courtiers said they largely supported the Company's wishes but that things could be finalised only when the court merchant Siddabasayya ("Zidbasia") returned. This man was currently staying in Ikkeri's former capital Keladi to perform annual royal ceremonies and would be back within a few days. When some time later news came that Siddabasayya had proceeded from Keladi to inspect border fortresses, Wilcken became impatient and, slightly insulted, informed Krishnappayya he would not stay in Bednur much longer. This led to further deliberations with the general, who now seemed somewhat insecure about his own position at court, saying he was willing to force the acceptance of the VOC's demands if only he could be sure this would not prove a bad decision later on.

But soon after, during another audience with Chennammaji—now accompanied by her minor, adopted son, the future King Basavappa Nayaka—Krishnappayya made a different impression. Declaring to speak on behalf of the young king, the general assumed a harsh tone against Wilcken and the meeting turned into an argument in which the Dutch envoy and the courtiers repeated their viewpoints without making any progress. In the subsequent weeks, yet more futile discussions with various functionaries followed and audiences with the queen were endlessly postponed, while the court merchant Siddabasayya never appeared to settle matters during Wilcken's sojourn. Eventually, the envoy returned home without any of the VOC's requests having been granted.⁴⁶

Disappointing though this mission was to Wilcken, his report gives an idea of the relations between various court officials, at least those involved in Ikkeri's contacts with the VOC and thus having a say in commercial, diplomatic, and military affairs. Much less is known about the background and careers of these people than about the Malu brothers. Yet, to some extent one can deduce the functions and power they held and reconstruct the court factions they belonged to.

First, there was a coalition of General Krishnappayya, "Governess" Maribasvama, and possibly "Chief Governor" Bhadrappa, which essentially favoured the VOC. Krishnappayya was referred to as "field lord" (*veltoverste*), indicating a high military commander. According to the chronicle *Keladinṛpa vijayam*, Krishnappayya had occupied the position of *sabbunīsa* since the reign of Somashekara Nayaka.

⁴⁶ NA, VOC, no. 1406, ff. 909v-33: report of mission to Ikkeri, Apr.-May 1684.

This military rank came just below the *daḷavāy*, but in Ikkeri it had a more or less equal standing.⁴⁷ It is unclear which functions Maribasvama and Bhadrappa held, but the former is mentioned in Dutch records as an important figure for trade matters between at least 1681 and 1684, while the latter was obviously considered a very highly placed person, perhaps the chief minister or *pradhāni*.⁴⁸ In spite of their prominence, however, these courtiers could not force decisions without getting other functionaries on their side, or so reported ambassador Wilcken.

Those other officials apparently belonged to a second, opposing faction, less clearly defined in Wilcken's account. It may well be that these were the people who had tried to eliminate Krishnappayya the year before. Judging from Wilcken's quote below, this group included the court merchant Siddabasayya, some relatives of the king, the governor of the port of Mangalore, and—as Wilcken suggested elsewhere in his report—several Brahmin traders. Of these, Siddabasayya seems to have been particularly powerful, although his exact function is, again, unclear. In the period of Wilcken's mission, he likely was the court's chief rice merchant and probably also held other posts, considering his performance of a royal ceremony in the old capital Keladi and examination of defence works.

A third party can perhaps be said to have consisted of Queen Chennammaji and her minor son, as there is no indication the queen associated herself with either of the main factions in this period. How influential Chennammaji actually was, is hard to determine, but from Wilcken's account it appears she occasionally took part in negotiations with the VOC envoy and had to give her consent to certain decisions.

In any case, during Wilcken's stay in Bednur, none of these alliances seems to have been dominant and all had to reckon with one another. As the Dutch envoy concluded:

... the field lord [General Krishnappayya]—as we could not have noticed differently—has done his best, with sincere intentions, to advance the Company's free trade. And although that lord, in our presence, has displayed himself in the opposite way before the queen and others, that happened in order to show that he sought not to lessen the

⁴⁷ Swaminathan, *The Nāyakas of Ikkeri*, 112, 116–19; Chitnis, *Keladi Polity*, 165–6. See also BL/AAS, MG, no. 6, pt. 11: "Historical account of Beedoonoor or Caladee Samstanum," ff. 80v–iv, where *Sabbunisa* Krishnappayya seems to be referred to as "Sabneveesoo Croostapiah."

⁴⁸ I have found no clear references to Maribasvama and Bhadrappa in Indian sources or secondary literature. Wilcken's report does not give Maribasvama's name, but it appears in other VOC documents. See NA, VOC, no. 1370, f. 2083v; no. 1373, ff. 361v, 370v; no. 1379, f. 2411v: letters from Cochín to Gentlemen XVII, Vengurla, and Basrur, Jan. 1681, Dec. 1682, memorandum for Basrur and Vengurla, Mar. 1682. This Bhadrappa should not be confused with Kasiyya Bhadrappa who attempted to install his son on the throne in the early 1670s.

king's revenues—which, as some troublemakers [*dwarsdrijvers*] suggest, would be the consequence of the free trade. And we know for sure that, in our absence, His Excellency [Krishnappayya] has made enough effort with the queen—for the benefit of the Company's business—to bring to reason the troublemakers or opponents [*tegenstrevers*], of whom the king's father and brother [Mariyappa and Mannappa Chetti], as well as the court's rice trader Zidbasuwaia [Siddabasayya] and the Mangeloorse governor, are the principal ones ...⁴⁹

Thus can be explained Krishnappayya's behaviour of privately professing support for the VOC and publicly showing toughness. He surely was a powerful official, considering for instance that he conducted some of Ikkeri's correspondence with the Dutch and that they believed gifts to him could make the whole court comply with their wishes.⁵⁰ Moreover, he commanded a great number of troops. But in his efforts to realise his goals, he had to beware of becoming even more suspect in the eyes of his rivals, as he admitted to Wilcken. Indeed, during the latter's visit, the general's influence had probably diminished already. The soured Dutch-Ikkeri relations in the subsequent years appear to confirm this. Since its requests were not granted, the VOC even temporarily closed its factory at Basrur and trade came to a near standstill.⁵¹ Apparently, Krishnappayya remained unable to win over other courtiers.

It is of course also possible that the court simply feigned internal disagreement to Wilcken in an attempt to reject the Company's demands without embittering it too much, presenting Krishnappayya as a friend of the Dutch, whose advice could be trusted. But whether the general faced competition at court or not, after 1684 he disappears from the VOC archives, while the overall political patterns sketched above continue to figure in those records for many more decades. For instance, these documents suggest that from the mid-1680s the court merchant Siddabasayya consolidated his position and dominated the court. Until his death around 1696, Dutch references to most probably the same man call him the "state governor" (*rijcxbestierder*, possibly *pradhāni*), and say he clashed with Queen Chennammaji at least once.⁵²

⁴⁹ NA, VOC, no. 1406, f. 932 (translation mine).

⁵⁰ NA, VOC, no. 1379, ff. 2353v, 2411v-12: letter from Cochin to Batavia, May 1682, memorandum for Basrur and Vengurla, Mar. 1682.

⁵¹ Coolhaas *et al.*, *Generale Missiven*, vol. IV, 824, vol. V (The Hague, 1975), 61.

⁵² NA, VOC, no. 1463, ff. 439-9v; no. 1474, ff. 15, 116-17, 191, 315, 329v, 336v: letters from Sadashiva Nayaka to Nagapattinam, from Basrur to Cochin, from Cochin to Gentlemen XVII, from "Sidij Bassuajia" to Cochin, Jan., May-June, Dec. 1689, Jan. 1690, report on Vengurla and Ikkeri, Mar. 1689; Coolhaas *et al.*, *Generale Missiven*, vol. V, 802. Siddabasayya may be the same person as one of Chennammaji's important officers, perhaps a treasurer, known as (Bokkasada) Siddabasavayya. See: Swaminathan, *The Nayakas of Ikkeri*, 124; Chitnis, *Keladi Polity*, 71.

Eighteenth-century Ikkeri saw many courtiers whose careers were as diverse, illustrious, or volatile as those of Narayana Malu, Krishnappayya, or Siddabasayya. While these officials are too numerous to even list here, one example that should be briefly mentioned is Nirvanayya. From the 1710s to the 1730s he held various offices, including that of “state governor” (*rijxbestierder*), and maintained his own ships for overseas horse trading. Figuring in both local and European sources, he further stands out because in 1722 his daughter Nilammaji was married in a grandiose wedding ceremony to King Somashekara Nayaka II, as was another daughter on a separate occasion.

In 1730, however, the VOC reported that disagreements had arisen between Nirvanayya (“Nerwanea”) and his royal son-in-law. The marriages between Somashekara II and Nirvanayya’s daughters had produced no children and opinions differed on who should be considered the heir apparent. Whereas Somashekara II preferred his nephew, Nirvanayya favoured his own son, Sangana Basappa, thus bluntly disregarding the king’s wish. After this confrontation, Nirvanayya’s prominence diminished. During VOC embassies to Ikkeri in 1735 and 1738, Dutch envoys were discouraged from presenting gifts to him or even visiting him. Indeed, Somashekara II’s hatred of Nirvanayya reached such heights that nobody at court dared to mention his name, while his possessions had been confiscated in the hope he would “lay his head down.”⁵³ Clearly, marital ties to a dynasty would not always prevent courtiers from falling out of favour, but could actually contribute to it.

This survey concludes by considering how the Dutch distributed gifts among courtiers each time they sent an embassy to Ikkeri, thus providing a series of snapshots of the court’s balance of power, as the VOC saw it. This information is available for only three missions, as lists of presents during other missions have not survived. Further, because Dutch-Ikkeri relations were deeply troubled during the embassy

⁵³ NA, VOC, no. 1852, ff. 60-2; no. 1977, ff. 110-10v; no. 2130, f. 53; no. 2187, ff. 9-11v, 148-8v; no. 2187, f. 222; no. 2200, ff. 1134, 1257; no. 2201, ff. 1897-9; no. 2228, ff. 949-50, 952, 955-5v; no. 2229, ff. 2031-1v, 2035; no. 2231, ff. 2891-2v, 2964; no. 2232, ff. 3593-8; no. 2354, ff. 1535, 1578, 1604, 1606-7: letters from Cochin to Batavia and Gentlemen XVII, from Basrur to Cochin, from Nirvanayya and merchant “Sunderdas Wistnadas” to the VOC, May 1714, May 1722, Apr. 1729, Sept., Nov. 1730, May, c. Sept.-Oct., Dec. 1731, Apr. 1732, Cochin diary, Apr. 1730, report on Malabar, May 1732, reports of missions to Ikkeri, Oct.-Dec. 1731, Jan.-Mar. 1735; TNA, DR, no. 257, ff. 9, 17-23: report of mission to Ikkeri, Apr.-May 1738 (also available in NA, VOC, no. 2435, ff. 2236-69); Pinto, *History of Christians in Coastal Karnataka*, 91; *Annual Report of the Mysore Archaeological Department for the Year 1915-16* (Bangalore, 1916), 68; *Epigraphia Carnatica*, vol. VIII, *Inscriptions in the Shimoga District (Part II)*, ed. B. Lewis Rice (Bangalore, 1904), 294, 324, 361-2; R.S. Siva Ganesha Murthy, “Sanskrit Literature under Keladi Rule,” in G.S. Dikshit (ed.), *Studies in Keladi History (Seminar Papers)* (Bangalore, 1981), 102; Swaminathan, *The Nāyakas of Ikkeri*, 141-2, 149, 224, Appendix B (between 280-1); Chitnis, *Keladi Polity*, 40, 69-71, 116; Shastry, *Goa-Kanara Portuguese Relations*, 232, 237-8, 291; Guha, “Transitions and Translations,” 29.

in 1684 (described above), no gifts were brought on that mission, save for some minor ones for Queen Chennammaji.

Table 9 ranks people according to the value of the presents they each received, indicating who were considered most influential by the VOC—or, in 1738, by the court itself. The embassy in that year was one of the rare occasions on which Dutch envoys were urged to distribute their gifts differently than initially planned. They intended to donate the most valuable presents to “former state governor” Nirvanayya and General Raghunatha Odduru (“Regenade Odderoe”). But a court’s representative sent to discuss this, explained that Chief Minister Devappa (“state governor Dewapa”) and Secretary Paramasarayya (“Parmasaraija”) now dominated the court. Not honouring these men with gifts would damage the VOC’s interests. Like Nirvanayya, General Raghunatha Odduru had recently fallen from grace. In 1734 he had single-handedly concluded an unfavourable peace treaty with the Dutch and he was suspected of silently allowing the Portuguese to build a fortress at Mangalore, of which port he was the governor. Therefore—although he still enjoyed the privilege of sitting one step below the king during audiences, together with Devappa—Raghunatha Odduru should receive fewer presents than other, more prominent officials.⁵⁴

Despite its limited coverage, table 9 underscores the dynamics transpiring from the preceding paragraphs. While the monarch naturally always received the most presents, the order of other offices differed with each embassy, suggesting these functions did not always ensure the same levels of power. In 1668, court merchant Narayana Malu received the second most valuable gifts, followed by various councillors and, at the bottom of the list, a secretary. In contrast, in 1735 a secretary occupied second place, with a treasurer coming next. Only three years later, the then secretary had moved to third place, since Chief Minister Devappa was now most honoured after the king.⁵⁵ The general, often the most powerful official in Ikkeri’s history, received the least during this mission.

⁵⁴ TNA, DR, no. 257, ff. 9, 17-23: report of mission to Ikkeri, Apr.-May 1738. For General Raghunatha Odduru, see: NA, VOC, no. 2226, ff. 54, 57; no. 2340, ff. 410v-18; no. 2354, ff. 1535, 1547, 1573-7, 1591-3; no. 2414, ff. 529, 531; no. 2432, f. 75v; no. 2433, ff. 231-32v, 245v, 436v, 504v, 512v-13, 538, 540v; no. 2435, f. 2232v; no. 2462, ff. 157, 371-iv, 433-3v: letters from Cochin to Gentlemen XVII and Batavia, Oct. 1732, Mar. 1738, final report (*memorie van overgave*) of Malabar *Commandeur* Adriaan Maten, Jan. 1735, report of mission to Ikkeri, Jan.-Mar. 1735, report on meeting with envoys from Ikkeri, Nov. 1736, “indigenous” diary (*inheems dagregister*, with correspondence and reports), Oct.-Dec. 1737, Jan. 1738, Nov. 1738, instructions for mission to Ikkeri, Mar. 1738; Heeres and Stapel, *Corpus diplomaticum Neerlandico-Indicum*, vol. 5 (The Hague, 1938), 199-203; Chitnis, *Keladi Polity*, 160-1, 167-8, 172-3, 183, 190; Swaminathan, *The Nāyakas of Ikkēri*, 132, 137. For violent Dutch-Ikkeri conflicts in this period, see NA, VOC, no. 2320, ff. 1507-698; no. 2414, ff. 137-477: reports concerning expeditions against Ikkeri, etc., c. 1734, Apr. 1736.

⁵⁵ It is not clear whether Devappayya (“Deopaja”), treasurer in 1735, was the same person as Devappa (“Dewapa”), chief minister in 1738.

Table 9: Distribution of gifts among prominent courtiers during Dutch missions to Ikkeri, in order of value, 1668-1738.

1668	1735	1738
<i>king</i> Somashekara	<i>king</i> Somashekara II	<i>king</i> Somashekara II
<i>court merchant</i> Narayana Malu	<i>secretary</i> Chanappayya	<i>chief minister</i> Devappa
<i>chief councillor</i> “Jantopaneijck”	<i>treasurer</i> Devappayya	<i>secretary</i> Paramasarayya
<i>second councillor</i> “Marij Boeij”		<i>general & governor</i> Raghunatha Odduru
<i>two councillors & a secretary</i>		

Sources: NA, VOC, no. 1268, ff. 1113v-4v; no. 2354, ff. 1537-45, 1550-2; TNA, DR, no. 257, ff. 17-24.

Obviously, the balance of power suggested by table 9 is largely based on Dutch observations and gives an incomplete picture, like all events discussed in this section. There were of course other officials in prominent positions, whom the VOC did not meet or write about. Further, the Dutch stayed in Ikkeri only during the second half of the kingdom's existence and even then they were absent from the court for long periods. Nevertheless, for all their limitations these sources reveal certain tendencies.

First, the courtiers thought to have been most influential over the years comprise a diverse group. Little is known about the background of most: we are aware only that the Malu family was of Brahmin descent,⁵⁶ and that Nirvanayya was probably a Lingayat, like Ikkeri's Nayakas, considering his daughters' marriages to the king. However, a survey of the positions held by the most prominent courtiers over time gives an idea of the variety among these ranks. At the very least, this list contains merchants Mallappa and Narayana Malu, General Timmanna, merchant Siddabasayya, “state governor” Nirvanayya, Secretary Chanappayya, and Chief Minister Devappa. One can add members of the royal family who, in the name of their relative on the throne, controlled the kingdom, like Basavappa Nayaka's father and uncle, Mariyappa and Mannappa Chetti. Some treasurers and various governors—including provincial ones and a woman—also exercised substantial power. Clearly, the formal positions of these courtiers bore little relation to their actual might. Offices could be very prominent when occupied by one person and much less significant when held by another. Between the 1660s and 1680s, the most influential

⁵⁶ Many more Ikkeri courtiers (not treated here) were Brahmins. See Swaminathan, *The Nayakas of Ikkeri*, 183.

courtiers were court merchants and generals. In the 1730s, people in these positions were less important, the court now being dominated by a secretary and a treasurer.

Further, courtiers moved between or combined functions to increase their power. Court merchants Narayana Malu and Siddabasayya acquired governmental and military ranks, and General Raghunatha Odduru served as the governor of Mangalore. With extra offices came more authority, status, servants, connections, resources, information, and therefore influence. Exploiting family relations or forging ties with prominent persons were additional means to advance one's position. The Malu family is just one example of the former kind of bonds. VOC documents abound with important people who were brothers, cousins, or other blood-relatives of one another. When General Timmanna died in 1676, his competitor Queen Chennammaji imprisoned some of his family members. Their considerable possessions, confiscated at this time, suggest they had risen to power in Timmanna's wake. In the 1720s, when "state governor" Nirvanayya was at his most powerful, his brother and his son received gifts from the Dutch on various occasions, indicating their high status. And in 1737, the brother of the influential Secretary Devappa was installed as general, governor of Mangalore, or both, albeit for a brief period.⁵⁷ As for links between non-blood-related courtiers, the report of the VOC mission in 1684 mentions several coalitions between courtiers who seemingly were not biological relatives. Nirvanayya was particularly effective in establishing such ties when he had his daughters marry the king.

Yet, as Nirvanayya's case demonstrates, no career step guaranteed security. Court factions obviously emerged—and fell apart—depending on the advantages they yielded. All officials ran the risk of losing their power, and many did so, sometimes even more than once. Narayana Malu repeatedly supported unsuccessful pretenders to throne, Krishnappayya annoyed jealous opponents, Nirvanayya grew overconfident, Raghunatha Odduru behaved too independently—all contributing to their downfall. Very few people kept their position for long. Career lengths cannot be determined with much precision, but no courtier considered above seems to have maintained great influence for longer than two decades. For most, their period in power was much shorter.

Nayakas of Tanjavur

It is impossible to arrive at such specific conclusions for courtiers serving under Tanjavur's Nayaka house, because for most of its existence one depends on south Indian sources. Intensive contacts between this court and the VOC lasted no longer

⁵⁷ NA, VOC, no. 1315, f. 740; no. 1977, ff. 110-10v; no. 2130, ff. 323v-4; no. 2433, ff. 436-6v: letters from Cochin to Gentlemen XVII and Batavia, Feb. 1677, May 1722, Cochin proceedings, Jan. 1729, "indigenous" diary, Dec. 1737.

than fifteen years: from 1658, when the Dutch captured the port of Nagapattinam, to 1673, when the Tanjavur Nayakas were dethroned by Madurai. But even VOC records of that period are not particularly rich when it comes to Tanjavur officials. There are, for instance, no Dutch embassy reports to throw light on the court's composition and its internal power relations. Therefore, this section only discusses a courtier dominating Tanjavur's early phase—based on local texts—and what little VOC documents say on functionaries during the Nayakas' last few decades.

First, we briefly inventory which important positions are thought to have existed in this kingdom, as listed in secondary literature based on south Indian sources. Like in Ikkeri, courtiers or ministers were referred to as *mantri* and *saciva*. Most prominent would have been three officials also encountered in Vijayanagara and Ikkeri. In descending order, these were the *pradhāni* (chief minister), the *daḷavāy* or *senāpati* (general), and, quite a bit lower in rank, the *rāyasam* (secretary), the first of which posts was allegedly always held by a Brahmin. Then followed some financial officers, including the *aṭṭavaṇai* (chief accountant of the revenue department) and the *tōshikāna adhikāri* (head of the treasury).⁵⁸ Judging from this literature, it is unclear which other types of high functionaries existed.

During almost half of this dynasty's relatively short span of about 140 years, one courtier stood out above everyone else: Govinda Dikshita. Indeed, his exalted position seems on par with that of his contemporary Ariyanatha Mudaliar, Madurai's powerful minister introduced at this chapter's beginning. Govinda is also mentioned in Chapter 1, as he figures in the origin stories of Tanjavur's Nayakas. One tradition traces the earliest career phase of this Brahmin, who came from the Kannada-speaking region, to Vijayanagara. Visiting the imperial court, he impressed the ruler Achyuta Raya (r. 1529-42) with his knowledge of religious texts and astrology, and was then employed as a courtier.

At Vijayanagara Govinda met the young Shevappa Nayaka, future founder of Tanjavur's Nayaka house. Recognising Shevappa's potential, Govinda introduced him to the emperor, who took him into his service. After military feats and marrying the emperor's sister-in-law, Shevappa became governor of Tanjavur, taking Govinda with him as his minister. Legend has it that Shevappa even offered his own position to Govinda, but he declined this since Brahmins were not to harbour royal ambitions. Instead, he served as the main official not only of Shevappa (r. c. 1530s-70s) but of several of his descendants, too.⁵⁹ Thus, some texts suggest that

⁵⁸ Vriddhagirisan, *The Nayaks of Tanjore*, 169-71.

⁵⁹ In addition to the sources and literature mentioned in Chapter 1, see Mahalingam, *Mackenzie Manuscripts*, vol. II, 344, for a text saying Govinda Dikshita even served under the dynasty's last real ruler, Vijayaraghava Nayaka (r. 1631-73).

Govinda was a courtier under this dynasty right from its beginning and lived and worked for an exceptionally long time.

Historians presume Govinda was in fact chiefly active during the reigns of Achyutappa Nayaka (c. 1570s-97?) and Raghunatha Nayaka (c. 1597?-1626). He is mentioned in inscriptions from the years between 1588 and 1634, and works like the *Raghunāthābhyudayamu* also link him to these rulers. Thus, he was still active for an exceedingly long period, compared with officials in Ikkeri. Little is known of Govinda's actual life, but a number of texts together suggest he held several court offices over time. The Sanskrit *Sāhitya ratnākara*, written by Govinda's son Yagnanarayana Dikshita, calls him *guru* (preceptor) and it is likely he was the Nayakas' *purōhita* (royal or family priest), in which capacity he may have crowned Raghunatha. The same work declares that he functioned as regent of Tanjavur when Raghunatha left the capital for a military campaign. In an inscription of 1631 he is specifically referred to as *pradhāni*, while the Telugu *Taijāvūri āndhra rājula caritra* seems to mention Govinda as both minster and general. So perhaps at one point he occupied the combined ranks of *pradhāni* and *daḷavāy*, like Madurai's Ariyanatha Mudaliar supposedly did.

In addition, Govinda built religious edifices, made gifts, and composed philosophical works. His prominence is further demonstrated by texts stating that he was allowed to sit on the same seat as Raghunatha while watching a play, and that this king held an umbrella—symbol of royalty—over Govinda's head when the latter performed a sacrifice. In short, both before and after his death, he enjoyed an illustrious reputation and over the years achieved some kind of saintly status (see illustration 9).⁶⁰

Based on this scant information, certain aspects of Govinda Dikshita's life as a courtier remind us of the Vijayanagara and Ikkeri courts. First, he clearly became a very powerful figure, outshining other officials and being glorified in literature and inscriptions. According to the *Sāhitya ratnākara*, Govinda not only arranged the coronation of Raghunatha, but also initiated the abdication of his predecessor Achyutappa, suggesting he played an influential role in this succession, like so many courtiers did in Vijayanagara and its heirs. Second, he apparently held several offices, simultaneously or consecutively, involving administrative, religious, and perhaps military duties. Third, Govinda's family ties played an

⁶⁰ Krishnaswami Aiyangar, *Sources of Vijayanagar History*, 267-74, 323; Venkatesam, "Govinda Deekshita"; Vriddhagirisan, *The Nayaks of Tanjore*, 54, 74, 105, 113-25, 170, 185-7 (nos 34, 36, 40, 46-7, 50, 54-5); Heras, *The Aravidu Dynasty of Vijayanagara*, vol. I, 288, 399-401, 522; Narayana Rao, Shulman, and Subrahmanyam, *Symbols of Substance*, 40, 248; M. Krishnamachariar, *History of Classical Sanskrit Literature ...* (Madras, 1937), 231-4; P.V. Jagadisa Ayyar, *South Indian Shrines* (Madras, 1920), 76; Padma Seshadri and Padma Malini Sundararaghavan, *It Happened along the Kaveri: A Journey through Space and Time* (New Delhi, 2012), 267.



Illustration 9: Statue of the Tanjavur courtier Govinda Dikshita, Amman Shrine Mandapa, Thenupurisvarar Temple, Pattisvaram (photo by Ssriram mt, source: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Govinda_Dikshita).

important role, since several of his sons rose to prominence, too. One text claims that Venkateshvara Dikshita served as a minister under Vijayaraghava Nayaka (r. 1631-73), while Yagnanarayana Dikshita was a celebrated court poet during Raghunatha's reign.⁶¹ Notwithstanding all this, we read nothing about rivalry with other courtiers, temporary or permanent downfalls, or other troubles. Govinda's

⁶¹ Vriddhagirisan, *The Nayaks of Tanjore*, 4-5, 59, 116, 118, 122-4; Krishnaswami Aiyangar, *Sources of Vijayanagar History*, 252, 269, 273.

career was a smooth one, local sources lead us to believe. But obviously, not all of Tanjavur's officials, or perhaps none at all, shared that experience. That, at least, is what the few Dutch records on functionaries under these Nayakas indicate.

The first Tanjavur courtiers the VOC archives refer to, albeit very briefly, include some *daḷavāys*. In 1652 it was noted that "dalleweij" Narayanappa Nayaka ("Narnapaneijcq") had been dismissed, for reasons unknown. Six years later, a message was received from an official described as the "dalleweij and great governor of the lowlands [*beneden landen*, coastal areas]" and probably called Kumarappa Nayaka ("Commerapaneijck"). In 1663, Tanjavur's chief general (*veltoverste*) was reported to be Tubaki Lingama Nayaka, the former *daḷavāy* of Madurai, who had fled that kingdom in the previous year but would return to his former position in the following year. As for local sources, an inscription of 1644 speaks of *Daḷavāy* Venkatadri Nayaka, while the *Taṅjāvūri āndhra rājula caritra* mentions Rangappa Nayaka in this function during Tanjavur's conquest by Madurai in 1673.⁶² These scattered references suggest there were at least four and probably five *daḷavāys* during the Nayakas' last three decades, implying they generally did not occupy this rank for long. Besides, one of them was apparently both general and coastal provincial governor, thus combining military and administrative functions.

More is known about another courtier of sorts, the magnate Chinanna Chetti, often called Malaya ("Maleije") in Dutch and English documents. Like some Nayaka houses, he belonged to one of the Balija castes, originating in the Telugu zone and engaged in both mercantile and military activities. Much of Chinanna's career has been described elsewhere,⁶³ but here his familial connections and many different positions are important. Similar to Ikkeri's Malu brothers, Chinanna was part of a family of merchants who branched off into a whole range of other enterprises.

His brother Achyutappa Chetti, also referred to as Malaya in European sources, was the first to grow prominent. While in the early seventeenth century he still worked as an intermediary between the Senji Nayakas and the VOC, in the 1620s and 1630s Achyutappa had become not only a powerful merchant, sending ships overseas, but also a dealer in arms and horses, a diplomat active at the courts

⁶² NA, VOC, no. 1195, f. 504; no. 1227, f. 5v; no. 1231, ff. 151, 154, 167; no. 1240, ff. 378-9; no. 1243, f. 186; no. 1246, f. 498: letters from Pulicat to Batavia, from merchant-envoy Chinanna Chetti and King Vijayaraghava Nayaka to Admiral Van Goens, from Jaffna to Pulicat, Aug. 1652, Jan., Sept.-Oct. 1658, Feb. 1662, Jan. 1663, Feb. 1664; Vriddhagirisan, *The Nayaks of Tanjore*, 153 (n. 15), 188 (no. 58). For Tubaki Lingama Nayaka, father of Madurai's Queen Mangammal (r. 1691-1707) and brother of Senji's *Daḷavāy* Tubaki Krishnappa Nayaka, see also the section on Madurai below.

⁶³ See: Subrahmanyam, *The Political Economy of Commerce*, 300-14; Mukund, *The Trading World of the Tamil Merchant*, 62-6; Joseph J. Brenning, "Chief Merchants and the European Enclaves of Seventeenth-Century Coromandel," *Modern Asian Studies* 11, 3 (1977), 323-8; Seshan, *Trade and Politics on the Coromandel Coast*, 62-7.

of Vijayanagara (at Chandragiri) and Madurai, a revenue-farmer administering extensive coastal areas, and a broker for the English.

Chinanna, initially an agent for his brother, was heavily involved in politics as well. Since the 1620s he had been an influential figure at the Senji court. After Achyutappa's passing in 1634, Chinanna took over his brother's role as the VOC's main broker on the Coromandel Coast. Around the same time, he captured a fort in which Vijayanagara's Timma Raja had entrenched himself, thus ending the latter's succession struggle with Emperor Venkata II. In 1637 this ruler requested Chinanna to mediate in conflicts between Tanjavur, Madurai, and Senji. In 1642 Vijayanagara's Emperor Sriranga III presented some fortresses and villages to him and in 1646 he escorted that ruler on a mission to the Dutch settlement at Pulicat. As the English wrote in the mid-1640s, Chinanna was held in such high esteem by Sriranga III that he was made the emperor's treasurer and "ruleth both king and contry." Apparently quick to forge ties with newly arrived powers, in the late 1640s he farmed revenue in some coastal territories recently conquered by the Bijapur sultanate. Meanwhile, Chinanna's large-scale seaborne trade continued to flourish, although he faced heavy and at times violent competition from some relatives and Senji's powerful *Daḷavāy* Tubaki Krishnappa Nayaka.⁶⁴

Originally chiefly active in other kingdoms, Chinanna became some kind of courtier in Tanjavur only very late in his life. Nevertheless, he seemed well on his way to acquire a special position there. In September 1658, following their conquest of Nagapattinam from the Portuguese, the Dutch sent him to Tanjavur's King Vijayaraghava Nayaka to discuss a treaty that would formally recognise the VOC's possession of the port. According to Chinanna's own account of this mission, the actual negotiations about Nagapattinam progressed with some difficulty. But Chinanna himself was allegedly treated with great respect by the Nayaka. During the first audience, he received several marks of honour and talked with the king about the "olden times" and the days of Chinanna's father. Vijayaraghava then announced he would place some lands under Chinanna's administration, while a few days later, at a more intimate audience, he once more stated he held Chinanna in high esteem. Confirming the merchant's own remarks about his standing with

⁶⁴ Subrahmanyam, *The Political Economy of Commerce*, 300-14; Mukund, *The Trading World of the Tamil Merchant*, 65-6; Brenniq, "Chief Merchants and the European Enclaves of Seventeenth-Century Coromandel," *passim*, especially 323-8; Raychaudhuri, *Jan Company in Coromandel*, 42-4, 52-6; MacLeod, *De Oost-Indische Compagnie*, vol. II, 13-15, 170-1, 183-93; NA, VOC, no. 1231, f. 146v: instructions by Admiral Van Goens to Nagapattinam, Sept. 1658; Colenbrander *et al.*, *Dagh-register gehouden int Casteel Batavia ... anno 1643-1644*, 244. For English references to the Chetti brothers, see: Foster, *The English Factories in India 1622-1623*, 122, 141, 238, *idem*, 1624-1629, 9, 16, 131, 358, *idem*, 1642-1645, 154, 279-80, 285, 290.

Vijayaraghava, the VOC wrote that Chinanna had free access to the king because of his long-existing prestige at court.

That Vijayaraghava's compliments were not mere words became clear when by January 1659 the supervision of all the kingdom's ports had been leased to Chinanna. But his rise to prominence was not confined to commerce, administration, and diplomacy. In October 1658 he informed the Dutch that the Nayaka had agreed to marry Chinanna's daughter and let his own daughter marry Chinanna's son.⁶⁵ Later VOC records suggest these weddings really took place, and at any rate this agreement further indicated that Chinanna's power at court was quickly increasing and expanding. Having served several dynasties, he now established familial connections with one of them. He could not enjoy this status for long, however. In April 1659 he passed away and, in true courtly style, was cremated together with thirty-three of his wives.⁶⁶ Had he lived longer, he probably would have become a fully-fledged Tanjavur courtier, at least in the sense of the term adopted here.

The last official under Tanjavur's Nayakas considered here is a somewhat obscure one. Referred to by the Dutch as "old court woman" (*oude hooffse wijff*) and named Vengamma ("Wengama"), this ambassadress was repeatedly dispatched by Vijayaraghava Nayaka to the VOC to discuss outstanding debts, overdue gifts, and withheld tolls. Vengamma's exact position at court is not clear, but she was active at least between 1658—taking part in Tanjavur's negotiations with Chinanna about the VOC's control of Nagapattinam—and 1666, when she last appears in Dutch records.

Having first visited the VOC at Pulicat in 1661, in early 1664 Vengamma travelled there again and also called at Nagapattinam to collect money for the Nayaka, to return to Pulicat once more in the middle of that year. The Tanjavur court had given her a limited mandate, however. Her embassies seemed chiefly meant as a charm offensive, launched, the VOC presumed, because Vijayaraghava was in great need of money and elephants. The Dutch further suspected that the ambassadress pursued personal interests as well, trying to increase her status in the eyes of both the Nayaka and the VOC. When she visited Pulicat again a few months later with another overly friendly letter from the court, the Dutch even started wondering if this correspondence was fabricated by her.

Since all this made the Company exercise restraint, Vengamma's missions achieved little, apparently making her insecure. In mid-1665, she was delegated

⁶⁵ This seems to confirm that Tanjavur's Nayakas and Chinanna Chetti's family both belonged to Balija castes.

⁶⁶ NA, VOC, no. 1231, ff. 146v, 149, 150v, 186, 632, 642v, 711, 712-12v; no. 8925, ff. 147-8: instructions by Admiral Van Goens to Nagapattinam, Sept. 1658, correspondence between Chinanna Chetti, Van Goens, Pulicat, and Batavia, Sept.-Oct. 1658, Jan. 1659, report of Kandy envoys received at Nagapattinam, Feb. 1710.

once more, now to Nagapattinam, but lingered in the nearby town of Kivalur, hesitant to risk an embassy proving as fruitless as the previous ones. In the end, she just returned home, mission wholly unaccomplished. In the following months, the court and the Company exchanged several letters—the former requesting that Vengamma be received by the Dutch governor in Pulicat, the latter replying that although she might visit the subordinate Nagapattinam settlement, this would be useless without her being granted proper powers of attorney. Eventually, in late 1666, when Vengamma had yet again embarked on a mission to the Dutch and pleaded with them that she did not dare appear before her king without bringing money back, they gave in and provided her with some capital due to Tanjavur for the lease of a few villages. She left Nagapattinam for good on that same day.⁶⁷

Vengamma seems to have been a courtier with little power. Whether she was acting on the Nayaka's orders or also on her own behalf, she lacked the authority to operate effectively and reach her goals. Tanjavur may have chosen a woman as representative in the hope of creating leniency among the Dutch, but since she had no real mandate to bargain, they could not consider her a serious negotiator, giving them an easy excuse to ignore the Nayaka's demands. As a consequence, Vengamma got stuck between the king and the VOC, unable to fulfil the expectations of either party and thereby employ her diplomatic activities to attain more standing at court. Thus, she did not join the ranks of the other discussed Tanjavur officials, who grew increasingly influential and often shifted between different functions.

Although there is little information about courtiers in Nayaka Tanjavur, these examples suggest that careers here largely resembled those in Ikkeri and Vijayanagara. People like Govinda Dikshita and Chinanna Chetti combined various functions, relied on family relations, played an important part in dynastic developments, and held great power, although it is unclear if they dominated the entire court, including the king himself. Further, judging from the brief survey of Tanjavur's last few *daḷavāys*, most careers seem not to have lasted long. For one aspect, Nayaka Tanjavur appears to have differed from Ikkeri: courtiers shifting allegiance between courts. Tubaki Lingama Nayaka was *daḷavāy* in Madurai, Tanjavur, and Madurai again, and merchant Chinanna Chetti served at least three other states—Senji, Vijayanagara, and Bijapur—as diplomat, military officer, and revenue-farmer before he rose to prominence in Tanjavur.

⁶⁷ NA, VOC, no. 1234, f. 133; no. 1236, f. 922; no. 1246, ff. 498, 565, 1514; no. 1248, ff. 1968-71, 2338-9; no. 1252, ff. 871-2, 1112; no. 1253, f. 1769; no. 1254, ff. 512-14; no. 1256, f. 728: letters from Pulicat and Nagapattinam to Gentlemen XVII and Batavia, from Nagapattinam to Pulicat, Sept. 1661, Feb.-Mar., June-July, Oct. 1664, May-June, Oct.-Nov. 1665, Sept. 1666; Heeres and Stapel, *Corpus diplomaticum Neerlandico-Indicum*, vol. 2, 190.

Bhonsles of Tanjavur

Research of courtiers at Tanjavur's Bhonsle court, for which many sources have survived, reveals some elements not encountered so far. That is not surprising, considering the origins of this house in Maratha western India and its past under various Deccan sultanates. According to secondary literature, the council of ministers at this court chiefly consisted of heads of various departments, generally well-educated men from upper classes. The Sanskrit text *Strīdharmapaddhati*—probably composed by Tanjavur's courtier Tryambaka Makhi in the first half of the eighteenth century—adds that the king should meet with his ministers and his general every afternoon, at half past one and half past four, respectively.

Unlike in other kingdoms, the term *mantri* (or *maṇṭrī*) did not primarily refer to any high official but rather denoted the chief minister. The word *khārbārī* seems to have been sometimes used for this function too. The second most important post was that of *daḷavāy* (also *senāpati*, general), which was occasionally occupied by the *mantri* himself, in that case holding both the main administrative and military powers. Next came the *dīwān* or *pradhāni*, who was responsible for the collection of revenue—the second designation thus having a somewhat different connotation than at the other courts. It appears that two distinct names were also employed for the rank of chief accountant: *samprati* and *dabīr*, but the latter word could refer to a secretary as well. The use of different terms for what seem to have been largely similar offices was no doubt often the result of the convergence in Bhonsle Tanjavur of Indic traditions and Persian influences in political organisation and terminology.

Other prominent functionaries included the *rāyasam* (secretary), *purōhita* (royal priest), and *qiladār* or *killedār* (commander of the fort, here Tanjavur town). Introduced around the mid-eighteenth century, according to a British report, was the office of *sar-i-khail*, a term for which various meanings are given, such as chancellor, troop commander, and chamberlain. Besides, there were various *sūbadārs*, governors of the kingdom's five or six *sūbas* or provinces. Finally, the term *peśvā* (more commonly *peshwa*), which in other Maratha states usually indicated the chief minister, appears not to have been a regular rank in Bhonsle Tanjavur but used as a more personal name or title.⁶⁸

⁶⁸ Subramanian, *The Maratha Rajas of Tanjore*, 77-81; Srinivasan, *Maratha Rule in the Carnatic*, 347-54; Tryambakayajvan, *The Perfect Wife*, 3, 10-12, 46; Subrahmanyam, *Penumbra Visions*, 156, 159, 162, 177; Hickey, *The Tanjore Mahratta Principality*, 42-5; Manamalar, "Administration and Social Life under the Mahrathas of Thanjavur," 17-22; BL/AAS, MM, no. 77, pt. 23: "Tanjour report," f. 7 (compiled in 1798-9 by a British commission consisting of the officials Torin, Harris, and Stratton; see Cotton, Charpentier, and Johnston, *Catalogue of Manuscripts in European Languages*, vol. I, pt. II, 605); NA, VOC, no. 3108, f. 89: report of mission to Tanjavur, Feb. 1764.

European records, and to a lesser extent south Indian sources, contain many references to courtiers serving the Bhonsles of Tanjavur, and only a fraction of them can be considered here. An early glimpse of the Bhonsle court is offered in the account of a VOC mission to Tanjavur in December 1676, less than a year after the kingdom's conquest by the dynasty's founder Ekoji. This document mentions the following officials as most influential: "governor Saijbo"; Treasurer (*tresaurier*) Koneri; "councillors" Gopala Pandit and Rangasaya; and Ekoji's brother "Pardane Ragia," possibly the *pradhāni*.

These names and ranks, corrupted by the Dutch, are hard to link to other sources. For example, a later Bhonsle chronicle—called "The history of the Tonjore Rajas" in its English manuscript version—suggests that Ekoji appointed four chief functionaries: Sayyid ("Syed") as *qiladār*, maybe identical to the VOC's "governor Saijbo"; "Bashvah" as *pradhāni*; "Cojee" Pandit possibly as *mantri*, stated to be in charge of "country domination"; and "Conra [or Coura] Mahadave" as what is called *vakil*, a judicial office. Additionally, Dutch records from the subsequent decade refer to Koneri Pandidar ("Conerij Pandidaer") as the kingdom's chancellor (*rijs cancelier*) and its most important "state minister." He was probably the same person as the Treasurer Koneri in the VOC report of 1676 and the *vakil* "Conra Mahadave" in the Bhonsle chronicle.⁶⁹

While these local and VOC sources differ with respect to certain offices and individuals, it appears there were several Pandits, or Brahmins, among Tanjavur's most prominent officials in this period. Indeed, in 1678 the Dutch complained that the "Pandigens" exercised so much influence that little could be achieved without them. But the highest courtiers included at least one Muslim, too, if "Syed" and "Saijbo" indeed refer to Sayyid. The Dutch account also explains that the Brahmin Venkanna, former *rāyasam* of Tanjavur's Nayakas, was still active during this time, serving as a broker between the VOC ambassadors and the court. As seen in Chapter 1 and the Epilogue, Venkanna had tried to maintain his position by helping the last Nayaka scion Chengamaladasa regain his family's throne after Madurai's invasion and, when this failed, by presenting the kingdom to Ekoji. But the latter regarded him as a traitor, causing Venkanna to flee Tanjavur soon after, which meant the end of his career.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ The *Mujumdār* (auditing official) Konher Mahadev mentioned in the Marathi text *Sabhāsad bakhar* on the Maratha King Shivaji, authored by Krishnaji Anant Sabhasad, may be the same person. See: Surendranath Sen (ed.), *Śīva Chhatrapati. Being a Translation of Sabhāsad Bakhar with Extracts from Chitṇis and Śivadigvijaya, with Notes* (Calcutta, 1920), 125.

⁷⁰ BL/AAS, MT, class III, no. 32: "The history of the Tonjore Rajas," ff. 90-90v; NA, VOC, no. 1329, ff. 1169v-76v; no. 1333, ff. 284v, 290; no. 1355, f. 163; no. 1398, f. 171; no. 1405, f. 1592; no. 1411, f. 96: reports of missions to Tanjavur, Dec. 1676-Jan. 1677, Mar. 1684, letters from Nagapattinam to Colombo, from Pulicat to Batavia, Oct.-Nov. 1678, Dec. 1680, Apr. 1684, news register, Jan. 1685. For possibly another

The Dutch embassy report of 1676 is silent on two Brahmin courtiers named Baboji Pandidar and Ragoji Pandidar (“Wawosi Pandidaer” and “Regosie Pandidaer”).⁷¹ Yet, they are worth being discussed in detail. Both start to figure prominently in the VOC archives in the late 1670s, so they began their careers in Tanjavur more or less simultaneously with Ekoji. Described as an eminent chief (*aensienel. hoofd*), Baboji held a function the Dutch labelled “regent” or governor of the southern “lowlands” (*beneden landen*). Generally based at Tiruvarur, a dozen miles inland from Nagapattinam, Baboji controlled Tanjavur’s southern coastal region up to the port of Naguru (or Nagore) and the Vettar River. Beyond lay the northern “lowlands,” stretching at least as far as the Kollidam (or Coleroon) River and administered by “regent” Ragoji.

Judging from their activities, Baboji and Ragoji served as revenue-farmers. That these were powerful positions transpires from the fact Baboji established his own mint at Tiruvarur in 1685. In his own words, in a letter to the VOC of 1688, he was “not an ordinary local revenue collector [*gemenen* “manigaar,” *māṇigār*] or ambassador ... but ... in supreme command [*oppergesag*] of a region of 24 miles ... alongside a prominent fortress.”⁷² According to the Dutch, both “regents” commanded more or less equal authority and power, but whereas Baboji seemed a protégé of “chancellor” Koneri Pandidar, Ragoji was said to be held in high esteem by the king himself.

When Ekoji died in late 1684, however, it was reportedly Baboji and one Narasimharaya who received orders from the new, young ruler Shahaji to keep the government in “state and shape” (*staat en postuijer*). Thus, Baboji assumed political duties covering the entire kingdom, at least temporarily. At the same time, both Baboji and Ragoji continued their control of the littoral areas, while a Muslim (*moor*) remained the *qiladār* (*slotvoogt*, “fort-commander”) of Tanjavur town. He was probably the Sayyid referred to above, now called “Saijed” and “Zayet” by the VOC.

Soon after, in 1685, Baboji expanded his range of activities again when he led a military expedition against Ramnad. This was apparently not a one-time affair because the Dutch referred to him as a general in the late 1680s, too. But in this period it was also rumoured that Ragoji enjoyed so much prestige with Shahaji that

reference to Koneri Pandidar (“Conery Pantulo”), see Fawcett, *The English Factories in India* (New Series, 1670–7), vol. II (The Eastern Coast and Bengal) (Oxford, 1952), 188.

⁷¹ Baboji’s name is also spelled Balogi, Vagogi, Bavaji, and the like in primary sources and secondary literature.

⁷² NA, VOC, no. 1454, ff. 1017–17v: letter from Baboji Pandidar to Nagapattinam, Aug. 1688. It is unclear which fortress and what type of miles are referred to. If Dutch or Rhineland miles are meant, the mentioned distance seems to amount to about 80 modern miles, which is unlikely considering Tanjavur’s size.

the king had given his own “state” palanquin to him, along with many other marks of honour. Evidently, Baboji and Ragoji both grew increasingly prominent—the VOC now called them “the two greatest Pandits”—but did so in different ways, each with their own patronage network.

Although Dutch records do not mention an open clash between them, the two men seem to have been rivals rather than allies. They courted different European trading companies, causing a struggle that was often expressed through protocolar insults. Baboji supported the Dutch, demanding that no other European power be allowed to trade in Tanjavur, as agreed in the treaties. Ragoji, assisted by his son, favoured the French, who wished to establish a trading station in the coastal region he supervised. Although Baboji had some backing from “chancellor” Koneri, Ragoji humiliated him and the Dutch on several occasions. Around mid-1688 Ragoji had knocked down the VOC’s flags at the Company’s building in the important inland market town Darasuram, on the outskirts of Kumbakonam. And when in early 1689 Baboji’s representative in the capital wanted to visit the king to discuss the demands of his master and the Dutch, Ragoji and a courtier named Tryambaka waylaid him in front of the royal residence and turned him away.

Because of these conflicts, the distribution of presents to Tanjavur’s courtiers during a VOC embassy in November–December 1688 was probably determined as much by the wish to strengthen ties with the Company’s allies as by the actual balance of power at court. “Regent” Baboji, “chancellor” Koneri, and “governor” Sayyid all received gifts, but “regent” Ragoji, also attending audiences during this embassy, was given nothing at all, despite his influential position (see table 10).

Another courtier the VOC did not honour with presents on this occasion was Tryambaka (“Triemboe Rago”), referred to above. That is surprising because, although apparently an ally of Ragoji, he was far less hostile towards the Dutch. This powerful Brahmin may have been quite receptive to presents and willing to consider the VOC’s wishes. Yet, his name is absent from the Dutch embassy report and perhaps he was away from Tanjavur’s capital around this time. In any case, Ragoji disappeared from the VOC records soon after, for reasons unknown, while “chancellor” Koneri’s influence also seemed to be waning and the French received no permission to set up a factory. Tryambaka now became a very prominent official and while his exact position is not clear, the Dutch described him as the “second in power” (*secunde*) and an eminent councillor of the king who “executed everything.” Local texts relate that Tryambaka, bearing the additional name Makhin or Makhin, was also a court poet, patronised scholars, and performed religious sacrifices.

These works reveal the prominence at court of Tryambaka’s family as a whole, too, for instance in the *Śahendra vilāsa*, dealing with King Shahaji (VI 40–5). The courtier Narasimharaya—together with Baboji in charge of the central government

when Shahaji commenced his reign—was an elder brother of Tryambaka. Their father Gangadhara and younger brother Bhagavantaraya were ministers too, and Narasimharaya's son, Anandaraya, became a celebrated general, as discussed below. Finally, the latter's sons (two of them also named Tryambaka and Narasimharaya) were important courtiers in the late 1730s, said to be held in high esteem by the king and receiving gifts from the Dutch and the French. All or most of these men combined political and literary qualities.⁷³

During the 1690s and early 1700s, Tryambaka and Baboji remained influential. In 1693 Baboji served as an ambassador to the Dutch with full powers of attorney to sign a contract. In mid-1700, according to VOC sources, he was a general in an unsuccessful war against Madurai, while some of his responsibilities as “regent” had been taken over by his brother-in-law Ranga Pandidar. In 1702 he commanded another campaign against Ramnad. In addition, around the years 1701-3 both Dutch and Jesuit documents mention him as the kingdom's first minister. Thus, Baboji continued to combine mercantile, diplomatic, governmental, and military functions until he passed away in 1703, by which time his son Gangadri Pandidar had acquired a high military rank.

Tryambaka's activities were almost equally diverse. In November 1700 he was dispatched to negotiate a peace treaty with Madurai. He promised to settle an agreement within ten days on the condition that he be given control over some lands around Mannargudi and Kumbakonam. Since those areas were administered by Baboji and Ranga Pandidar, Tryambaka's demand may point to rivalry with Baboji. By 1709 Tryambaka had become chief minister himself and in 1711, when King Shahaji felt his end was near, he was even invested by the monarch with what the Dutch called the “principal government” (*principaal bewind*), apparently to oversee the imminent royal succession. Indeed, after Sarabhoji ascended the Tanjavur throne, Tryambaka's position seemed stronger than ever. In 1712 local scholars told German Pietist missionaries that “Istriburaier” (a corruption similar to the Dutch “Triemboe Ragoe”) controlled “the heart of the king” and the kingdom was reigned “according to his will and pleasure.”⁷⁴

⁷³ For genealogical trees of this family, see: Tryambakayajvan, *The Perfect Wife*, 18; Krishnamachariar, *History of Classical Sanskrit Literature*, 246.

⁷⁴ NA, VOC, no. 1329, f. 1167v; no. 1333, ff. 294v-5; no. 1349, f. 1402; no. 1355, ff. 163-4v; no. 1411, ff. 96v, 103-3v, 135v-7, 142, 343v, 346v; no. 1448, ff. 294-7, 304, 319v, 324, 326-35; no. 1454, ff. 1009v, 1014v-17; no. 1456, ff. 2081-1v; no. 1463, ff. 169, 171v, 205-13v, 427v-8; no. 1526, ff. 250-50v; no. 1633, ff. 122v-3, 126-8v, 143-7; no. 1638, f. 189; no. 1645, ff. 150-1v; no. 1649, f. 58; no. 1657, ff. 74, 142v, no. 1664, f. 177; no. 1678, ff. 338, 353 (latter folio 2nd numeration); no. 1778, f. 104; no. 1803, f. 303; no. 2369, f. 117 (and possibly subsequent folios); no. 2387, ff. 322-3: instructions for mission to Tanjavur, Dec. 1676, correspondence between Nagapattinam, Pulicat, Sadras, Colombo, Batavia, and Gentlemen XVII, letters from commander Floris Blom to Baboji Pandidar, from Baboji to Nagapattinam, from VOC envoys Rangappa and “Wieragua” to

After Tryambaka no prominent courtiers seem to really stand out in the VOC archives until the decades around the mid-eighteenth century, when the partially overlapping careers of several courtiers can be traced. One of them was a Muslim called Imam (or Iman) Khan Kurush Sahib (“Iman Chan Koroosje Sahib”) in Dutch documents, who appears not to figure in local sources. In 1730 he was installed by King Tukkoji as a supervisor, probably *sūbadār*, over the lands around Mannargudi. Only a year later, the VOC began to describe him as “state minister” and especially as Tanjavur’s *albeschik*. Literally meaning “all-ordainer,” the latter term seems to have denoted someone holding great effective power or at least interfering in all sorts of matters, but it has also been translated as factotum, suggesting a more executive role.⁷⁵ Exactly what the Dutch referred to is unclear, nor whether this was an actual function or an umbrella term for whoever exercised most control.⁷⁶ But certainly any person given this label must have been influential.

In the 1730s Imam Khan Kurush conducted nearly all of the court’s correspondence with the VOC, which annually presented costly gifts to him. As another instance of a courtier expanding his range of activities, in 1731 he both led a siege of the Danish settlement at Tranquebar and travelled south to conclude treaties with Ramnad and Shivagangai about their tribute-paying to Tanjavur. Although in 1733 the Dutch wrote that Tukkoji had reshuffled both the structure and the staff of his government, Imam Khan Kurush’s position appears to have gone unchallenged since the VOC still called him “ordain-it-all” in subsequent years.

In the same period, as the Dutch reported, the position of chief minister was occupied by the Brahmin Anandaraya (“Anandaraijer”) Makhi, perhaps better

commander Blom, from “Wengerawaddij” to his master captain Ramanatha Nayaka at Nagapattinam, from “Candae Rague” to his master Baboji, from a VOC spy in Tirumullaivasal to Nagapattinam, Dec. 1678, Dec. 1680, July 1685, Aug., Oct., Dec. 1688, Jan.-Feb., July 1689, Dec. 1693, Aug.-Nov. 1700, June, Oct. 1701, May, Sept. 1702, Apr., Oct. 1703, May 1709, Sept. 1711, Oct. 1736, reports on Tanjavur, May 1679, Aug. 1688, news register, Jan., Apr.-May 1685, instructions to VOC envoy “Wiereragua,” Aug. 1688, report of mission to Tanjavur, Nov.-Dec. 1688, Nagapattinam proceedings, June 1736; *Arsip Nasional Republik Indonesia*, Jakarta (hereafter ANRI), *Buitenland* collection (“foreign countries,” access no. K.48, hereafter BC), no. 150e (unpaginated, entry of 29 June): Nagapattinam diary extract, June 1688; Jeyaraj and Young, *Hindu-Christian Epistolary Self-Disclosures*, 266; Śrīdhara Venkatēśa, *Śāhendra Vilāsa*, 11, 25-6; Tryambakayajvan, *The Perfect Wife*, 3, 10-13, 17-19, 24-5; Krishnamachariar, *History of Classical Sanskrit Literature*, 246-7; Ananda Ranga Pillai, *The Private Diary of Ananda Ranga Pillai, Dubash to Joseph François Duplex, Knight of the Order of St. Michael, and Governor of Pondichery* ..., ed. J. Frederick Price and K. Rangachari, vol. I (Madras, 1904), 50; Lockman, *Travels of the Jesuits*, vol. II, 286-7; Subramanian, *The Maratha Rajas of Tanjore*, 18, 30-1, 77-8, 87; Srinivasan, *Maratha Rule in the Carnatic*, 225, 228, 373; Bhosale, *Rajah Serfoji – II*, 24, 27.

⁷⁵ For the latter translation, see Subrahmanyam, *Penumbral Visions*, 105-6, 120, 138, 153.

⁷⁶ Perhaps the term derived from the function of *harakāra*, literally “do-all,” which referred to messengers and information-gatherers. See Subrahmanyam, *Penumbral Visions*, 239.

known as the often victorious *Daḷavāy* Ananda Rao Peshwa, and a son and a nephew of the courtiers Narasimharaya and Tryambaka Makhi, respectively. Other sources add that he had already held the office of *daḷavāy* since the reign of Shahaji. Also a patron of literature, Anandaraya thus combined various functions over time, involving both governmental and military duties, and may have succeeded his uncle Tryambaka as chief minister or *mantri*. In 1734, however, he died in a war against Arcot.

“Ordain-it-all” Imam Khan Kurush remained one of the court’s most influential men for the rest of the 1730s, enjoying much respect from the king—at least according to the VOC, which during an embassy in 1735 presented most of the gifts for courtiers to him and his son Husain Khan (see table 10). Imam Khan Kurush is further mentioned in a grant issued by Ekoji II to the Dutch following their mission. In all likelihood, he was also the prominent courtier called “General Khan Sahib” in the report of a Danish embassy to Ekoji II in 1735, suggesting his duties included military activities at this time. When the Danes reached the capital, not only the king but this courtier, too, sent representatives to welcome them. His son Husain Khan (“Usenhan”) played an important role during this mission as well.⁷⁷ As VOC records suggest, Imam Khan Kurush maintained his position during the troubled years of 1736-9, when Queen Sujana Bai and “usurper” Shahaji II briefly sat on the throne. Under the former he still was referred to as “ordain-it-all,” while under the latter he additionally served as the chief governor of the coastal region around the northern town of Mayuram.

The post of “ordain-it-all” was however now also ascribed to Siddhoji Dada, Sujana Bai’s chief minister and favourite, and Imam Khan Kurush’s influence may have diminished during her rule. Soon after Pratapasimha commenced his reign, he appears to have lost most or even all power. In May 1740, the Dutch reported that the new king had installed one Annappa Rao Shetke as his “ordain-it-all.” For unknown reasons, around the same time Imam Khan Kurush disappears abruptly from the VOC documents, the last mention of his name dating from July of that year.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ For these Danish references, see Kay Larsen, “En dansk Gesandtskabrejse i Indien (1735),” *Historisk Tidsskrift* 8, 3 (1910-12), 59-67.

⁷⁸ NA, VOC, no. 2166, f. 554; no. 2198, ff. 12, 14, 43, 64, 194-202 (2nd numeration); no. 2243, f. 558; no. 2244, ff. 48, 61, 1272-7, 766 (latter folio 2nd numeration); no. 2289, ff. 105-6; no. 2304, ff. 232-3v (?); no. 2317, ff. 192-3; no. 2318, ff. 2281-3; no. 2334, f. 182v; no. 2350, ff. 118, 438-41; no. 2351, ff. 3994, 3997-8; no. 2352B, f. 528; no. 2386, ff. 65-72, 164-8, 905-6, 943-4; no. 2387, f. 209; no. 2399, ff. 301-iv; no. 2412, ff. 56-7, 371-4, 436, 62, 273-4, 1983 (latter folios 2nd numeration); no. 2427, ff. 431v-3, 441-2, 465-9, 517-18v; no. 2442, ff. 45, 609, 799, 2028, 2035, 2038; no. 2443, ff. 311-14 (2nd numeration); no. 2455, ff. 447, 459v-61, 462v-4, 475v-6, 519v-20; no. 2471, ff. 1225, 1232; no. 2505, ff. 82, 1655-6; no. 8866, ff. 123-4: letters from Nagapattinam to Batavia, Sept. 1730, Sept. 1731, Sept. 1732, Oct. 1734, Aug., Oct. 1735, Nov. 1736, June, Oct.

Another courtier faring badly after Pratapasimha's accession was the last person in what seems to have been a hereditary succession of Muslim functionaries. Both the previous and present chapter already discussed members of this dynasty of sorts, which probably provided the Tanjavur Bhonsles with *qiladārs* for almost three-quarters of a century and figures extensively in both local and European sources. All designated as Sayyid, these men were apparently of high ancestry, possibly claiming descent from Prophet Muhammad. In 1735, the Dutch described one of them as:

... the fort-supervisor [*slot voogd*] or killebaar, and recruiter of the soldiers, on horseback as well as on foot, a man of great prestige [*aansien*] from the Said's or priestly house ...⁷⁹

One of the Bhonsle chronicles—in its English manuscript translation titled “Account of the Tanjore Samastanums”—has less kind things to say about these *qiladārs*. Covering the decades between the 1680s and 1740s, and mixing up the consecutive reigns of Shahaji, Sarabhoji, and Tukkoji, some excerpts from this text run as follows:

... When the Toocojee Rajah [Tukkoji] mounted on the throne, he then appointed Sydahaneef [Sayyid Hanif] as a Killadar or commander of the fort. While he was ruling the kingdom, the said Syeed sent for a fakeer ... While it was so the Rajah [king] had born no childrins, then by the power of the ... muntra [magical spell] of that fakeer, he had borne 2 sons named Shankar & Shareef. Thus he ... ruled the kingdom & departed his life. Also the said Syda Haneef was died, but he had born a son named Syda Boorahun [Sayyid Burhan], who had continued the same service. He succeeded [made succeed] the Shahajee Rajah [Shahaji] to the throne & himself ... acted [in] the Deevanyeerey [office of *diwān*] or prime ministership.

When the Shahajee Rajah grow big ..., he began to manage the affairs of the countries. Then the abovementioned Syad give poison and killed the Rajah & seated his young brother Sharafoujee Rajah [Sarabhoji] on the throne. When [Sarabhoji] grow big, then the Syad struck of the head of him & succeeded [made succeed] one of their realation named

1737, June, Sept. 1738, July 1740, Nagapattinam proceedings, Apr.-May 1731, Mar. 1733, Jan., Oct.-Nov. 1735, Mar., Sept., Dec. 1736, May 1737, Feb., July-Aug. 1738, correspondence with Imam Khan Kurush Sahib, Apr.-June 1731, Apr. 1732, July, Oct.-Nov. 1735, July-Aug. 1738, Jan.-Feb., June 1739, lists of gifts presented in Coromandel, 1730-9, report on visit of Tanjavur envoys to Jaffna, Apr.-Aug. 1734, report of mission to Tanjavur, Nov. 1735, grant of Ekoji II to VOC, Nov. 1735, Nagapattinam diary, May 1740; S. Raju (ed.), *Taṅṅai Marāṭṭiyar Kalvēttukkal / Inscriptions of the Marathas of Thanjavur* (Tanjavur, 1987), xlviii (no. 99); idem, *Taṅṅai Marāṭṭiyar Ceppēttukal-50*, xlvii-viii (nos 35, 37); Subramanian, *The Maratha Rajas of Tanjore*, 31-2, 37-8, 77-8; Srinivasan, *Maratha Rule in the Carnatic*, 231-3, 240-1, 349; Bhosale, *Rajah Serfoji – II*, 28; Subrahmanyam, *Penumbra Visions*, 153-4, 160.

⁷⁹ NA, VOC, no. 2386, f. 167: report of mission to Tanjavur, Nov. 1735 (translation mine).

Baw Baw Saib [Baba Sahib, Ekoji II] to the throne ... Afterward he succeeded one of their realation named Annah Saib [unidentified ruler, perhaps Tukkoji's son Anna Sahib, who in fact never became king] to the throne.

In the course of that time the Syad was died, but he had borned a son named Syad Mahamud [Sayyid Muhammad], who followed the custom of his fathers & had killed the said Annah Saib. Then being nobody to succeed the throne, then the wife of the Rajahs—her named Soojan Banye [Sujana Bai]—was ruling the kingdom. Sometimes after she was departed her life, then Syada Mahamada considered in his mind: if he [made] succeed any of a realation of the Rajahs to the throne, he would happen any trouble by it. Having this considered, he catch and brought a lad from the wood and told he is the son of the Rajahs: “formerly Baw Baw Saibs [Ekoji II's] son would mix poison to him, therefore he running now, [but] he was caught by me.” So that he succeeded him to the throne.

While he was ruling the kingdom for some time, this Cottirajah [Kattu Raja, Shahaji II] considered in his mind: “... this Syad had distroyed many Rajahs, likewise he will do to me.” Having this considered, he given the Deevangerry or prime ministership to the Annapa Shatunga [Annappa Rao Shetke?] & only continued the service of the Killadary to the Syad. The Syada then having resented much, suddenly went with some peons in to the Mahall [palace] of the Rajahs & murdered the Rajah. Whereupon he ... considered: as there was nobody to succeed the throne but the Pratapa Singa [Pratapasimha], son of Rackey or concubine of the Toccojee Rajah, ... whom he intended to succeed to the throne. Then the lad [Pratapasimha] being afraid in thinking: “... he [Sayyid] will kill me like the others.” He [Sayyid] then encouraged him [Pratapasimha] very much & seated him on the throne. Pratapa Singa considered in his mind: if he keeps the Annapa Shatunga & Syada, they will kill him. [Therefore] he confined the Syad and killed him. Also he sent a number of the army and murdered the Annapa Shatunga ...⁸⁰

Here we read an occasionally confused account of three generations of the Sayyid family: first Hanif, next his son Burhan, and last Burhan's son Muhammad. Their influence on the Bhonsle dynasty is presented as all-pervasive, with Hanif employing a “fakir” to guarantee royal offspring, and Burhan and Muhammad killing and enthroning kings at will. But as shown before, according to other sources these Sayyids initially were not as omnipresent—let alone as murderous—as the quoted text leads us to believe. This work apparently projects the might and aggression of the last Sayyid, from the mid-1730s onward, to his much less influential and bloodthirsty predecessors. However, as Dutch records also imply, the post of *qiladār* was probably indeed passed between several men called Sayyid from the start of Bhonsle rule in the mid-1670s until King Pratapasimha had the last of them executed in the early 1740s.

⁸⁰ BL/AAS, MT, class III, no. 88: “Account of the Tanjore Samastanums,” ff. 140-1v.

Both local and VOC sources suggest that the first Sayyid, maybe the above-mentioned Hanif, was appointed right upon Ekoji's conquest of Tanjavur. Later Dutch documents, mostly from the 1680s, regularly refer to a "fort-supervisor" or "governor" called "Saijed," "Zayet," and the like, possibly Hanif or Burhan. And VOC records of the late 1730s in particular report about the then active *qiladār*. Perhaps indicative of his growing influence, in 1738 the Dutch asked him to forestall another French effort to settle in Tanjavur. Since the VOC addressed him as Sayyid Qasim Sahib ("Saijd Casim Sahib") and he signed his reply with Mirza Sayyid al-Yusuf ("Miera Sei-Iedoe Ischieph"), it is not clear if this person can be identified with Burhan or Muhammad in the cited text.

In any case, in September of that year, just after Shahaji II had taken the throne, the VOC thought that *Qiladār* Sayyid commanded most power (*vermogen*) at court and, as discussed in Chapter 2, may have been instrumental in this king's instalment. Around the same time, a French embassy to the court presented him with the most expensive gifts among all courtiers. In July 1739 the Dutch remarked that Shahaji II's dethronement within a year was a "betrayal by the fort-commander," further demonstrating the *qiladār*'s great role in court politics. Indeed, two months later, the VOC reported that an agreement had been reached stipulating that, although Pratapasimha had now been crowned king, Sayyid would hold the "government of everything." A Marathi text of about forty-five years later portrays the relationship between these two men thus:

For a very considerable time, Pretap-cen-veh [Pratapasimha] enjoyed nothing but the name of Rajee [king], & experienced every degree of mortification & insult from Sied [Sayyid], who now possessed a most unbounded power. He had the horse [riders] & foot [soldiers] under his command—the former amounting to 4,000 men—the keys of the fort, & was besides Cerkeel [*sar-i-khail*] or Duan [*diwān?*]. When the Rajee rode out, Sied attended him in the greatest state, & on their return, while the Rajee was obliged to go to his palace with only two or three attendants, Sied would go to his own house attended by all the guards.⁸¹

But this division of formal kingship and actual power was not to last and, as the earlier-cited "Account of the Tanjore Samastanums" suggests, the *qiladār* overplayed his hand, making Pratapasimha distrust him. Soon after, the Dutch wrote that the aforementioned Annappa Rao Shetke had become "the principal person at court, after whose will all matters were governed." In fact, after 1739 *Qiladār* Sayyid figures no more in the VOC records and perhaps Pratapasimha had already disposed of this king-maker by then. The Marathi text quoted above declares:

⁸¹ BL/AAS, MG, no. 4, pt. 9: "History of Tanjore," f. 220; Cotton, Charpentier, and Johnston, *Catalogue of Manuscripts in European Languages*, vol. I, pt. II, 52.

... being apprehensive from the fate of his predecessors for his life, he [Pratapasimha] consulted with his confident Annaph Centa-ghee [Annappa Rao Shetke], ... having determined to take off Sied [Sayyid], it was accomplished in the following manner. The Rajee [king] feigned to have received a letter from Poonah [Maratha capital Pune] of importance, and retired to read it with Sied in a private garden of the palace, where a tent had been previously prepared. After being a little seated, the Rajee got up & went to the door, upon which men who had been placed for the purpose between the walls, rushed out & dispatched Sied, which occasioned some commotion amongst the troops at first & the gates of the fort were kept shut for three days, at the end of which time they returned to their duty. Annaph Centa-ghee was for his services created Cerkeel [*sar-i-khail*].⁸²

Thus, the peak of Sayyid's career, although high, was also short and signalled the end of his line's position.⁸³ In September 1740 the Dutch reported that the post of *qiladār* was held by Mallarji Gadi Rao ("Khatte Rauw"), the king's brother-in-law, who seemingly kept it until at least the 1760s. Signifying his status, this man's partaking in several battles earned him inclusion in the *Pratāpasimhendra vijaya prabandha* (55), a Marathi poem by Ramakrishna Kavi Pandit glorifying one of Pratapasimha's military expeditions.⁸⁴

As brief and turbulent as Sayyid's zenith, was the period in power of Annappa Rao Shetke (also Sedge or Setage) and his brothers Govinda Rao and Ayyannar Rao, the last Tanjavur courtiers considered here. Annappa, besides taking over Sayyid's position as the court's most influential man, also replaced Imam Khan Kurush Sahib as the king's "ordain-it-all." Annappa and his brothers appear to have risen to prominence very suddenly and from a low position. In May 1740 the Dutch described this event as follows:

... the currently reigning king Pretappa Singa Raasja [Pratapasimha Raja] raised to stately service the three brothers Rouw Sahib, Anna Chetke, and Aijnaar Rouw Chetke—who,

⁸² BL/AAS, MG, no. 4, pt. 9: "History of Tanjore," ff. 220-1.

⁸³ Several other local texts refer in detail to the dominance and death of *Qiladār* Sayyid. See: BL/AAS, MT, class III, no. 32: "The History of the Tonjore Rajas," ff. 92v-5v; class III, no. 87: "The historical account of the Tonjore" (*Bhonsale vaṃśa caritra*), ff. 99v-103; OI, no. I, pt. 24: "Morratoe kings of Tanjore" [III], f. 242.

⁸⁴ NA, VOC, no. 2427, ff. 431v-3, 437-8v, 470-70v; no. 2443, ff. 2038, 2040; no. 2470, f. 70; no. 2471, ff. 51-2; no. 2506, ff. 58-9, 86; no. 3108, f. 98: Nagapattinam proceedings, July 1738, Aug.-Sept. 1740, Feb. 1764, correspondence with *Qiladār* Sayyid, July-Aug. 1738, letters from Nagapattinam to Batavia, Sept. 1738, July, Sept. 1739; TNA, DR, no. 282, ff. 54v-61v: letter from Nagapattinam to Cochin, Dec. 1738; Ramakrishna Kavi Pandit, *Pratāpasimhendra Vijaya Prabandha*, ed. A. Krishnaswamy Mahadick Rao Sahib (Tanjore, 1950), 30; Ananda Ranga Pillai, *The Private Diary*, vol. I, 50; Subramanian, *The Maratha Rajas of Tanjore*, 43-4, 48-9, 54, 60; Srinivasan, *Maratha Rule in the Carnatic*, 242-4, 250-1; Bhosale, *Rajah Serfoji – II*, 32-5; Subrahmanyam, *Penumbra Visions*, 153.

like all their ancestors, since long years have served the consecutive Tansjourse kings like slaves by carrying their spittoon, slippers or papoesen, etc.—namely: the first-mentioned, Rouw Sahib, as chief regent over Combagonna [Kumbakonam] and its subordinate lands; the second, Anna Chitke, as his carbarrie [*khārbārī*, chief minister] or ordain-it-all at his court; and the third or last-mentioned, Aijnaar Rauw Chitke, also as chief regent over the Manaargoijl [Mannargudi] and Maijoeramse [Mayuram's] lands ...⁸⁵

Apparently coming from a family of personal servants of the Bhonsles, the Shetke brothers entirely dominated Tanjavur in the subsequent years. The VOC called Annappa both chief minister and even “supreme ordain-it-all” (*oppersten albeschik*) and he was said to hold so much power that he “ruled over the king.” A royal grant to the Dutch was co-issued by him, and when King Pratapasimha visited Tiruvarur and Nagapattinam in 1741, he received the most gifts from the VOC of all courtiers (see table 10 below and illustration 12 in Chapter 4). Further, he conducted part of the court's correspondence with the Dutch, the French, and the Danes—to the last designating himself as “revenue officer in charge”—and figures in the abovementioned *Pratāpasimhendra vijaya prabandha* (55) as a “resolute and courageous” army commander.

His brother Ayyannar Rao Shetke, who in addition to his regency led several military campaigns, grew powerful as well. He felt strong enough to let his men intimidate the Dutch and the French on several occasions, destroying their property, beating up their personnel, confiscating their merchandise, and laying siege to their settlements. But the third Shetke, Govinda Rao, seems to have become the most influential brother over the years, taking over the label of “supreme ordain-it-all” from Annappa, increasingly dominating the king, and regulating all access to him. Not surprisingly, tension arose between Pratapasimha and the Shetkes, and the “evil” Ayyannar, as the VOC called him, was even temporarily jailed.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ NA, VOC, no. 2505, ff. 1655-6: Nagapattinam diary, May 1740 (translation mine).

⁸⁶ NA, VOC, no. 2505, ff. 1656-80; no. 2506, ff. 29-32, 58-61, 85-6; no. 2538, ff. 11-13, 1615, 1622; no. 2539, ff. 2486-8, 2490, 2629, 2671; no. 2556, ff. 669v, 679v; no. 2574, ff. 43-5, 88-94; no. 2575, ff. 2049-51; no. 2594, f. 497; no. 2608, ff. 83-90, 388-92: Nagapattinam diary, May-July 1740, Nagapattinam proceedings, July-Sept. 1740, May, Aug.-Sept. 1741, letters from Nagapattinam to Batavia and Gentlemen XVII, Feb. 1741, Oct. 1742, Mar., July, Oct. 1743, grant by Tanjavur, May 1741, lists of gifts presented during royal visits to Tiruvarur and Nagapattinam, May 1741, letter from Annappa Rao Shetke to Nagapattinam, Oct. 1742; *Lettres & conventions des gouverneurs de Pondichéry avec différents princes hindous 1666 à 1793* (Pondicherry, 1911-14), 133-5, 236-8, 240; Elisabeth Strandberg (ed.), *The Moḍi Documents from Tanjore in Danish Collections* (Wiesbaden, 1983), 90-3, 285-6; Ramakrishna Kavi Pandit, *Pratapasimhendra Vijaya Prabandha*, 31; Coolhaas et al., *Generale Missiven*, vol. XI, 275; Srinivasan, *Maratha Rule in the Carnatic*, 352. For references to Annappa Rao Shetke in south Indian texts, see: BL/AAS, MT, class III, no. 32: “The History of the Tonjore Rajas,” ff. 95v, 97; class III, no. 87: “The historical account of the Tonjore,” ff. 102v-3, 105v-6; Raju, *Taṅṅai Marāṭṭiyar Ceppēṭukal*-50, xlvi (no. 42).

Finally, in 1746 an opportunity presented itself to rid Tanjavur of their influence once and for all. The Shetke brothers' fall was as steep and rapid as their rise and merits another quote from the VOC records:

... the so-called supreme ordain-it-all of that court, Gowinda Rauw Chetke, by whom the king was entirely governed, died in the month of April. Because of that, the way to His Highness' throne was opened again for several well-intentioned [people], to enable [them] to inform him how his subjects were exploited and also exhausted by the deceased and his two brothers Annaji Rauw and Aijna Rauw Chetke—without spending any of that [extorted income], but only to gather great riches for themselves. And because those brothers ... pretended there was no money in the treasury ... to pay overdue salary to the horsemen, His Highness had them and some of their heralds caught and robbed of their riches. And [having] afterwards also intercepted a letter sent by them to the king of the Marattijs [Marathas] at Satara to the detriment of His Highness, in mid-August His Highness had their heads placed before their feet.⁸⁷

But this time, perhaps because of the violent career endings of Sayyid and the Shetkes, it proved not so easy to find people willing to fill the positions that now became vacant—a situation, however, the Dutch deemed most beneficial:

... the king has offered the government of affairs to one of his relatives named Manosie Rauw Jagataap, but he has requested to be excused from that, and so until now the king continues to manage everything himself, and it is to be wished this would carry on.⁸⁸

Still, despite the managerial qualities that the king himself may have possessed, powerful courtiers of course kept coming and going under Pratapasimha and his successors,⁸⁹ as they had always done. This rotation is also illustrated in table 10, which shows the distribution of presents among Tanjavur officials during seven VOC embassies between 1677 and 1764. Admittedly, in some cases there were gaps of several decades between missions, making changes among the courtiers only logical. Besides, three of these embassies were dispatched to Tiruvarur or Naguru while the king visited these towns, during which trips several important functionaries remained in the capital and would not receive gifts anyhow.⁹⁰

Yet, the table makes clear that in Bhonsle-ruled Tanjavur neither particular ranks nor certain individuals were automatically honoured with presents and

⁸⁷ NA, VOC, no. 2677, ff. 256-7: letter from Nagapattinam to Batavia, Oct. 1746 (translation mine).

⁸⁸ NA, VOC, no. 2677, f. 257: letter from Nagapattinam to Batavia, Oct. 1746 (translation mine).

⁸⁹ See for instance Orme, *A History of the Military Transactions*, vol. 1, 290.

⁹⁰ See for example NA, VOC, no. 2386, ff. 67, 70: Nagapattinam proceedings, Nov. 1735.

Table 10: Distribution of gifts among prominent courtiers during Dutch missions to Bhonsle Tanjavur, in order of value, 1677-1764.

1677	1688	1725	1730	1735	1741	1764
<i>king</i> Ekoji	<i>king</i> Shahaji	<i>king</i> Sarabhoji	<i>king</i> Tukkoji	<i>king</i> Ekoji II	<i>king</i> Pratapasimha	<i>king</i> Tuljaji II
<i>governor</i> (<i>qiladār</i> ?) Sayyid (?)	<i>chancellor</i> Koneri Pandidar	<i>sūbadār</i> Nanaji Babaji	<i>minister</i> Siddhoji Dada	<i>“ordain-it-all”</i> Imam Khan Kurush Sahib	<i>“supreme ordain-it-all”</i> Annappa Rao Shetke	<i>qiladār</i> Katta Rao
<i>treasurer</i> Koneri (Pandidar?)	<i>regent</i> Baboji Pandidar	<i>“assembaij”</i> (?) (name unknown)	<i>sūbadār</i> Govinda Damodra Pandidar	<i>son of</i> <i>“ordain-it-all”</i> Husain Khan	<i>regent</i> Ayyangar	<i>dabīr</i> Naro Pandidar
<i>councillor</i> Gopala Pandit	<i>governor</i> (<i>qiladār</i> ?) Sayyid		<i>secretary</i> (<i>rāyasam</i> ?) Naroji Pandit	<i>qiladār</i> “from Said’s house”	<i>regent</i> Ragoji	<i>head of cavalry</i> Manoji Appan
<i>councillor</i> Rangasaya			<i>sūbadār’s envoy</i> Jagannath Narasimha		<i>dabīr</i> (name unknown)	<i>rāyasam</i> Amboji Pandidar
<i>pradhāni</i> (?) “Ragia”			<i>minister’s servant</i> Venkappa Ayyar Karwari		<i>regent</i> Ayyannar Rao Shetke (?)	<i>sūbadār</i> “Arnegeri- appen”
<i>“broker”</i> Venkanna						

Notes: in 1677 the differences between nos 2 to 5 were very small, and nos 3 and 4 were virtually equal; in 1688 the differences between nos 2 to 4 were small; in 1730 nos 3 and 4 received equally much; the reception of gifts by no. 4 in 1735 is probable but not certain; in 1741 nos 5 and 6 received equally much; the missions of 1725, 1730, and 1741 were dispatched to Tiruvurur or Naguru when the king visited those towns; the *sūbadār*s mentioned here were always seated in Mannargudi.

Sources: NA, VOC, no. 1329, ff. 1169v-76v; no. 1463, ff. 205-13v; no. 2031, ff. 1119, 1299-300; no. 2166, ff. 392-9; no. 2386, ff. 66-71, 167; no. 2539, ff. 2487-9; no. 3108, ff. 97-101.

therefore considered influential by the Dutch. Rather, on each occasion different positions and different persons obtained the most valuable gifts after the king. For instance, what were probably several members of the Sayyid line, each holding the post of *qiladār*, received the second most expensive presents in 1677 but were listed as fourth in 1688 and 1735. In 1764 a *qiladār* belonging to the royal family came second again. Likewise, in 1725, 1730, and 1764, various *sūbadārs* ranked second, third, and sixth respectively, while the *dabīr* moved from the fifth to the third place during the last two embassies. And some positions, such as “son of the ordain-it-all” (in 1735) and head of the cavalry (in 1764), appear in the table only once, underlining that power resided in people rather than offices.⁹¹

The previous paragraphs describe patterns partly similar to those observed at other courts. Thus in Bhonsle-ruled Tanjavur some officials—holding various ranks—grew exceedingly powerful, to the point of overshadowing the king. But such periods of dominance generally were quite short, as demonstrated by the brief, tumultuous careers of the last *Qiladār* Sayyid and the Shetke brothers. Functionaries wielding substantial but not overarching influence, and for longer periods, seem to have been more common. The relatively stable and lengthy careers of men like “regent” Baboji Pandidar, Minister Tryambaka, “ordain-it-all” Imam Khan Kurush Sahib, and the earlier Sayyid *qiladārs* are exemplary. Further, many courtiers shifted between or combined different portfolios. Baboji, initially a revenue-farmer, later served as a military commander, ambassador, and chief minister as well. Tryambaka Makhi acted as chief minister, envoy, and some sort of provincial governor over the years. And Imam Khan Kurush, who also started out as a local administrator, soon assumed governmental, military, and diplomatic responsibilities.

Other aspects of Tanjavur’s courtiers appear to be more specific to this kingdom. To start with, competition between functionaries seems to have been less intense and violent than at other courts. Apart from the political upheavals around 1740, we read little about court factions expelling, imprisoning, or killing opponents, when compared to Ikkeri for example. Competition did of course exist: Baboji Pandidar faced it first from the “northern regent” Ragoji Pandidar and later from Tryambaka. Yet, such rivalry apparently seldom led to large-scale, vicious clashes.⁹²

⁹¹ It is not clear whether Treasurer Koneri (1677) was the same person—with the same function—as Chancellor Koneri Pandidar (1688), nor if Secretary Naroji Pandit (1730) was the same person as *Dabīr* Naro Pandidar (1764).

⁹² See also Narayana Rao, Shulman, and Subrahmanyam, *Symbols of Substance*, 96.

Another outstanding element is the strong and long-lasting presence of a relatively small number of families. Kinship relations were important at all courts, but under the Bhonsles power passed between family generations especially often. Perhaps most notable in this respect are the (probably) three men of the Sayyid line, who likely held the position of *qiladār* for almost seven decades, and the Makhi family—most prominently Tryambaka, Narasimharaya, and Anandaraya (Ananda Rao Peshwa)—which spanned at least four generations. But blood ties also played an essential role for the Shetke brothers, as well as for Baboji and Imam Khan Kurush and their respective sons, Gangadri and Husain.

Further, unlike in Vijayanagara, Ikkeri, and Nayaka-ruled Tanjavur, there seem no instances of marital ties between courtiers and the royal house. The distinct backgrounds of many functionaries may have precluded such liaisons. Judging from the discussed officials, a fair number of courtiers were Brahmins or Muslims, while the Bhonsle family belonged to a Shudra caste that perhaps claimed Kshatriya status. Finally, the influential and enduring presence of Muslims, probably related to the dynasty's past under various Deccan sultanates, is another element setting this court apart.

Nayakas of Madurai

Several terms for functions at the Madurai court are also found for other Nayaka courts, but in Madurai their exact nature appears to have been somewhat different. According to secondary literature, the most distinguished official was generally the *daḷavāy*, a post frequently occupied by Brahmins. Formally, this term denoted the commander-in-chief, but in Madurai it is thought to have often included the supervision of civilian affairs, too. As a consequence, two ranks that traditionally represented the division between these portfolios, *mantri* (minister or chief minister) and *senāpati* (general), seem to have been less significant or even not in use here. Another important position was that of *pradhāni*, in Madurai the finance minister rather than the chief minister, who was responsible for the collection and expenditure of revenues and exercised great influence on the kingdom's administration. As with Ariyanatha Mudaliyar, the Madurai courtier discussed at the outset of this chapter, the offices of *daḷavāy* and *pradhāni* could at times be combined in one person. Third in the supposed ranking order came the *rāyasam* (royal secretary), also closely involved in administrative matters.

Other high functions, not necessarily existing throughout the Nayaka period, included the *kaṇakkan* (chief accountant), *daḷakartan* (commander of the capital's fort, akin to Tanjavur's *qiladār*), *sthānāpati* (foreign secretary, ambassador), and *ācārya* (royal preceptor). Further, there were about seven provincial governors, the one residing at Tirunelveli—a vast distance south of the capitals Madurai and

Tiruchirappalli—often being very prominent. Finally, as explained in Chapter 2 and unique to Madurai, the royal family provided not only regular monarchs but also a continuous line of secondary rulers, whose influence was occasionally far-reaching.⁹³

Again, there is only space to consider a limited number of courtiers here. To begin with, a chronicle compiled around 1800 discusses many of the *daḷavāys* under Madurai's Nayakas over time. As the text goes, after *Daḷavāy-cum-Pradhāni* Ariyanatha Mudaliyar's passing, two uterine brothers took over his ministerial offices, probably serving as the *pradhāni* and *daḷavāy* respectively. Supposedly, the latter was the celebrated Ramappaiya, mentioned in the previous chapter as the general who around 1640 invaded Ramnad to capture the Setupati and said to have served as Madurai's ambassador to Goa in 1639.⁹⁴ The chronicle next refers to Ramappaiya's son-in-law and successor Kondappaiya, active under King Tirumalai Nayaka (r. c. 1623-59) and praised as the conqueror of Ceylon.

We then read of a general called Tutu Tirumalai Nayaka, maybe identical to the *Daḷavāy-cum-poet* Venkata Krishnappa Nayaka. A former betel-bearer promoted by King Chokkanatha Nayaka (r. 1660-77, 1680-2),⁹⁵ he and his assistant Chinna Tambi Mudaliyar allegedly fought against the Nayaka Prince Chengamaladasa of Tanjavur. Remarkably, the significant role they probably played in the fall of Tanjavur's Nayaka house in 1673 is more or less ignored here. Instead, the text relates that on this occasion, Chokkanatha dispatched a hundred tall, plump prostitutes with the order to show their naked bodies to his own unsuccessful and unmotivated soldiers. Utterly disgraced, the Madurai troops now desperately fled towards the hostile Tanjavur army, hoping at least to die an honourable death on the battlefield, but entirely routing the enemy in the process.

After this episode, the first mentioned general is Kasturi Ranga Ayyan, initially serving Queen Mangammal (r. 1691-1707) but later backing her grandson and rival Vijayaranga Chokkanatha (r. 1707-32). The text suggests that Kasturi Ranga held a minister's post as well, possibly combining the functions of *daḷavāy* and *pradhāni*. However, he was later imprisoned by Vijayaranga Chokkanatha and replaced with General Govindappa Ayyan. The chronicle ends with the last real Nayaka

⁹³ Sathyanatha Aiyar, *History of the Nayaks of Madura*, 235-43; Rangachari, "The History of the Naik Kingdom of Madura," *Indian Antiquary* XLIV, 113-16; Nelson, *The Madura Country*, vol. III, 144-7; Aseem Banu, "Polity under the Nayaks of Madurai," 26-35, 39-42; Chandra, "The Cultural History of the Nayaks of Madurai," 52, 61-6, 72-3, 78-9; Vink, *Mission to Madurai*, 53, 58-62, 309-15, 353-6; Mahalingam, *South Indian Polity*, 117.

⁹⁴ Mahalingam, "Historical Material in the Ramappayyan Ammanai," 389, 391.

⁹⁵ The text has "budget bearer," thought to refer to "betel bearer." See BL/AAS, MG, no. 4, pt. 4: "Mootiah's chronological & historical account of the modern kings of Madura," f. 43 (footnote).

ruler, Queen Minakshi (r. c. 1732-9), under whom a few more, competing generals follow. These include Minakshi's aid Ravanaiya—another *daḷavāy* who was also a minister—and his opponent Muttu Svami Ayya (perhaps to be identified with Venkatacharya), supporter of the queen's rival Bangaru Tirumalai and son of yet another general, probably named Narasappa Ayyan.⁹⁶

This text is rather confused, mixing up several people and events, and clearly omitting a number of *daḷavāys*. Still, it implies that many characteristics of courtiers found at other courts also existed in Madurai. The chronicle repeatedly mentions functionaries occupying different offices simultaneously, profiting from family connections, competing among each other, falling from grace, and influencing dynastic developments. All these observations are underscored by Dutch reports on this Nayaka court.

But before turning to those accounts, we briefly consider another succession of officials initiated by Madurai's first great courtier, Ariyanatha Mudaliyar. Not only did he commence the *daḷavāy* and *pradhāni* lines at the central court, he supposedly also established a hereditary governorship at the town of Tirunelveli in the far south when he was dispatched to subdue that region. This lineage allegedly came to be known as the Medai Dalavay Mudaliyars, the word *mēḍai* referring to the high platform on which the governors sat when receiving their subordinates, and the second term denoting the high military office held by the family founder. Perhaps because of this tradition, Tirunelveli emerged as a secondary political and courtly centre in Madurai, according to some local texts complete with a sumptuous display of might, riches, and status.⁹⁷

Around the mid-seventeenth century, by the time the VOC settled down on Madurai's shores, these two nodes of power—the main court (alternating between Madurai town and Tiruchirappalli) and the southern governor's seat at Tirunelveli—still shaped the kingdom's politics. For, as Dutch records suggest, this period saw the domination of two families of courtiers, one stationed at the capital, the other based in the Tirunelveli region. The former, the Tubaki family, included several individuals already mentioned. Central among them was Tubaki Lingama (or Lingappa) Nayaka, who around 1663 briefly served as a *daḷavāy* under the Nayakas of Tanjavur, both after and before holding the same post in Madurai. He was a younger brother of Tubaki Krishnappa Nayaka, the *daḷavāy* of Senji, whose

⁹⁶ BL/AAS, MG, no. 4, pt. 4: "Mootiah's chronological & historical account of the modern kings of Madura," ff. 59, 61, 64-5, 71-4. For the identification of some of these generals see Sathyanatha Aiyar, *History of the Nayaks of Madura*, 165, 231, 232, 234, 236-7.

⁹⁷ Kadhivel, *A History of the Maravas*, 67; Ludden, *Peasant History in South India*, 69-70, 99, 189; Narayana Rao, Shulman, and Subrahmanyam, *Symbols of Substance*, 39-40, 95; Taylor, *Oriental Historical Manuscripts*, vol. II, 213-15; Sathyanatha Aiyar, *History of the Nayaks of Madura*, 53.

power was feared more than that of the Senji Nayaka himself, at least according to a Dutch letter of 1644.⁹⁸

When Krishnappa died in 1659, his brother Lingama offered his services and troops to the Nayakas of Madurai. There, already in 1660, he was instrumental in the succession following King Muttu Virappa Nayaka II's passing. He acquired the offices of *daḷavāy* and governor of the province bordering Tanjavur soon after and held great power at court during much of the 1660s while the young Chokkanatha Nayaka sat on the throne. In the beginning of that decade, Lingama was involved in a plot with the *pradhāni* and the *rāyasam* to replace Chokkanatha with his younger brother. Its timely discovery explains why Lingama fled to Tanjavur and became *daḷavāy* there. But his surprisingly quick return to Madurai to resume this rank under Chokkanatha—after a short stint in prison—shows the might and prestige he continued to enjoy in these years.

Indeed, in 1665 Chokkanatha married Lingama's daughter Mangammal, thought to wield great influence on her husband through her legendary beauty. Lingama's son Tubaki Anandappa (or Antappa) Nayaka, now brother-in-law of the king, became a prominent courtier too, later occupying the office of *daḷavāy* himself.⁹⁹ The Tubakis were a highly influential family, then, centred on the brothers Lingama and Krishnappa, who in the course of time were employed by all three Nayaka houses in the Tamil area in various, mostly military, offices, and even managed to establish marital ties with one of these dynasties.

In the same period, another Madurai official with a strong family network rose to great heights. This was Vadamalaiyappa Pillai, who according to the Dutch came from the Tanjavur region and belonged to the Vellala caste. At least from the late 1640s on, he served the Nayakas of Madurai, intermittently holding the positions of governor of the southern Tiruvallur province—seated at Tirunelveli—and of

⁹⁸ NA, VOC, no. 1147, ff. 535-5v: letter from Pulicat to Batavia, Jan. 1644. For Senji's *daḷavāys*, in Dutch records often referred to as "the great Aija," see: Srinivasachari, *A History of Gingee*, 114-19; Philippus Baldaeus, *Naauwkeurige beschryvinge van Malabar en Choromandel, der zelve aangrenzende ryken, en het machtige eyland Ceylon. Nevens een omstandige en grondigh doorzochte ontdekking en wederlegginge van de afgoderye der Oost-Indische heydenen ...* (Amsterdam, 1672), 1st pt., 158; Subrahmanyam, *The Political Economy of Commerce*, 310-11; Narayana Rao, Shulman, and Subrahmanyam, *Symbols of Substance*, 96; Om Prakash (ed.), *The Dutch Factories in India 1617-1623: A Collection of Dutch East India Company Documents Pertaining to India* (New Delhi, 1984), 32 (n. 2); idem, *The Dutch Factories in India ... Vol. II*, 159; Terpstra, *De vestiging van de Nederlanders aan de kust van Koromandel*, 89; Raychaudhuri, *Jan Company in Coromandel*, 19-20, 43-4, 53-4; Colenbrander et al., *Dagh-register gehouden int Casteel Batavia and Coolhaas et al.*, *Generale Missiven*, both series first few volumes.

⁹⁹ Vink, *Mission to Madurai*, 58-9, 63, 150 (n. 100), 157 (n. 111), 163 (n. 124), 166 (n. 128), 176 (n. 157), 177; NA, VOC, no. 1233, f. 43v: letter from Pulicat to Batavia, July 1660; Saulier, "Madurai and Tanjore," 778-83; Sathyanatha Aiyar, *History of the Nayaks of Madura*, 155-6, 192; Rangachari, "The History of the Naik Kingdom of Madura," *Indian Antiquary* XLVI, 41-2.

pradhāni at the central court. It is unclear whether he was related to the Tirunelveli-based Medai Dalavay Mudaliyar line of governors supposedly founded by the celebrated Ariyanatha Mudaliyar. In any case, Vadamalaiyappa appears to have initially operated as a revenue collector in this area, which likely formed his power base. Inscriptions, temple paintings, and literary works glorify his beneficent rule and exalted deeds, including his divinely-guided recovery of the deity statues seized by the VOC from the coastal Subrahmanya Svami Temple at Tiruchendur in 1649, during a Dutch-Madurai conflict (see illustration 10).

By the 1660s, he exercised great control in the central capital as the kingdom's *pradhāni*, while his son or son-in-law Tirumalai Kulantha Pillai had taken his place as governor at Tirunelveli. A brother of Vadamalaiyappa and a nephew of Tirumalai Kulantha later occupied this office, too, and in 1665 the Dutch referred to Tirumalai Kulantha as "the second of the court" and head of the army. Vadamalaiyappa's own influence was still strong in this period, since in 1670 the VOC called him the "land regent" or provincial governor, who also functioned as "the ordain-it-all [*albeschick*] of all the Nayaka's lands." In addition to holding political power, most members of the Pillai family acted as patrons of letters or were poets themselves.¹⁰⁰

An impression of how the powerful Tubaki and Pillai families coexisted is provided by the account of a Dutch mission to Tiruchirappalli in February-May 1668. The VOC's ambassador, Hendrik Adriaan van Rheede, wrote that upon his arrival at the capital he first contacted Vadamalaiyappa Pillai ("Barmialappa Pulle" in Dutch records), then *pradhāni* and considered the kingdom's second man. As he reportedly supervised all matters at the central court and personally governed the southern coast, where the Company had settled, nothing could be achieved without his help. In fact, during this embassy, the *pradhāni* literally controlled access to King Chokkanatha Nayaka as his troops guarded the royal residence.

While envoy Van Rheede therefore mostly negotiated with Vadamalaiyappa, on separate occasions he met with a few other courtiers. One of them was Tubaki Lingama's son, Anandappa Nayaka. Although only in his early twenties and seemingly not holding a specific court function yet, according to the Dutch he already wielded substantial influence through his sister Queen Mangammal. Lingama

¹⁰⁰ Vink, *Mission to Madurai*, 48, 54, 59-60, 127 (n. 7), 132 (n. 34), 136 (n. 46), 162 (n. 119), 163-4 (ns 123-4), 179 (n. 166); NA, VOC, no. 1251, f. 741; no. 1277, f. 1603; report of mission to Travancore, Madurai, and Ramnad, Mar.-Oct. 1665, instructions for mission to land regent Vadamalaiyappa Pillai, Feb. 1670; *Travancore Archaeological Series*, vol. V, pt. III, ed. A.S. Ramanatha Ayyar (Trivandrum, 1927), 200-1; Somasundra Desikar, "Viceroys of the Nayaks of Madura," 175-80; Mac Leod, *De Oost-Indische Compagnie*, vol. II, 382-3; Bauke van der Pol, *The Dutch East India Company in India: A Heritage Tour through Gujarat, Malabar, Coromandel and Bengal* (Bath, 2004), 160. For the Tiruchendur Temple murals portraying Vadamalaiyappa Pillai recovering the statues from the VOC through divine intervention, see: tiruchendur.org/dutch_gallery.htm.



Illustration 10: Painting depicting the Madurai courtier Vadamalaiyappa Pillai recovering deity statues seized by the Dutch, Subrahmanya Svami (Murugan) Temple, Tiruchendur, 20th century? (photo by Patrick Harrigan, courtesy Sri Subrahmanya Swami Devasthanam, source: tiruchendur.org/dutch/dream-9.htm).

himself, despite being Chokkanatha's father-in-law, had lately fallen out of the ruler's favour and lost his position of *daḷavāy*, accused—through instigations of *Pradhāni* Vadamalaiyappa—of treason, allegedly conspiring with Mysore, Tanjavur, Ramnad, and Bijapur. As a consequence, the standing of his son Anandappa had also suffered, even though he had been raised together with Chokkanatha.

During Van Rhee's stay in Tiruchirappalli, the tension at court increased when Tubaki Lingama announced that if his former functions and designations were not returned to him, he would look for employment at other courts. Because of his family ties with the king, Lingama was permitted to depart on the condition he left his capital and possessions behind. As it was thought unlikely he would comply, Tiruchirappalli was secured with soldiers to prevent him from escaping, while Lingama himself permanently kept some 1,500 personal guards with him. Matters quieted down a bit when Chokkanatha gave Lingama command over a number of the kingdom's troops again, according to the Dutch because Queen Mangammal had threatened to commit suicide if her father left Madurai. Yet, *Pradhāni* Vadamalaiyappa appears to have remained in charge—supposedly through massive bribery of the king—and he entirely dominated the sole audience the VOC envoy secured with Chokkanatha. Not surprisingly, a few days later it turned out Lingama had fled the kingdom after all.

This did not prove an unequivocal victory for Vadamalaiyappa. Left with no general to oversee the war against Mysore, a group of courtiers managed to have the *pradhāni* himself sent to the battlefield as commander. These officials, belonging to neither the Pillai nor the Tubaki faction, included the councillor Chinna Tambi Mudaliyar and chief chamberlain Kumara Rangappa Nayaka. The former was another military official disposed of by Vadamalaiyappa, who nevertheless would serve as both *daḷavāy* and *pradhāni* a few years later, while the latter was a close and perhaps illegitimate relative of the king and was much favoured by him.¹⁰¹ That these men held some power of their own, is suggested by the fact that Van Rhee presented them with gifts, albeit of less value than what Vadamalaiyappa and Anandappa Nayaka received (see table 11 below). In any case, Vadamalaiyappa soon returned from the war front, claiming to have fallen ill, but no doubt eager to keep the court under control.¹⁰²

Whereas during the following four decades two members of the Tubaki family rose to great heights, the Pillai family gradually lost its prominence. In the early 1670s, Vadamalaiyappa was imprisoned twice, reportedly with the aim to confiscate his riches. After his first time in jail, he had to endure the presence of two Brahmins sent from the central court to Tirunelveli to monitor him. After he died in 1675, in the 1680s his functions of *pradhāni* and governor of Tirunelveli were both held by the Brahmin Tiruvenkatanatha Ayya. Like Vadamalaiyappa, he originated from Tanjavur and had enjoyed a high court position there before he and his sons moved to Madurai to offer their administrative and fiscal skills. Local sources suggest that Tiruvenkatanatha had already been governor at Tirunelveli around the mid-seventeenth century and that his son Venkatesha later occupied this position, while other sons served as a *pradhāni* or provincial governor elsewhere. Like the Pillai family, these men patronised poets and composed texts themselves. Some literature even portrays them as behaving like fully-fledged royals, holding court and lavishly parading around town. Confirming this local view, in 1705 the Dutch wrote that the governors of Tirunelveli—whom they called “great land regents”—might be considered “viceroys” (*onder coningen*), for the Nayakas had permitted them to “maintain their own court” (*hoff te houden*).

While these Brahmins operated from their southern power base until the 1690s, Tubaki Anandappa Nayaka became a powerful *daḷavāy* based at the capital, and so the coexistence of two political centres in the kingdom continued. Perhaps as a consequence of this rivalry, Anandappa’s career kept oscillating. After his stature

¹⁰¹ This Kumara Rangappa Nayaka was possibly the same person as the eponymous member of Madurai’s secondary line of rulers, mentioned in Chapter 2.

¹⁰² Vink, *Mission to Madurai*, 144–8, 157–8, 160, 165–8 (ns 130–1), 172–7, 180, 190, 193–4, 196, 201–5, 214–17, 221–4, 227–8, 232–7, 246–7, 249–50, 252, 255–60.

had briefly diminished in 1668 when his father Lingama was accused of treason, in 1677 he temporarily shifted allegiance to Tanjavur, now under Ekoji Bhonsle. Back in Madurai—being the uncle of Chokkanatha's successor Muttu Virappa Nayaka III—from 1682 on Anandappa acted as the regent of this underaged ruler, in which capacity he dominated the court.¹⁰³ But in 1686, losing a battle against the Maratha King Shivaji, he fell out of favour once more. Finally, in 1689, upon the discovery that he was part of a plot to assassinate the king, he was executed together with dozens of other members of the Tubaki family.¹⁰⁴

Anandappa's sister Mangammal fared better. After her son Muttu Virappa III died in 1691, she effectively reigned over Madurai as a widowed queen, installing her infant grandson Vijayaranga Chokkanatha as formal co-ruler. Only when the latter reached maturity and dethroned his grandmother in 1707, the might of the Tubaki family at last came to an end.¹⁰⁵

Of course, there were numerous other courtiers to fill their place, most of whom must go unmentioned here. Some deserve brief reference, however, as they provide us with further illustrative examples of the fortunes of Madurai officials. One of them was Kavita Nayaka, who was married to a sister of King Chokkanatha Nayaka and around 1674 served as both a *daḷavāy* and the governor of the briefly occupied Tanjavur coast. His son Pradhani Nayaka (alias Bodi Alagiri), the ruler's nephew, initially succeeded Vadamalaiyappa Pillai as governor in Tirunelveli and was thought by the Dutch to dominate the court in the mid-1670s.

The Muslim general or *daḷakartan* (commander of the capital's fort) Rustam Khan, allegedly adopted and raised by Chokkanatha, usurped the kingdom in 1680. Once in power, he appointed his followers to important positions, locked Chokkanatha up in the palace, and reportedly appropriated all the king's privileges and possessions, including the royal women—until he was assassinated in 1682. During an embassy in 1689, the Dutch considered the *Pradhāni* Raghava Ayya the most powerful courtier, judging from their distribution of gifts (see table 11). But just as this mission was taking place, Raghava lost his position when the

¹⁰³ Notably, like Queen Mangammal, the wife of this young king, Muttammal, was the daughter of a Madurai *daḷavāy*, Venkata Krishnappa Nayaka, who in 1673 defeated the Nayakas of Tanjavur.

¹⁰⁴ Vink, *Mission to Madurai*, 59-62, 157 (n. 111), 168, 174, 204, 228, 233-4, 258, 262 (n. 2), 312 (n. 196), 377-8 (n. 4), 464, 476-7, 548, 556-7; NA, VOC, no. 1292, ff. 24, 214v; no. 1274, ff. 81, 303; no. 8921, f. 163: letters from Colombo to Gentlemen XVII and Batavia, Dec. 1670, Jan. 1671, Feb., May 1673, final report of Tuticorin's chief (*opperhoofd*) Nicolaas Welter, Oct. 1705; DNA, DCGCC, no. 2672, ff. 9v-10v: final report of Tuticorin's chief Laurens Pijl, Dec. 1672; S. Somasundra Desikar, "Tiruveṅkaṭānātha of Mātai," *Journal of Indian History* XVI, 2 (1937), 133-6; idem, "Venkatesa, Viceroy of Rangakrishna Muttuvirappa III," *Journal of Indian History* XVI, 3 (1937), 304-9; Taylor, *Oriental Historical Manuscripts*, vol. II, 213-15.

¹⁰⁵ Madurai's Queen Minakshi (r. c. 1732-9) may however have belonged to the Tubaki family as well. See the Madurai section in Chapter 2.

abovementioned Tiruvengkatanatha Ayya was suddenly reinstalled as *pradhāni* again, necessitating the Dutch to quickly produce extra presents for the latter.¹⁰⁶

Around the turn of the eighteenth century the court was dominated by two Brahmin *daḷavāys*, father and son Narasappa Ayyan and Kasturi Ranga Ayyan, who figure prominently in both local and VOC sources. The former, a favourite of Queen Mangammal, grew so influential that Jesuit missionaries called him the “prince-regent.” But his great influence, and—as the VOC claimed—his Tamil background, caused resentment and fear among Madurai’s Telugu-speaking courtiers, many of whom allegedly sought asylum in Ariyalur. When Narasappa died in battle in 1702, his son Kasturi Ranga seems to have taken over his father’s great might. His was an unstable career, however. He was first imprisoned by Mangammal and later, under her successor Vijayaranga Chokkanatha Nayaka, he fled to Tanjavur to serve Shahaji Bhonsle. But in both cases, Kasturi Ranga was soon reinstalled in Madurai as *daḷavāy*, the second time supposedly with the help of the Nawab of Arcot in return for 400,000 *rupees*—another instance of the strongly fluctuating powers of some courtiers and the ongoing involvement of neighbouring kingdoms.¹⁰⁷

Until the fall of the Nayakas around 1739, more courtiers followed. Some appear in table 11, which lists the officials receiving the most valuable gifts from the Dutch at seven diplomatic meetings between Madurai’s monarchs and the VOC during the period 1668–1731, mostly in the early eighteenth century. As in this chapter’s other tables, there are great changes in the distribution of presents with each

¹⁰⁶ For Kavita Nayaka, Pradhani Nayaka, and Raghava Ayya, see: Vink, *Mission to Madurai*, 64, 269 (n. 22), 378 (n. 4), 384 (n. 9), 409–10, 499–500, 571–2; NA, VOC, no. 1304, ff. 281v, 323; no. 1316, f. 302: letters from Nagapattinam to Batavia, from Tuticorin to Colombo, Sept. 1674, Dec. 1676, report of Tuticorin’s chief, Mar. 1674. For Rustam Khan, see: Srinivasachariar, “Muslim Adventurers in the Kingdoms of Tanjore and Madura,” 389–92; Taylor, *Oriental Historical Manuscripts*, vol. II, 35; Sathyanatha Aiyar, *History of the Nayaks of Madura*, 180–2, 286; Vink, *Mission to Madurai*, 314 (n. 211), 396 (n. 61); idem, “Encounters on the Opposite Coast,” 372–3; Rangachari, “The History of the Naik Kingdom of Madura,” *Indian Antiquary* XLVI, 96–9.

¹⁰⁷ For Narasappa Ayyan and Kasturi Ranga Ayyan, see: NA, VOC, no. 1617, f. 67v; no. 1664, f. 177; no. 1706, ff. 1040v, 1047–50v; no. 1756, ff. 1195–6v, 1205–8v; no. 1778, ff. 103–4; no. 1803, ff. 102–3v; no. 1893, ff. 1050v–3v; no. 8595, ff. 129–30; no. 8924, ff. 201–2; no. 11306, ff. 43–5: letters from Nagapattinam and Colombo to Batavia, from Tuticorin to Colombo, June 1699, May 1702, Feb. 1707, May 1709, July 1711, July 1717, reports of meetings with Madurai rulers, July 1705, July 1708, report on the Nayaka’s imminent visit to Tuticorin, Apr. 1709, description of the Nayakas of Madurai by Holst, 1762; BL/AAS, MG, no. 4, pt. 4: “Mootiah’s chronological & historical account of the modern kings of Madura,” f. 71; Coolhaas et al., *Generale Missiven*, vol. VI, 593, 779; Vink, *Mission to Madurai*, 38, 64, 474–5 (n. 237); Venkata Rao, *The Southern School in Telugu Literature*, 144; Sathyanatha Aiyar, *History of the Nayaks of Madura*, 209–10, 213, 217–19, 223, 295, 305–11, 316–17, 366 (nos 216, 218); Burgess and Naṭeśa Śāstri, *Tamil and Sanskrit Inscriptions*, 110–11; Nelson, *The Madura Country*, vol. III, 230–5, 240; Rangachari, “The History of the Naik Kingdom of Madura,” *Indian Antiquary* XLVI, 162–3, 183, 187–8.

Table 11: Distribution of gifts among prominent courtiers during Dutch missions to Madurai, in order of value, 1668-1731.

1668	1689	1705	1708	1717	1720	1731
<i>king</i> Chokkanatha	<i>king</i> Muttu Virappa III	<i>queen</i> Mangammal	<i>king</i> Vijayaranga Chokkanatha	<i>king</i> Vijayaranga Chokkanatha	<i>king</i> Vijayaranga Chokkanatha	<i>king</i> Vijayaranga Chokkanatha
<i>pradhāni</i> Vadamalai- yappa Pillai	<i>pradhāni</i> Raghava Ayya	<i>daḷavāy</i> Kasturi Ranga Ayyan	<i>daḷavāy</i> Kasturi Ranga Ayyan	<i>daḷavāy</i> (& <i>pradhāni</i> ?) Rajasam	<i>pradhāni</i> Sambu Ayyan	<i>daḷavāy</i> Govindappa Ayyan
<i>king's brother</i> Achyutappa Nayaka	<i>lowlands</i> <i>regent</i> Alagiri Nayaka	<i>"favourite"</i> Pattavirama Ayyan	<i>royal in-law</i> Achyutapati Nayaka	<i>deputy general</i> Sambu Ayyan	<i>royal in-law</i> Periya Mappil- lai Nayaka	<i>"favourite"</i> Ananda Raghu Ayyan
<i>town governor</i> Chokkalinga Nayaka	<i>(new) pradhāni</i> Tiruvengkata- natha Ayya	<i>royal in-law</i> Lakshminan Nayaka	<i>royal in-law</i> Lakshmipati Nayaka	<i>councillor</i> Venkatesa Ariyar	<i>state minister</i> Venkatesa Ariyar	<i>courtier</i> Polamara Chetti Ayyan
<i>courtier</i> Tubaki Anandappa	<i>regent's envoy</i> Mutti Mudaliyar	<i>councillor</i> Vadamalai- yappa Pillai	<i>lowl. regent</i> Ananda Pat- panatha Pillai	<i>lowl. regent</i> Alagappa Mudaliyar	<i>regent's in-law</i> Kumara Svami Mudaliyar	<i>lowl. regent</i> Chetti Raja Ayyan
<i>councillor</i> Chinna Tambi Mudaliyar	<i>captain</i> Venkatapati Nayaka		<i>rāyasam</i> (?) Govindappa Ayyan		<i>court merchant</i> Sundardasu Ayyan	<i>minister</i> Venketa Raghava Ariyar
<i>chamberlain</i> Rangappa Nayaka					<i>royal relative</i> Chagavada Ayyan	<i>deputy regent</i> Lingaraja Ayyan

Notes: in 1668 the order between nos 3 and 4 and between nos 5 and 6 is not certain; in 1689 gifts for no. 4 had to be improvised during the mission after his sudden installation and the demotion of nos 2 and 3; in 1705 nos 3 and 4 received equally much, while the difference with no. 5 was very small; in 1708 nos 3 and 4 as well as nos 5 and 6 received equally much; in 1717 no. 2 was not present, nos 4 and 5 received equally much, and the difference between them and no. 3 was very small; in 1720 nos 3 and 4 received equally much; all missions from 1705 to 1731 were dispatched to Melur, on the outskirts of Tuticorin, when the monarch visited that town.

Sources: Vink, *Mission to Madurai*, 199-203, 254-7, 382-4, 408-10, 450-1, 459, 461-3, 499-500, 537-8, 544, 546-7, 571-2; NA, VOC, no. 1706, ff. 1040v-50v, 1054v-5; no. 1756, ff. 1198v-208; no. 1893, ff. 1050v-5v; no. 1941, ff. 927v-9, 931, 939-45; no. 2185, ff. 1009v-11.

new encounter. Since the first embassies were decades apart, those differences should maybe not surprise us. Besides, the eighteenth-century missions all took place during royal tours to Madurai's Fishery Coast, so courtiers staying back at the capital were generally not honoured with gifts. Yet, the table underscores some of the patterns seen above.

Most notably, the men who over the decades were given the most valuable presents after the king or queen were two *pradhānis*, two *daḷavāys*, another *pradhāni*, and a *daḷavāy* again. The first of these *pradhānis*, Vadamalaiyappa Pillai, was also governor of Tirunelveli, or “regent of the lowlands,” as the Dutch called this function. But people holding only this regional post never made it to the highest level in the VOC's ranking order, although they were still regularly presented with gifts, often occupying the third or fifth position. Another category that frequently received presents, unlike in the other kingdoms, comprised relatives of the monarch, including a brother and several in-laws, positioned anywhere between the third and seventh place.

Most other functions—including some unclear Dutch classifications like “councillor,” “minister,” “favourite” (*gunsteling*), or simply “courtier”—occur just once in the table, indicating the transitory power of these offices. A special case concerns the royal tour in 1717, when *Daḷavāy* Rajasam—who may have been *pradhāni* too since the Dutch called him “Prodani Raijasam”—received the most gifts of all courtiers. The fact that he did not actually accompany the king on this trip, shows all the more the great influence he wielded according to the VOC.

All this suggests that one's formal office said little about one's effective power, at least in the eyes of the Dutch. Tellingly, while in this table the position of either *pradhāni* or *daḷavāy* always comes second, these offices never appear together in a single list. Thus, whenever the *pradhāni* was honoured with the most gifts after the monarch, the *daḷavāy* was given nothing at all, and so it was the other way round. It seems that someone holding one of these ranks was either very powerful or lacked much influence, perhaps pointing to a general fierce rivalry between these potentially most prominent functions.

Although the preceding pages have discussed only some of Madurai's courtiers, several characteristics can be deduced from the examples. Some of these are common for all courts, while others seem more typical for Madurai. Starting with the latter, this was the only kingdom among Vijayanagara's heirs that long harboured two strong political centres or—as some contemporaries called it—two courts: the capital, at Madurai town or more northerly Tiruchirappalli; and the governor's seat at Tirunelveli in the far south. Several southern governors, such as Vadamalaiyappa Pillai, Pradhani Nayaka, and Tiruvenkatanatha Ayya, also occupied important positions at the central court, usually as *pradhāni*. Control of

the Tirunelveli region, and the wealth gained from revenue collection there, likely often served as a power base for the acquisition of influence at the capital.

This coexistence of two nodes of power, and the resultant great potential for competition, may have contributed to another phenomenon occurring often in Madurai: the movement of courtiers to or from other kingdoms. Tubaki Lingama Nayaka and his son Anandappa, Vadamalaiyappa Pillai, Tiruvenkatanatha Ayya, Raghava Ayya, and Kasturi Ranga Ayyan, all *daḷavāys* or *pradhānis*, each left this Nayaka court to seek employment or asylum at Tanjavur or Ariyalur—usually to soon return—or first arrived in Madurai from elsewhere in search of political and economic opportunities, found at both the capital and Tirunelveli.

Another point on which Madurai seems to stand out is the relatively limited diversity of the courtiers' backgrounds. Most officials were either members of various Brahmin communities or, judging from their many marital liaisons with the royal family, belonged to the Balija castes, like the Nayakas themselves. The considerable size of the second group may also explain the fair number of royal in-laws mentioned in table 11. In contrast, and unlike in Bhonsle-ruled Tanjavur, few or no Muslims are found among Madurai's prominent functionaries, with the notable exception of Rustam Khan.

Other aspects are more common for all courts. Madurai courtiers frequently held various offices consecutively or simultaneously, in the latter instance often combining a function in the capital with a regional governorship. Besides the aforementioned cases, table 11 shows that in 1717 Sambu Ayyan was a deputy general (*onder veltheer*), while three years later he held the more civilian post of *pradhāni*. Climbing in the opposite direction—from an administrative to a military rank—Govindappa Ayyan, *rāyasam* in 1708, was probably the same person who acted as *daḷavāy* in 1731. Further, in Madurai, too, careers were not only diverse but also oscillating. Tubaki Lingama, Vadamalaiyappa Pillai, Raghava Ayya, and Kasturi Ranga Ayyan rose to prominence and fell from grace at least twice, and Tubaki Anandappa did so no fewer than three times. Apparently, demotion, imprisonment, or even defection hardly ever signalled the end of one's possibilities at this court. Anandappa seems a rare example of a Madurai courtier whose career ended with his execution.

Another element shared with other successor states is the prominent role of kinship. In Madurai, a handful of Brahmin and (probably) Balija families dominated the kingdom from the moment the VOC began to report about it. These included the Tubaki and Pillai houses, Tiruvenkatanatha Ayya and Kavita Nayaka with their respective sons, and father and son Narasappa and Kasturi Ranga Ayyan. The Tubaki and Pillai lines were especially long-lasting, active during at least the years 1660-1707 and 1640s-1705 respectively.¹⁰⁸ Equally common was the strong opposi-

¹⁰⁸ For this last year, when a relative of Vadamalaiyappa Pillai held an important post, see table 11.

tion between these families and among individual courtiers. The power struggle between the Tubaki and Pillai families during the 1660s and 1670s and the rivalry between the “Tamil” *Daḷavāy* Narasappa Ayyan and Telugu-speaking officials in the 1690s are just two examples of the regular competition at the Madurai court, in which nearly every courtier somehow seemed involved.

Setupatis of Ramnad

The composition of high functionaries in Ramnad appears to be largely modelled on its parental state Madurai. Secondary literature states that Ramnad’s most prominent courtier was the *daḷavāy*, who combined the highest military and civilian duties, serving as both the chief minister and supreme general. It has been suggested this office was only introduced here in the early 1680s, when Madurai’s King Chokkanatha Nayaka presented his *Daḷavāy* Kumara Pillai to Ramnad’s Setupati Kilavan Tevar, showing his appreciation for the latter’s assistance in assassinating Madurai’s usurper Rustam Khan. But Dutch records refer to a *daḷavāy* in Ramnad at least from 1674 on, so the function may have been in use since the court’s beginnings.

The *pradhāni* is thought to have been the next most important official, controlling financial matters, revenue collection, and the state’s internal administration. The third court rank was the *rāyasam*, the king’s secretary. Further, VOC documents speak of a “treasurer” (*schatbewaarder*), probably the *sarvādhikāri* mentioned in secondary literature, and several *sērvaiikkārars* (“cheerwegaren”), a term that in Ramnad seems to have indicated military officers of various ranks.¹⁰⁹ Besides, there were provincial governors, including the functionary the Dutch called “regent of the lowlands,” the revenue-farmer of the region along the kingdom’s southern shore.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ The word *sērvaiikkārar* as used by the VOC chiefly denoted a high military post, but it had in fact several meanings depending on the context. Besides a military or political designation—commander or chief—it was a title of members of the Ahambadiya caste (closely related to the Maravars and Kallars), the name of a Maravar sub-caste, and a term for male offspring of Setupatis and junior wives of the Ahambadiya caste. Such progeny was disqualified from kingship but it is thought courtiers were often recruited from this group. It is unclear whether the officials called *sērvaiikkārar* in this chapter came from this background. See: Dirks, *The Hollow Crown*, 72 (n. 35), 173-4, 268-9 (n. 7); Kadhivrel, *A History of the Maravas*, 9-10; Thurston, *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*, vol. V, 48, vol. VI, 362; Mahalingam, *Mackenzie Manuscripts*, vol. I, 238; Ludden, *Peasant History in South India*, 72; Raja Ram Rao, *Ramnad Manual*, 33.

¹¹⁰ For the size and composition of the entire palace staff and other servants in late eighteenth-century Ramnad and (in more detail) its off-shoot Pudukkottai in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, see respectively: Howes, *The Courts of Pre-Colonial South India*, 146-7, 166, 169; Joanne Punzo Waghorne, *The Raja’s Magic Clothes: Re-visioning Kingship and Divinity in England’s India* (University Park, 1994), chs 5-7.

The focus lies here on the period from the last decades of the seventeenth century onward, because the VOC only permanently settled down in Ramnad in 1690, leading to closer and more continuous contacts with courtiers than before. Moreover, the 1680s seem to mark the kingdom's achievement of practical autonomy from Madurai, as it was in these years that King Kilavan Tevar no longer supported his Nayaka overlord but, on the contrary, joined Madurai's opponents and conquered part of the Nayaka's lands.¹¹¹ Thus, starting around 1690, one can both study an independently functioning court and consult sources that deal intensively and uninterruptedly with this kingdom's courtiers.¹¹²

Among the limited number of Ramnad officials who can be discussed here are various members of the family of Shaykh Abd al-Qadir, like the Dutch based at the town of Kilakkarai. This port had long been home to communities of Muslim merchants—some claiming Arab descent—who designated themselves as Maraikkayars, Labbais, or both.¹¹³ Belonging to the former group, Abd al-Qadir and several relatives consecutively bore the title of *periya tambi* or “great brother,” denoting their prominent position among Kilakkarai's inhabitants and at the Ramnad court. At least active from the 1670s, the initial *periya tambi* was Abd al-Qadir's uncle or elder brother, who served as the Setupati's chief merchant and in his capacity as revenue-farmer controlled Ramnad's Fishery Coast, including Kilakkarai. Like in Madurai and Tanjavur, the Dutch called this coastal representative “regent of the lowlands.”

As with many other magnates, in the wake of the *periya tambis'* extensive commercial enterprise—including large-scale overseas trade—came political power. The standing of the first *periya tambi* at the Ramnad court transpires from the fact that during a VOC mission in 1683 he was one of the two courtiers conducting the negotiations in between the formal audiences with the king. But his great influence and mercantile activities led to clashes with the Dutch, who, after a military confrontation with Ramnad in 1685, forced the Setupati to sign a treaty that removed the *periya tambi* and his relatives from their administrative positions. Like with

¹¹¹ Seshadri, “The Sētopatis of Ramnad,” 55-8, 184-6; Shulman and Subrahmanyam, “Prince of Poets and Ports,” 505-6; Vink, *Mission to Madurai*, 73-4, 470 (n. 226); Kadirvel, *A History of the Maravas*, 37-49; NA, VOC, no. 2956, f. 1223: diary of mission to Ramnad, June 1759.

¹¹² For courtiers in Ramnad up to the 1680s, see: Vink, “Encounters on the Opposite Coast,” 288-9, 292-3, 372, 376-7; idem, *Mission to Madurai*, 73-4; Shulman and Subrahmanyam, “Prince of Poets and Ports,” 506-7; Seshadri, “The Sētopatis of Ramnad,” 29-30, 56-7.

¹¹³ While the term “Maraikkayar” generally denoted a higher status than “Labbai,” this distinction appears not to have always been observed in Ramnad in this period. At any rate, someone like Labbai Nayinar Maraikkayar (see below) apparently bore both titles.

many other such agreements, however, this stipulation was more or less ignored by the Ramnad court.

Consequently, when the first *periya tambi* died in 1688, his various functions passed to a family member who was probably his brother's younger son, or perhaps his brother himself, called Citakkati Pillai (the former term a Tamilisation of "Shaykh Abd al-Qadir"). Although facing opposition from not just the Dutch but also other Muslims traders and court officials, Citakkati became the most powerful person in Ramnad after the king. Illustrative of his high position was the permission he, and maybe already his predecessor, received to bear the names "Vijaya Raghunatha," used by Ramnad's royal family. This sharing of names—thereby establishing fictional kinship—was an effort by the Setupati Kilavan Tevar to incorporate the powerful *periya tambis* and Kilakkarai's Muslim community at large, binding them with moral obligations. One reason why the king wished to maintain such close relations was his desire to conduct overseas trade himself, for which Kilakkarai's merchants served as valuable middlemen.

Further conflicts with the VOC, however, resulted in another Dutch-Ramnad contract in 1690, once more stating that the *periya tambi* family be excluded from political functions. During the signing of this treaty, Kilavan swore on his gun that this time he would stick to the clause and even put the hands of the *periya tambi*'s son and the Dutch envoys together in his own hands "as a sign of friendship." Despite all that, this stipulation was again hardly adhered to as by the mid-1690s Citakkati resurfaced in VOC documents, dominating Kilakkarai and wielding great influence at court.

After Citakkati Pillai passed away in 1698, he was succeeded by a close relative, also named Abd al-Qadir. This third *periya tambi* grew even more influential than his predecessors. Said by the Dutch to possess the king's mind (*gemoet*) and be consulted by him on all important affairs, Abd al-Qadir served as a revenue-farmer, court merchant, ship and arms supplier, and diplomatic intermediary between the court and the VOC, besides his own commercial activities. As with very powerful courtiers in Tanjavur and Madurai, the Dutch referred to Abd al-Qadir as the Setupati's "ordain-it-all" (*albeschik*). One tradition has it that he or his predecessor also helped the king fund the construction of the capital's fort and palace hall, in return for which he was allowed to reside in a nearby palatial building.

In addition, Abd al-Qadir, his predecessor Citakkati Pillai, and possibly the other *periya tambis* were patrons of Tamil Muslim literature. Such texts portray them variously as heroic warriors, religious devotees, and even kingly figures holding court with all due pomp and circumstance. Thus, this family provides another example of traders whose wealth and network made them attain political power and rise to great prominence as courtiers, in this case complete with royal trappings.

Nevertheless, when Abd al-Qadir died in 1708 and his place was filled by his young son, the end of the family's power was near. The son got involved in yet more discord with the VOC and on one occasion had his men attack not only Dutch property but also delegates of the Setupati. Therefore, in 1709 the VOC could finally convince the court to strip the *periya tambi* line of its political power. A Dutch-Ramnad treaty in that year stipulated that all relatives and descendants of Abd al-Qadir's family be perpetually excluded from governmental positions. Soon after, under the reign of Muttu Vijaya Raghunatha Setupati, the Dutch reported that the fourth *periya tambi* had still engaged himself in the succession struggle between this ruler and his opponent Bhavani Shankara, financially backing the latter's supporters Madurai and Pudukkottai. After severe punishment, Abd al-Qadir's son allegedly died in 1710 and in the following years his family largely disappeared from the VOC archives, a return to power seemingly impossible.

However, much to the VOC's dismay, a mission sent in 1739 by Ramnad to the Dutch at Colombo was headed by another member of Abd al-Qadir's house. Like his predecessors, this man, perhaps a son of the fourth *periya tambi*, served as the "regent of the lowlands" and was entitled to bear the royal names "Vijaya Raghunatha." Yet, he never acquired the great powers of his ancestors and after the Colombo embassy the VOC records are silent on him.¹¹⁴

Thus, in short, Ramnad's court on the one hand profited from the economic skills of the *periya tambis* and other Maraikkayars and Labbais, but on the other hand faced competition for political power from these Muslim communities. The Setupatis' efforts to incorporate their leaders—for instance through administrative appointments and name-sharing—were therefore moves to control them, which they were more than willing to accept because this only increased their influence and prestige. As with Abd al-Qadir's family, however, there was always the risk of growing too powerful, overplaying one's hand, and falling from grace.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ As late as around the mid-nineteenth century, this family continued to use the Setupatis' dynastic names, like "Ravikula Muttu Vijaya Raghunatha." Other Muslim families at Kilakkarai bore the Setupati designation "Hiranya Garbhayaji" (for which title see Chapter 5). See Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*, 83-4.

¹¹⁵ Shulman and Subrahmanyam, "Prince of Poets and Ports"; Vink, *Mission to Madurai*, 77-80; idem, "Encounters on the Opposite Coast," 293-4; Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*, 78-90; Raja Ram Rao, *Ramnad Manual*, 228; Thiruvengkatachari, *The Setupatis of Ramnad*, 45, 150 (n. 51); Bes, "The Setupatis, the Dutch, and Other Bandits," 548, 550-2; P. Sabapathy, "Muslims under the Setupatis of Ramnad: A Study in the Socio-Cultural History of Tamilnadu (17th and 18th Centuries)," *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 60 (1999), 386; J.L.W., "The Chronicles of the Marava Country," 456; NA, VOC, no. 1383, f. 554v; no. 1479, f. 403v; no. 1615C, f. 653; no. 2457, ff. 1026v-7, 1030; no. 2459, ff. 1613v, 1617v-20v, 1623-4; no. 8595, f. 133; reports of missions to Ramnad, May-June 1683, Sep. 1690, Feb. 1699, letters from Colombo to Batavia, from Sivakumara Muttu Vijaya Raghunatha Setupati to Colombo, Feb. 1707, Apr., Aug. 1739, diary of visit of Ramnad envoys to Colombo, May-June 1739; Heeres and Stapel,

Hence, around 1710 the *periya tambis* were replaced with other distinguished Muslims, initially one Adam Labbai, and in 1715 Labbai Nayinar Maraikkayar. The career of the latter, although seemingly a less prominent man than Citakkati Pillai and Abd al-Qadir, had much in common with the fortunes of the *periya tambis*. As stated in poetry sponsored by him, Labbai Nayinar (“Lebbe Neijna Marca” in Dutch documents) descended from both important mercantile families and leading religious figures.¹¹⁶ Like the *periya tambis*, he was appointed tax-farmer of the Kilakkarai area—“regent of the lowlands”—and after a temporary loss of the function regained it in 1723. He was also permitted to use the Setupati’s names “Vijaya Raghunatha.” These attempts by the king to monitor another mighty, and possibly threatening, figure again proved hazardous since Labbai Nayinar did indeed turn out to be a threat.

In the report of a VOC embassy to Ramnad in January 1731, envoy Reijnier Helmondts wrote that the lowlands regent was the kingdom’s most powerful man, enjoyed the protection of Tanjavur’s King Tukkoji Bhonsle, and completely dominated the new Setupati, Kattaya Tevar. Even though the mission was partially dispatched to protest against Labbai Nayinar’s frequent violations of the Dutch-Ramnad treaties, the regent himself was present at all audiences, turning Kattaya against the VOC or bluntly interrupting the king and taking over the negotiations. According to envoy Helmondts it was obvious that Labbai Nayinar, and indeed most other courtiers, kept the Setupati in the dark. Kattaya was illiterate and as a newcomer to the capital had little idea what agreements had been made with the VOC. In a letter of August 1731, Tuticorin’s Dutch chief Daniel Overbeek drew a picture of the balance of power at the Ramnad court in no uncertain terms:

The canneckappel [*kanakkuppillai*, local clerk] whom I have sent to the court of the Theuver [Kattaya Tevar] has not been able to achieve anything, other than that he has noticed that even the lowest betel-bearer there understands more than His Excellency the lord of the woods [*woudheer*, Kattaya] himself. Yes! So much so, that a pupil of that idiot [Kattaya], in his own face and in the presence of all courtiers, nullified the word that had been given by that king to the delegated canneckappel Philip and that had already been signed on a blank ola [*ōlai*, palm-leaf letter] to the effect that his subjects were all ordered to pay [their debts

Corpus diplomaticum Neerlandico-Indicum, vol. 4 (The Hague, 1935), 328–30. The first two secondary works mentioned above partly disagree on the number of and relationship between the *periya tambis*. I largely follow Vink’s more recent findings here.

¹¹⁶ Labbai Nayinar Maraikkayar was perhaps even a close relative of the *periya tambis*, his paternal grandfather possibly being a younger brother of Citakkati Pillai. See Torsten Tschacher, “Challenging Orders: *Ṭarīqas* and Muslim Society in Southeastern India and Lañkā, ca. 1400–1950,” in R. Michael Feener and Anne M. Blackburn (eds), *Buddhist and Islamic Orders in Southern Asia: Comparative Perspectives* (Honolulu, 2019), 88.

to the VOC]. [This nullification happened] under the pretext that if those people were to fail [to pay], the Honourable Company [VOC] would always hold His Excellency responsible. Thus, that ola was destroyed ...¹¹⁷

While this sarcastic portrayal may reflect the VOC's frustration with Ramnad's opposition as much as the actual situation at court, Kattaya appears to have held little authority in this period. However, in the following years Labbai Nayinar's own position proved insecure as well. When the VOC had difficulties collecting debts owed by the Setupati, several courtiers, and others, the lowlands regent discretely endeavoured to mediate between the Dutch and some of the debtors, foremost the king himself. The VOC thought Labbai Nayinar's sudden cooperation highly dubious, wondering whether he was sincerely trying to solve the disputes or actually safeguarding his own interests, bearing in mind Kattaya's reign was still unstable. On one occasion, the regent hinted that if the Dutch wished to build a fort at Kilakkarai, the Setupati might not object, adding that he himself would always support the VOC, even if Kattaya was dethroned. The Dutch ignored this offer, suspecting it was the king rather than the regent who suggested the construction of a fort, because a Dutch stronghold on Ramnad territory might serve as a safe retreat should the Setupati be attacked.

Whether Labbai Nayinar acted on Kattaya's behalf or not, he was walking a tightrope. He could not exert his influence on the king too openly in favour of the VOC, as he faced competition from other courtiers, who might accuse him of disloyalty. At the same time, winning the confidence of the Dutch was not only important in case the Setupati lost his throne but also to partake in the next, VOC-controlled pearl fishery. In the end, however, it was Kattaya who dropped Labbai Nayinar. If the regent had really approached the Dutch in the king's name, he had achieved very little. If he had acted on his own behalf, his courting of the VOC while the Setupati's reign was under threat had probably not passed unnoticed. In either case, Labbai Nayinar no longer served a purpose and was blamed for having made problems between the court and the Dutch worse. Thus, around March 1734, after an earlier temporary suspension, this regent, too, was removed from office in perpetuity, as a consequence, it seems, of a combination of wrong assessments, exploitation by his overlord, and competition from other courtiers.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷ NA, VOC, no. 2186, ff. 1307-8: letter from Tuticorin to Colombo, Aug. 1731 (translation mine).

¹¹⁸ NA, VOC, no. 1992, ff. 843-3v; no. 2068, ff. 1375-5v; no. 2185, ff. 1053v-62, 1167-85; no. 2186, ff. 1215-34, 1265v, 1274-80v, 1312-12v; no. 2224, ff. 1508-9, 1623-8; no. 2245, ff. 328-9; no. 2291, ff. 499-500, 508-9, 517; no. 2308, ff. 2056v-83v: correspondence between Kilakkarai, Tuticorin, and Colombo, Aug. 1723, Aug.-Oct., Dec. 1731, Jan.-Feb. 1732, May, July, Nov. 1733, Feb.-May 1734, judicial document, Mar. 1727, letters from Kattaya Tevar to Colombo, from Labbai Nayinar Maraiikkayar to Tuticorin, Feb. 1731, Apr. 1734, report and diary of mission to Ramnad, Jan.-Feb. 1731, report of journey of Ceylon Governor

Nevertheless, a son of Labbai Nayinar probably functioned as the king's representative in Kilakkarai from around 1745. In his correspondence with the Dutch, this man signed as Kumara Muttu Vijaya Raghunatha Labbai Nayinar Maraikkayar, apparently referring to symbolic kinship ties with the Setupati Sivakumara Muttu Vijaya Raghunatha. His career seems to have been steady for a quite some time, since he led a mission to the Dutch in 1750, still using these royal names, and he is mentioned as a courtier in the diary of a VOC embassy to Ramnad in 1759.¹¹⁹

After Labbai Nayinar's fall in 1734, the regency of the lowlands was held by a sequence of people quickly replacing each other. Their different backgrounds make clear this office was not reserved for notables from Kilakkarai's Muslim community, but simply for the highest-bidding aspiring tax-farmer. Among others, the VOC records mention as regents the Brahmin Veda alias Chinna Ayyan (1735), the Muslim Chinna Maraikkayar, who was perhaps Labbai Nayinar's brother (1737, holding the post for the second time), the Brahmin Ramalinga Pillai (1739), the Muslim Shaykh Ibrahim Maraikkayar (1739, also acting as envoy to the VOC in this year), and the Hindu Svaminathan (twice, including the late 1750s). No one among this wide range of people, however, appears to have attained the influence and prestige at court enjoyed by the *periya tambis* and Labbai Nayinar.¹²⁰ Between the mid-1730s and the early 1760s, courtiers in other functions rose to prominence and, moreover, they managed to keep their position for longer periods.

One of them was Muttu Vairavanatha (or Vairavar) Servaikkarakar ("Moettoe Wajjrewenaden Cheerwegaren" in VOC records), who held the office of *daḷavāy* and thus functioned as both prime minister and commander-in-chief. He was probably identical to the prominent but not particularly powerful *sērvaiḱkārar* or military officer Muttu Vaira Tevar mentioned in a Dutch report of 1709. The latter was Kilavan Tevar's brother-in-law and consequently must have belonged to the Maravar caste like Ramnad's rulers themselves. Besides holding a military rank, in this period he served as the revenue-farmer of lands near the Pamban Channel.

In any case, by the early 1730s Muttu Vairavanatha Servaikkarakar had become Ramnad's *daḷavāy*, although, judging from the distribution of gifts during a VOC

Versluys to the Fishery Coast, Feb. 1732. See also: Bes, "The Setupatis, the Dutch, and Other Bandits," 556-8; idem, "Friendship as Long as the Sun and Moon Shine," 30, 34-44.

¹¹⁹ NA, VOC, no. 2473, f. 97; no. 2666, ff. 2209, 2211; no. 2757, ff. 1457, 1465v-6, 1480v; no. 2956, ff. 1228v-30: letters from Tuticorin to Colombo, from Kilakkarai to Tuticorin, Aug. 1739, Sept. 1750, correspondence between the VOC and Labbai Nayinar Maraikkayar, Dec. 1745, Jan. 1746, diary of visit of Ramnad envoys to Tuticorin, Apr. 1750, diary of mission to Ramnad, June-July 1759.

¹²⁰ For these regents, see NA, VOC, no. 2015, ff. 577, 672, 686; no. 2337, ff. 1519-19v, 1521v, 1524-5, 1530v-1, 1540; no. 2403, ff. 1974, 1980-80v; no. 2459, f. 1617; no. 2925, f. 842v: diary of mission to Ramnad, Feb.-May 1724, correspondence between Tuticorin and Colombo, Mar.-Apr., June-July 1735, Aug., Oct. 1737, Feb. 1758, report on visit of Ramnad's envoys to Colombo, May 1739.

mission in 1731, at this time the regent Labbai Nayinar Maraikkayar was still considered more influential (see table 12). Vairavanatha's chance to become the kingdom's mightiest courtier arrived when the Setupati Kattaya died in 1735. The latter's son, the five- or six-year old Sivakumara Muttu Vijaya Raghunatha, was installed as king with the provision that during his minority Vairavanatha would be his guardian and rule Ramnad in his name.

Henceforth, the *daḷavāy* appears to have considered the kingdom his own. Like several Setupatis before him, he selected a prominent Muslim, Nongu Muttu, as his protégé and appointed him supervisor of the lucrative conch shell diving. According to the Dutch, Vairavanatha provided his protection in exchange for part of the profits made by Nongu Muttu on the shells, the trade of which was supposed to be the VOC's monopoly. *Pradhāni* Ramalingam Pillai was occasionally given some money, too, to enlist his support. This man seems to have held little power of his own, however, said to be unwilling to discuss even the smallest matter as long as Vairavanatha was away on the battlefield. In any case, when the Dutch in 1736 dispatched an embassy to the court to complain about Nongu Muttu's diving, Vairavanatha and Ramalingam simply told envoy Wouter Trek they wished to receive extra gifts, over and above the regular presents, before they could grant an audience with the minor Setupati, at which the *daḷavāy* would lead the negotiations anyhow.

To the VOC's indignation, the same demand was made in 1741 when it requested a reduction of the tolls levied at Kilakkarai. These had been raised on the occasion of the consecration of Sivakumara, now about twelve years old, as Setupati. Although this marked a new stage towards the king's adulthood, Vairavanatha remained Ramnad's most powerful person, according to both the VOC—calling him the court's "ordain-it-all" in these years—and other courtiers the Dutch met. For at a VOC mission in June 1743, the official Kadamba Tevar, inspecting the gifts brought along by the Dutch, suggested that Vairavanatha's share be increased even though he would already receive the most of all courtiers anyway.

Further exemplifying the *daḷavāy*'s wide-ranging powers and exalted status, he maintained his own ships for overseas trade and built or endowed several temples, as well as a pilgrim rest house on Rameshvaram island with, according to a VOC report of 1746, a statue depicting him. Even the fact that Vairavanatha grew blind over the years—the Dutch now described him as "that fickle, cross-eyed field-lord"—did not threaten his unshakeable position. His dominance only came to an end when he died in a battle with Shivagangai around April 1745.¹²¹

¹²¹ For Muttu Vairavanatha Servaikkarar, see: NA, VOC, no. 1771, ff. 1494-5, 1499, 1501, 1516, 1528v, 1547, 1555, 1581v; no. 2015, f. 680; no. 2185, ff. 1186-7v; no. 2224, f. 1613; no. 2337, ff. 1543-3v; no. 2374, ff. 2041-73v; no. 2388, ff. 1392-3; no. 2400, ff. 411-11v; no. 2403, f. 1971v; no. 2523, f. 1400; no. 2559, ff. 1463, 1485;

Vairavanatha's apparent impregnability did not mean that he faced no rivalry at court. Probably the strongest opposition came from a somewhat unexpected corner: the young Setupati's mother, Kattaya Tevar's widow. While Dutch records refer to her just as the king's mother (*Theuvers moeder*), an English corruption in a translated Tamil text suggests her name was Chalabara Nachiar. During the VOC embassy to Ramnad in 1736, envoy Wouter Trek was approached by her several times. First, through an interpreter, she let Trek know that he could be assured of her respect, that from now on she regarded him as her eldest son, and that it was therefore his duty to strive for harmony between the Dutch and Ramnad. Later, Chalabara, who did not attend the audiences with the minor king, herself visited the VOC ambassador. She asked him not to be offended should he not be received with the proper respect, and urged him to consider her son's tender years.

It is likely the queen-mother was dismayed to see how *Daḷavāy* Vairavanatha dominated her son and she probably hoped the Dutch could counterbalance his power. Calling Trek her eldest son seems to have been yet another effort to create a bond through fictional kinship—this time between a Dutchman and the Setupati dynasty—in order to involve the VOC in her struggle against her opponents. Trek may not have been fully aware of it, but in a sense Sivakumara Setupati had become his younger brother, whom he was supposed to protect. In 1739, these family ties were apparently extended to the envoy's superiors when the Dutch governor of Ceylon, Gustaaf Willem van Imhoff, was invited as Sivakumara's "eldest brother" for the Setupati's wedding. However, Van Imhoff bluntly replied that the king should pay more respect to his Dutch brothers and comply with the VOC's demands.

Although Chalabara never became a serious threat to *Daḷavāy* Vairavanatha, she still maintained influence at court, as scattered references in VOC and local sources suggest. In 1739 she sent delegates and gifts to the Dutch governor at Colombo to apologise for Ramnad's repeated offences, and in 1746 a local VOC representative was received by the Setupati in the company of his mother. When in

no. 2599, ff. 2107-59, 2175-88, 2201v-2; no. 2621, ff. 2190-5, 2212; no. 2642, ff. 141v-2, 176v; no. 2666, f. 2357v: diaries of missions to Ramnad, May-July 1709, Feb.-May 1724, correspondence between VOC envoys at Ramnad and Colombo, June 1709, letters from Tuticorin to Colombo, from Colombo to Batavia and Nagapattinam, June 1732, Aug. 1735, Sept. 1736, June-July 1737, Feb. 1741, Nov. 1742, Jan.-Feb., Sept. 1743, Jan. 1744, Apr., June 1745, list of gifts distributed during mission to Ramnad, Feb. 1731, reports and diaries of missions to Ramnad, Nov. 1736, Apr.-July 1743, letter from Colombo to Ramnad court, Oct. 1742, correspondence between Colombo and Vairavanatha Servaikkarakar, July-Aug. 1744, diary of visit to Rameshvaram ("Pamban") island, Aug. 1746; TNA, DR, no. 353, ff. 6, 91-5: letter from Tuticorin to Cochin, Jan. 1743, report of visit to Ramnad, Nov.-Dec. 1742; Raja Ram Rao, *Ramnad Manual*, 96, 236, 270; Seshadri, "The Setupatis of Ramnad," 97. See also: Bes, "The Setupatis, the Dutch, and Other Bandits," 558-9, 564; idem, "Friendship as Long as the Sun and Moon Shine," 46-73. Temples were also sponsored by *Pradhāni* Ramalingam Pillai. See: Raja Ram Rao, *Ramnad Manual*, 81; Seshadri, "The Setupatis of Ramnad," 97.

1742 a VOC interpreter was dispatched to Ramnad with a letter of protest because of another conflict, Chalabara openly sided with the Dutch. As the interpreter wrote, she ordered Vairavanatha to comply with the VOC's requests, but he did not take the slightest notice of her commands.

Nevertheless, around the same time several Dutch officials stated that Ramnad was ruled by courtiers but also by the queen-mother, and in 1744 she reportedly sanctioned the plundering of lands in Madurai by Ramnad's troops. Besides, during the Dutch mission in 1743, Chalabara received the most gifts after the king and the *daḷavāy*, more than the *pradhāni* (see table 12). Rather than her actual power, this perhaps reflected the VOC's wish to raise the prestige of this ally at court, but in any case no objections were made against this distribution. Further, both Dutch records and the Tamil *Māduraittala varalāru*, a history of Madurai town, claim that she was involved in selecting Rakka Tevar as Setupati in 1748. However, following this succession she does not appear in any source. After what seems to have been an insecure and isolated career, Chalabara must have either passed away or lost all power in the 1750s, when her son no longer sat on the throne.¹²²

A few other illustrative careers must be briefly mentioned here. Muttu Vairavanatha Servaikkarakar was succeeded as *daḷavāy* by Vellaiyan Servaikkarakar ("Willejen Cheerwegaren"), who according to Dutch reports grew equally powerful. As Chapter 2 explains, he was instrumental in the dynastic successions in the late 1740s. He built temples and pilgrim rest houses and figures prominently in the abovementioned *Māduraittala varalāru* for his efforts to re-establish Madurai's Nayakas after their demise (see the Epilogue). One tradition has it that he, despite his non-royal status, forced subordinate chiefs to prostrate themselves before him, right where mud had been thrown on the ground. After his passing around 1760, his son also served as a general but most power now was held by a *pradhāni*, Damodaram Pillai, also discussed in the previous chapter.

¹²² NA, VOC, no. 2374, ff. 2052, 2059-60, 2073, 2075-6v; no. 2457, ff. 874-6v; no. 2459, ff. 1615-15v, 1618-18v, 1624, 1628; no. 2559, ff. 1463, 1491-2v, 1502v-3; no. 2599, ff. 2139, 2141v, 2149-9v, 2150v, 2160-2v; no. 2665, f. 2010v: diaries of missions to Ramnad with lists of gifts, Nov. 1736, June-July 1743, report on visit of Ramnad's envoys to Colombo, May-June 1739, Colombo proceedings (with correspondence with Sivakumara Muttu Vijaya Raghunatha Setupati), June 1739, correspondence between the VOC and the Setupati, July 1739, and between Tuticorin and Colombo, Oct. 1742, letter from Colombo to the Setupati and his mother, Oct. 1742, report of VOC's *arachi* (local captain) in Ramnad, Sept. 1746; TNA, DR, no. 334, f. 305; no. 353, ff. 89-94: (secret) reports of VOC's *arachi* in Ramnad, Dec. 1742, June 1744; DNA, DCGCC, no. 85, f. 116v: Colombo proceedings (with letter to the Setupati and his mother), Oct. 1742; BL/AAS, MG, no. 4, pt. 8: "A general history of the kings of Rama Naad or the Satoo-Putty Samastanum," f. 194; *Beknopte historie*, 94; Daniel Overbeek, *Memoir of Daniel Overbeek, Governor of Ceylon, 1742 – 1743, for His Successor Julius Stein van Gollenesse*, 22 April 1743, ed. K.D. Parananavithana (Colombo, 2009), 50, 97. See also: Bes, "The Setupatis, the Dutch, and Other Bandits," 540-1 (n. 1), 559-60, 568; idem, "Friendship as Long as the Sun and Moon Shine," 48, 50, 58-9, 66, 68, 70.

An important courtier in the 1730s and 1740s was an official the Dutch referred to as the “Moorish” Ravuttan Servaikkarakar (“Rauten Cheerwegaren”), probably the captain of the Setupati’s bodyguards. His name or title suggests that Muslims, too, could attain high military ranks in Ramnad. Another eminent man during this period was Kadamba Tevar, son of Muttu Vijaya Raghunatha Setupati. As governor of the town of Tiruppullani (between the capital and Kilakkarai), Kadamba did not occupy a particularly high post, but as “prince” (as the Dutch called him) he nevertheless proved influential when he solved several disputes between the court and the VOC.

Finally, Chalabara Nachiar was not the only prominent queen-mother in this kingdom. Already in 1685, the Dutch delegated a Brahmin envoy to present gifts not just to Kilavan Tevar and some of his courtiers but to his mother as well. And according to several local texts, the sister of the former Setupati Sella Tevar, Muttu Tiruvayi Nachiar, initially acted as regent when her minor son Muttu Ramalinga Tevar ascended the throne in 1763.¹²³

This survey concludes with an analysis of the distribution of gifts during four VOC embassies to Ramnad between 1724 and 1743 (see table 12). These are the only missions from which lists of presents remain, while on the embassy in 1759 the VOC brought no gifts anyway—apart from a few minor “private presents” for the Setupati—to express its annoyance with Ramnad’s violations of the treaties. Still, the available lists are worth analysing because they tie in with the developments discussed above.

In 1724, a *rāyasam*, and what the Dutch called a eunuch (*cappater*), a “distinguished councillor,” and a “treasurer-cum-state cashier” (*schat bewaarder en rijxcassier*, perhaps *sarvādhikāri* or *pradhāni*), received the most gifts. The regent

¹²³ NA, VOC, no. 2185, f. 1172v; no. 2308, ff. 2060v-1, 2064v; no. 2374, ff. 2055v-6, 2060v-4v; no. 2492, f. 1471v; no. 2559, f. 1498; no. 2599, ff. 2108v, 2128-30v, 2136, 2148v-50v, 2152-3, 2192v-3v, 2196v; no. 2621, f. 2222; no. 2666, ff. 2215-15v, 2227-7v, 2235-7v; no. 2757, ff. 1470v, 1474-4v, 1477-8v; no. 2774, f. 1326; no. 2812, f. 230; no. 11306, f. 113; diaries and reports of missions to Ramnad, Jan. 1731, Nov. 1736, June-July 1743, correspondence between Tuticorin, Manapadu, and Colombo, Mar., May 1734, May 1742, Apr. 1743, May 1744, Jan., Apr.-June 1750, Aug. 1751, Jan. 1754, letters from Sivakumara Muttu Vijaya Raghunatha Setupati and Vellaiyan Servaikkarakar to the VOC, Feb. 1740, Jan., Mar. 1746, description of the Nayakas of Madurai by Holst, 1762; TNA, DR, no. 334, ff. 305-6: secret report of VOC’s *arachi* in Ramnad, June 1744; DNA, DCGCC, no. 29, f. 28v: Colombo proceedings, May 1685; BL/AAS, MG, no. 4, pt. 8: “A general history of the kings of Rama Naad or the Satoo-Putty Samastanum,” ff. 194-7; Taylor, *Oriental Historical Manuscripts*, vol. II, Appendix, 52; Srinivasachari, *Ananda Ranga Pillai*, 115 (n. 17); Raja Ram Rao, *Ramnad Manual*, 82, 96, 110, 237-9, 239-40; Nelson, *The Madura Country*, vol. III, 292-4; Seshadri, “The Sētopatis of Ramnad,” 101-2, 104-5, 115-17, 120-1, 126-8; Thiruvenkatachari, *The Setupatis of Ramnad*, 51-2; Kadirvel, *A History of the Maravas*, 84, 86-7, 91-3, 99-100; Sathyanatha Aiyar, *History of the Nayakas of Madura*, 378-81; Burgess and Naṭeśa Śāstrī, *Tamil and Sanskrit Inscriptions*, 57. See also: Bes, “The Setupatis, the Dutch, and Other Bandits,” 540-1 (n. 1), 559-60, 568; idem, “Friendship as Long as the Sun and Moon Shine,” 58-9, 73, 83-5.

Table 12: Distribution of gifts among prominent courtiers during Dutch missions to Ramnad, in order of value, 1724-43.

1724	1731	1736	1743
<i>king</i> Muttu Vijaya Raghunatha	<i>king</i> Kattaya Tevar	<i>king</i> Sivakumara Muttu Vijaya Raghunatha	<i>king</i> Sivakumara Muttu Vijaya Raghunatha
<i>rāyasam</i> Adi Narayana	<i>lowlands regent</i> Labbai Nayinar Maraikkayar	<i>daḷavāy</i> Vairavanatha Servaikkayar	<i>daḷavāy</i> Vairavanatha Servaikkayar
<i>eunuch</i> Raja Gopala Ayyan	<i>pradhāni</i> Ramalingam Pillai	<i>pradhāni</i> Ramalingam Pillai	<i>queen-mother</i> Chalabara Nachiar
<i>“distinguished councillor”</i> Avirikutti (?) Ayyan	<i>daḷavāy</i> Vairavanatha Servaikkayar	<i>queen-mother</i> Chalabara Nachiar	<i>pradhāni</i> Ramalingam Pillai
<i>sarvādhikāri / pradhāni</i> (?) Subrahmanya Pillai	<i>rāyasam</i> Karuppa Pillai	<i>rāyasam</i> Karuppa Pillai	<i>rāyasam</i> Karuppa Pillai
<i>lowlands regent</i> Labbai Nayinar Maraikkayar		<i>royal guard’s captain</i> Ravuttan Servaikkayar	
<i>regent’s brother</i> Chinna Maraikkayar		<i>chancellor / eunuch</i> “Teijve Chidamanniaijer”	

Notes: the mission of 1724 was dispatched to Arantangi where the Setupati prepared for battle; for this year the differences between nos 2 to 5 are not entirely clear; in 1731 nos 4 and 5 received equally much; in 1736 nos 2 and 3 as well as nos 5 to 7 received equally much. *Sources:* NA, VOC, no. 2015, ff. 573-4, 603-4, 643, 672, 677-9, 689-92; no. 2185, ff. 1170, 1186-7v; no. 2374, ff. 2060v, 2064v, 2075-6v; no. 2599, ff. 2160-2v.

of the lowlands, Labbai Nayinar Maraikkayar, and his brother were listed last. Less than a decade later, in 1731, the same regent was honoured with the most presents, followed by *Pradhāni* Ramalingam Pillai, whereas the *daḷavāy* and *rāyasam* now occupied the last places. After only five more years, this *daḷavāy*, Vairavanatha Servaikkayar, shared the highest position with the *pradhāni*, followed by Queen-Mother Chalabara Nachiar. The *rāyasam*, Karuppa Pillai, still came in last (together with two others), while the then regent of the lowlands was not even mentioned.

The distribution among the higher-ranking courtiers hardly changed in 1743, when only the positions of the *pradhāni* and the queen-mother were swapped.¹²⁴

Thus, while at first no presents were allotted to the *daḷavāy* and the queen-mother, later people in these positions received valuable goods. Conversely, the *rāyasam* was initially honoured with many gifts, whereas his successor during the following embassies each time ranked low. The “regent of the lowlands” was even less sure of Dutch presents, consecutively receiving nearly the least of all, the most of all, and nothing at all. In addition, some people appear only once in the table, providing still more examples of officials whose functions were apparently hardly related to their actual influence.

These lists therefore show the rapidly changing balance of power in Ramnad during this quarter-century, as perceived by the Dutch. The court initially appears somewhat unstable here, as witnessed by Labbai Nayinar Maraikkayar’s fast rise to prominence and equally quick fall. Subsequently, there seems to be a phase of consolidation, judging from the steadier careers of Vairavanatha Servaikkarar, Chalabara Nachiar, Ramalingam Pillai, and Karuppa Pillai, who each more or less maintained their place in Ramnad’s political constellation.

The preceding overview of Ramnad’s courtiers suggests that this kingdom, too, shared certain matters with the earlier discussed successor states, while other characteristics were less common. Elements found everywhere include the great power courtiers could acquire, the absence of a clear relationship between such influence and formal positions, combinations of different functions, the oscillating nature of some careers, the importance of family ties, and competition between individuals and factions.

Thus, between the 1680s and 1760s the court often was dominated by individual courtiers, including the *periya tambis*, Labbai Nayinar Maraikkayar, Vairavanatha Servaikkarar, perhaps Chalabara Nachiar, Vellaiyan Servaikkarar, and Damodaram Pillai. They all appeared to wield more influence than the Setupatis at some point, regardless of their official designations. Between them they occupied a wide range of functions, the first few men serving as “regents of the lowlands,” followed by a *daḷavāy*, a queen-mother, another *daḷavāy*, and a *pradhāni*. Some engaged in different activities at the same time. The *periya tambis* and Labbai Nayinar Maraikkayar started as merchants and assumed administrative duties as revenue-farmers, sometimes also acting as councillors and ambassadors. In turn, Vairavanatha

¹²⁴ NA, VOC, no. 2015, ff. 573, 603-4, 643, 672, 677-9, 689-92; no. 2185, ff. 1170, 1186-7v; no. 2374, ff. 2060v, 2064v, 2075-6v; no. 2599, ff. 2160-2v; no. 2956, ff. 1234, 1237-7v: diaries and reports of missions to Ramnad, Feb.-May 1724, Jan. 1731, Nov. 1736, June 1759, lists of gifts distributed at VOC mission to Ramnad, May 1724, Feb. 1731, Nov. 1736, July 1743.

Servaikkarak held a military rank but also got involved in commercial enterprise. While the careers of the *daḷavāys* in particular were stable, the fortunes of the “regents of the lowlands” fluctuated wildly, eventually falling to such depths that they were forever excluded from official functions. Yet, a few decades later their sons were again accepted in administrative and diplomatic positions, illustrating the importance of family relations.

Other instances of the strong role of kinship include the prominence of Labbai Nayinar Maraikkayar’s brother, Vellaiyan Servaikkarak’s son, and royal family members Chalabara Nachiar and Kadamba Tevar. Possibly Kilavan Tevar’s brother-in-law, *Daḷavāy* Vairavanatha Servaikkarak may have had family ties with the Setupati house, too. Further, rivalry between courtiers was ever present. The competition faced by “regents of the lowlands” from other officials and the opposition between the *daḷavāys* and Queen-Mother Chalabara Nachiar are cases in point. The nearly always tumultuous successions to the throne provide many other examples of rivalling court factions.

In certain respects, Ramnad’s courtiers clearly differed from those in other kingdoms. First, the great variety of their backgrounds is striking. As at all courts, Brahmins and the ruling family’s caste—here the Maravars—were well-represented. All or most *pradhānis* and *rāyasams* belonged to the former group, while *daḷavāys* chiefly were Maravars, at least in the eighteenth century. Additionally, however, several coastal Muslim merchants served as revenue-farmers and some grew very influential in this capacity. Besides, there were Muslims based at the capital, including Ravuttan Servaikkarak, captain of the royal guard, and Labbai Nayinar Maraikkayar junior, simply called “courtier” by the Dutch. Possibly related to this was the presence of eunuchs at court, which has been interpreted as a sign of Muslim influence,¹²⁵ although those mentioned in table 12 bear Hindu names. In any case, it appears Muslims played a more significant political role in Ramnad than in the other kingdoms, apart from Bhonsle-ruled Tanjavur.

Another aspect typical of Ramnad’s courtiers was the regular occurrence of name-sharing and fictional kinship relations, employed between various parties. Several Muslim merchants-cum-revenue-farmers had permission to bear the Setupati dynasty’s Hindu names, while a Dutch ambassador and his superior in Colombo were designated as sons by the queen-mother, making them elder brothers of the king. These were all efforts to bind powerful people in order to control them or win them over.¹²⁶

¹²⁵ Shulman and Subrahmanyam, “Prince of Poets and Ports,” 505.

¹²⁶ See Chapter 6 for an example concerning the Setupatis and the Nayakas of Madurai in the 1650s.

Finally, the position of queen-mothers in Ramnad stands out compared to other kingdoms. Both Dutch records and local texts refer to the influence some of them wielded, opposing other parties, manipulating successions, and dispatching embassies. With the exception of the five queens reigning over Ikkeri, Bhonsle Tanjavur, and Madurai, very few such references are found for Vijayanagara's other heirs. This difference may be related to the relatively great autonomy enjoyed by widows—and women in general—belonging to the caste of the Setupatis, the Maravars.¹²⁷

Conclusions

Much of the information about the dozens of courtiers discussed in this chapter derives from VOC documents. These sources often portray them in a negative way: violently opposing rivals, dominating or even dethroning their kings, extorting gifts and cash from whomever they could, and generally creating political instability. A question that must be asked, therefore, is whether the Dutch may have misunderstood or exaggerated matters and how ill-informed and biased their accounts possibly are. To address that issue, this section first briefly considers the only embassy the VOC ever dispatched to the successor state of Mysore, ruled by the Wodeyar dynasty. The report of this mission, lasting from December 1680 to February 1681, serves as a valuable counterpoint because of its rather impartial description of Mysore's courtiers, with none of whom the Dutch had interacted before.

The VOC's ambassador Jan van Raasvelt was dispatched to Mysore's capital Srirangapatnam to secure an audience with King Chikkadevaraja Wodeyar (r. 1673-1704) and investigate commercial opportunities in this landlocked kingdom. Mysore had already invited the Dutch to do so in 1679, eager as it was to purchase war horses and elephants. Yet, the mission proved unsuccessful. Unfamiliar with the maritime world, the court was reluctant to follow Van Raasvelt's suggestion that Mysore representatives sail with the VOC to Ceylon to select elephants. Even the idea of boarding a ship made the king and courtiers uncomfortable and afraid of losing money.

The Dutch, in turn, were unwilling to venture into areas beyond their control, preferring to conduct trade from their factory at the port of Kannur (Cannanore). Also, they suspected Chikkadevaraja was chiefly interested in receiving VOC delegations to enhance his prestige among other rulers. Moreover, it was impossible to deliver the hundreds of horses he so adamantly asked for. Consequently, Dutch-Wodeyar contacts evaporated soon and from the mid-1680s Mysore largely disappeared from the Company records.

¹²⁷ For Maravar women, see: Thurston, *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*, vol. V, 39-40; Taylor, "Marava-Jathi-Vernanam," 354.

Nonetheless, Van Raasvelt's report is an exceptional description of an early modern south Indian court. For, unlike other accounts of Dutch embassies to Vijayanagara's heirs, it gives a rather positive impression of the king and his courtiers. Chikkadevaraja is portrayed as friendly and attentive, albeit slightly eccentric, and his officials as competent and courteous. Most powerful among the latter appears to have been the king's father-in-law and *Daḷavāy* (general) Kumarayya. The Dutch referred to him with the exalted term "governor-general," not used by them for any other courtier in the successor states. His influence is manifest in his prominent role during audiences, his physical proximity to Chikkadevaraja on these occasions, and his overall control of access to the king. Kumarayya's paramount position perhaps foreshadowed the great dominance of his Kalale family over Mysore as *daḷavāys* in the early eighteenth century, discussed in this chapter's introduction.¹²⁸ Other important courtiers the Dutch envoy encountered were the *Rāyasam* Nagappayya (*secretaris* "Negapaja"), the king's brother-in-law Balayya ("Ballia"), and Doddayya ("Dordia"), Kumarayya's son or nephew, who replaced him when he was sent into battle against Madurai.¹²⁹

Although Van Raasvelt spent a full month at Srirangapatnam and met all these courtiers several times, he did not observe friction among these men or between them and the king. Only the merchant Chikkanna Chetti, the middleman between the court and the ambassador, caused some misunderstanding and was strongly reprimanded by Balayya for his delaying tactics and begging for gifts. Other than that, the complaints and general derogatory tone so often found in VOC documents about dealings with south Indian courts—commonly criticising ignorant kings and sly officials—are lacking in this mission's diary. In brief, the Dutch depicted the Wodeyar court of the early 1680s as orderly, stable, and reasonable.¹³⁰

¹²⁸ The VOC report does not mention the *daḷavāy*'s name, but "governor-general" doubtlessly refers to Kumarayya, Mysore's then *daḷavāy*. For more information on him, see: Satyanarayana, *History of the Wodeyars of Mysore*, 91-2, 225-7; Hayavadana Rao, *History of Mysore*, vol. I, 226-34, 263-77, 291-8; Sampath, *Splendours of Royal Mysore*, 105-6; Wilks, *Historical Sketches of the South of India*, vol. I, 114-15.

¹²⁹ Unlike some secondary literature, the Dutch refer to Doddayya as Kumarayya's son. In any case, the former seems to have permanently replaced the latter as *daḷavāy* in 1682. See: Satyanarayana, *History of the Wodeyars of Mysore*, 89, 91, 226-7; Hayavadana Rao, *History of Mysore*, vol. I, 296-9, 311, 332-3; Sampath, *Splendours of Royal Mysore*, 106; Mahalingam, *Mackenzie Manuscripts*, vol. II, 448-9; Wilks, *Historical Sketches of the South of India*, vol. I, 115-17.

¹³⁰ For the diary of the VOC mission to Mysore, see NA, VOC, no. 8985, ff. 104-20. For Dutch-Wodeyar relations, see also: NA, VOC, no. 1355, f. 437; no. 1370, ff. 2086v, 2099-9v, 2272-3; correspondence between Cochin and Mysore, Feb.-Mar. 1681, letters from Cochin to Gentlemen XVII, Jan., Mar. 1681, contracts regarding trade to Mysore, June 1681; Coolhaas *et al.*, *Generale Missiven*, vol. IV, 456-7, 577, 702, 824; Colenbrander *et al.*, *Dagh-register gehouden int Casteel Batavia ... anno 1681* (Batavia/The Hague, 1919), 563, 707; Mailaparambil, "The VOC and the Prospects of Trade between Cannanore and Mysore," 211-20; s'Jacob, *De Nederlanders in Kerala*, 218.

Regardless of the question of whether it really was all that, Van Raasvelt's account suggests VOC ambassadors were not always entirely prejudiced against the courts they visited. Even when a mission failed, as happened in Mysore, the Dutch apparently reported about their host in positive terms if they believed they were treated appropriately. It seems therefore that, although VOC officials no doubt misunderstood or overstated certain matters, their reports on south India's court politics cannot be discredited as merely subjective and ignorant opinions. To a certain extent, these writings also reflect functionaries' efforts to explain events to their best ability and provide reliable information for their fellow Company men. The VOC records thus give a valuable impression of at least some aspects of courtiers' powers, despite the one-sided view we are left with due to the scarcity of other sources.

Comparing the findings in this chapter, one observes many similarities but also differences between kingdoms. The main common elements can be summarised as follows. By way of career moves and personal connections, all kinds of courtiers could become exceedingly powerful, but, by the same token, they could also fall from grace because of competition.¹³¹ At each court, people from different backgrounds, including Brahmins and people of the same castes as the rulers, often occupied various positions—most notably military, administrative, mercantile, and diplomatic functions—consecutively or simultaneously. In many cases one's official designation (if any) only partially covered one's actual activities. A number of women contributed to this diversity. Indeed, instances of female power were found in each kingdom. The courts of Vijayanagara, Ikkeri, Nayaka- and Bhonsle-ruled Tanjavur, and Ramnad all included women with substantial influence, acting as governess, ambassadress, or queen-mother, while Ikkeri, Bhonsle-ruled Tanjavur, and Madurai had female rulers.¹³²

Clearly, power could be held not only by occupants of the standard offices mentioned in secondary literature—like *pradhāni* (chief or financial minister), *daḷavāy* (general), and *rāyasam* (secretary)—but also by persons in many other functions, such as court merchant, provincial governor, revenue-farmer, and *qiladār* (fort-commander). People of sword, pen, and coin could all become influential. Members of the royal families regularly occupied such posts, too, and thus acquired power in addition to the status they naturally enjoyed because of their descent.

¹³¹ For similar conclusions on other pre-modern Eurasian courts, see: Duindam, "The Court as a Meeting Point," 83-5; Flatt, *The Courts of the Deccan Sultanates*.

¹³² For female power in Bhonsle-ruled Tanjavur, see also the references in Chapter 2 to Queen-Mother Dipamba Bai. For an analysis of Ikkeri's and Madurai's ruling queens, see Bes, "The Ambiguities of Female Rule in Nayaka South India." See also Howes, *The Courts of Pre-Colonial South India*, 142.

On the whole, however, positions bore limited relation to ancestry. There seems to be some correlation between Brahmins and the *pradhāni* office and between members of the kings' castes and the *daḷavāy* rank, but few functions were strictly reserved for persons from particular backgrounds. Still, Brahmins (of various communities) probably made up the single largest group with important offices. Acclaimed by Vijayanagara's Krishna Raya and often despised by the Dutch, they occupied all sorts of posts, from *pradhāni*, *daḷavāy*, and *rāyasam* to provincial governor, ambassador, revenue-farmer, and merchant.

Frequently, combinations of positions enabled courtiers to increase their influence. Generals governed provinces and conducted trade, finance ministers led military campaigns, and merchants became diplomats and revenue-farmers. Bringing pen, sword, and coin together, courtiers expanded their power base through personal connections, military support, and financial means. Relationships were forged with anyone sharing political interests, but networks often included relatives in particular. There are numerous examples of officials whose power derived from blood or marital ties with eminent families, sometimes even the royal houses.

Yet, apart from a few exceptional cases—like Tanjavur's *qiladārs*, Ramnad's *periya tambis*, and Mysore's *daḷavāys*—prominent functions did not turn into long-lasting hereditary offices, and were rarely held by the same family for more than two generations. Family bonds generally helped one acquire influence in general rather than specific posts.¹³³ All in all, it seems power was attained through access to anyone else with power—the ruler, courtiers, parties beyond the court and the kingdom, and so on—rather than specifically the ruler, despite his or her sovereign status.¹³⁴

In each kingdom some courtiers grew so powerful that they came to dominate the court, including the monarch. Dutch records contain many references to functionaries thought to practically rule the state. They eliminated competitors, removed kings or queens, and even appropriated symbols of royalty, such as dynastic titles, courtly pomp, and praises in literature hardly different from glorifications of rulers. But this competition also made careers insecure. Other courtiers, other courts, and the king himself were all potential rivals and many officials lost their power quickly—sometimes to rise to prominence again later.¹³⁵

¹³³ But see also Burling, *The Passage of Power*, 62-3.

¹³⁴ Access to the ruler in particular is generally considered to have been important for gaining influence at pre-modern Eurasian courts. See for instance Duindam, "The Court as a Meeting Point," 103-4.

¹³⁵ See also: Shulman, "On South Indian Bandits and Kings," 304-6; Heesterman, *The Inner Conflict of Tradition*, 148.

In addition to these similarities between all courts, certain distinctions can be perceived. These are mostly related to the backgrounds and connections of courtiers. To begin with, whereas in Vijayanagara, Ikkeri, Nayaka-ruled Tanjavur, and Madurai no or very few Muslims ever became influential, they held considerable and lasting power in Ramnad and Bhonsle-ruled Tanjavur. There, they occupied varied posts, like *qiladār*, “ordain-it-all,” “state minister,” provincial governor, and revenue-farmer, and in some cases acquired so much influence that they were thought to overshadow the entire court, including the king. It is not surprising that Muslims grew prominent in these two states, considering the Bhonsles’ past as generals in the Deccan sultanates, and the importance of Ramnad’s Muslim traders.

In Ramnad, courtiers had relatively diverse backgrounds, coming from Muslim communities, Brahmin groups, and the royal family’s caste. Less variety was seemingly found in Vijayanagara, Madurai, and perhaps Ikkeri and Nayaka-ruled Tanjavur, where most functionaries appear to have been Brahmins or—as regular marriages between the royal houses and courtiers’ families show—members of the dynasties’ castes. In Bhonsle-ruled Tanjavur probably few or no such marital ties were forged, and functionaries seem to have belonged chiefly to Brahmin and Muslim communities rather than to the caste of the royal house. There was apparently a lack of court families with whom the Bhonsles could intermarry and a certain distance may have existed between this dynasty and the court, although it is unclear which was the cause and which the effect.

Besides, this kingdom stands out for its relative absence of violence and of rapid changes among officials—setting aside the atypical turmoil around 1740. Like the Bhonsle rulers themselves, several courtiers here managed to stay in office for comparatively long periods and many belonged to a small pool of prominent families. Madurai witnessed the same dominance of a limited number of families, but there politics appear to have been more volatile, possibly related to the unusual coexistence of two political centres. For decades these were the power bases of fiercely competing families, leading to instability and even deserting officials. Desertion seems to have been especially common between Madurai and Tanjavur. A considerable number of courtiers from the former kingdom sought asylum in the latter, perhaps because several of them, or their direct ancestors, had arrived from Tanjavur in the first place. Many defectors soon returned to Madurai to assume high offices again and relations between the two courts must have been close and competitive at the same time.

Further, in none of the kingdoms relations between courtiers appear to have been strongly determined by religious, ethnic, linguistic, or caste factors. Apart from the opposition of Telugu-speaking officials to the Tamil *Daḷavāy* Narasappa Ayyan in Madurai around 1700, nothing suggests these aspects generally played a significant role in either alliances or hostilities at any of the courts. Brahmins,

members of the rulers' castes, and Muslims might all collaborate in the same faction. Indeed, antagonism could rise within each of these social or religious groups, as demonstrated by the competition among, for example, Brahmins in Madurai and Bhonsle-ruled Tanjavur, Islamic merchants in Ramnad, and extended royal families at each court. Also, there seem to be few or no instances of such communities acting collectively against a common opponent.¹³⁶ As said, factional divisions and networks rather coincided with mutual political and economic interests and close family ties. After all, these were among the most significant elements in the acquisition of power by courtiers.

Finally, one may ask what all these findings say more generally about (south) Indian courtiers over time. For the early modern period, we have seen that while various south Indian sources occasionally refer to the might of courtiers, usually merely hinting at it, European records in particular show how powerful some of them actually grew and what mechanisms were behind this. For earlier historical phases, external documents are extremely scarce, but Indian sources from those periods at times also suggest courtiers could become highly influential as they—like their early modern successors—combined various offices, used family connections, married into royal families, and so on.¹³⁷

Therefore, in this respect, the courts of Vijayanagara and its heirs probably did not differ much from those preceding them. The frequency of courtiers dominating

¹³⁶ Court factions based on ethnic, religious, or linguistic factors did however occur in several neighbouring kingdoms. For the Deccan sultanates, see: Roy S. Fischel, *Local States in an Imperial World: Identity, Society and Politics in the Early Modern Deccan* (Edinburgh, 2020), especially ch. 3; Kruijtzter, *Xenophobia in Seventeenth-Century India*, chs 2, 6. For Nayaka-ruled Kandy, see: Dewaraja, *The Kandyan Kingdom*, for instance 43, 92, 110-11, 114; Michael Roberts, *Sinhala Consciousness in the Kandyan Period 1590s to 1815* (Colombo, 2003), for example 48-52.

¹³⁷ For conclusions on courtiers in early medieval India largely similar to the present work's findings, see Ali, *Courtly Culture and Political Life*, 264-5. For glimpses of powerful courtiers under the Chalukyas of Kalyana, Hoysalas, Kakatiyas, Yadavas, Cholas, and Pandyas, see: Mahalingam, *South Indian Polity*, 48, 96, 105, 109-10, 113, 115-17, 122-3, 134; Nilakanta Sastri, "The Chālukyas of Kalyāṇi," 388-92, 395-8; Basava Raja, "The Central Government under the Chālukyas of Kalyāṇa," 98-100, 103-5; idem, "Qualifications of Ministers under Hoysalas," in B. Sheik Ali (ed.), *The Hoysala Dynasty* (Mysore, 1972), 142-9; William Coelho, *The Hoysala Varṇa* (Bombay, 1950), 97-106, 252, 266-7; Daud Ali, "Between Market and Court: The Careers of Two Courtier-Merchants in the Twelfth-Century Deccan," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 52, 4-5 (2009); Venkataramanayya and Somasekhara Sarma, "The Kakatiyas of Warangal," 596-7, 618-19, 641, 662-4; Talbot, *Precolonial India in Practice*, 159; A.V. Narasimha Murthy, *The Sevunas of Devagiri* (Mysore, 1971), 146-50; Altekar, "The Yādavas of Seunādeśa," 559-60; Veluthat, *The Political Structure of Early Medieval South India*, 109; Whitney Cox, *Politics, Kingship, and Poetry in Medieval South India: Moonset on Sunrise Mountain* (Cambridge, 2016), 167-70, 182-8; K.A. Nilakanta Sastri, *The Cōlas* (Madras, 1935-7), vol. I, 279, vol. II, pt. I, 58-60, 89-92, 101-9, 222; idem, *The Pāṇḍyan Kingdom: From the Earliest Times to the Sixteenth Century* (London, 1929), 154; Karashima, *A Concise History of South India*, 143-4.

courts, the strategies they employed to this end, and the resultant fierce competition amongst them—it is likely that these aspects of court politics remained largely the same in the course of time (even though the arrival of European powers no doubt enhanced the opportunities of certain south Indian courtiers). If correct, this assumption has significant consequences for the historiography on courts predating the early modern period. The power of courtiers in Vijayanagara's predecessors would have been far greater than indicated by the available sources.

All facets of court politics considered in this chapter had strong repercussions on the position of the king in Vijayanagara and its successors. Of course, as Indian treatises on statecraft declare, the monarch embodied the kingdom's sovereignty and served as its foundation. The fact that at the courts under study no rulers were removed without being replaced more or less immediately demonstrates their essential role. After all, the king ranked first among the kingdom's seven limbs, coming before the minister. Further, the advice of political discourses that kings delegate their power and duties to courtiers was certainly followed, as illustrated by the efforts of Tanjavur's ruler Pratapasimha to find new functionaries after he eliminated the Shetke brothers. As the Dutch reported, while this search lasted he had to govern the kingdom himself, which he apparently deemed undesirable.

But as Indian treatises also warn, courtiers were prone to usurping the monarch's power rather than simply executing it in his name. That this was indeed a real danger is shown in this chapter by many such cases. These make clear that rulers were never assured of effective power, and in fact their influence fluctuated as much as that of courtiers. The complaint of Vijayanagara's Emperor Krishna Raya in the *Rāyavācakamu* about being dominated and ignored by his officials—whether it concerned his court or that of Madurai, where the text was composed—must have been shared by many of the kings of Vijayanagara's heirs.

Thus, despite his sovereignty, exalted descent, semi-divine status, and all other attributes of kingship, the monarch in Vijayanagara and its successor states was in many ways just one of the courtiers—or rather, just one of the contenders for power in the political arena that was the court.¹³⁸ Just as no court office granted actual political influence, so even the throne did not guarantee a powerful position, since this always depended on other parties. In all states, however, courtiers, although influential as a group, seldom operated in harmony and were usually divided. As

¹³⁸ For courts all over pre-modern Eurasia as arenas for power competition—played out in three partly overlapping hierarchies based on formal ranking, membership of decision-making bodies, and access to the monarch—see Duindam, "The Court as a Meeting Point," 100–14. Based on the available sources, it seems difficult to clearly identify and distinguish between these three domains at the south Indian courts under study.

shown by the VOC's comment on the Madurai court cited in this chapter's introduction, kings tried to benefit from the disagreements and jealousies among officials, playing them off against each other, thereby securing their own position.

Some rulers were much stronger than others. Several kings wielded concrete power and did not hesitate to rid themselves of threatening functionaries, whereas other monarchs lacked any authority, being barely tolerated by their ministers, their reigns often ending violently. In sum, the ruler's effective might was based on both his own capacities and the influence of others. One can therefore conclude that royal power in Vijayanagara and its heirs was largely shaped by the same factors that determined the powers of courtiers: personal ambitions and skills, connections within and outside the court, financial and other resources, and, of course, fate.

Obviously, kings differed from courtiers in certain other respects. Court politics were not all about plain ambitions and raw power. Just as the distribution of the VOC's gifts reflected the power balance between the court's officials, it also demonstrated the monarch's exceptional position. The Dutch always presented many more gifts to rulers than to courtiers, regardless of their effective power. The following chapter considers one of the aspects of court politics in which the king, or queen, occupied an exceptional place: court protocol.

