

Dynastic Successions¹

In February 1689 the Dutch East India Company received a remarkable letter from a certain Sadashiva Nayaka, who introduced himself as the king of Ikkeri. He began his message with a list of his royal ancestors leading up to himself and his elder brother Shivappa, who had been king of Ikkeri in the past. Sadashiva next declared that since his brother had passed away, he was now the rightful heir to the kingdom. Besides, he claimed that he was beloved by all local chiefs and other distinguished people in Ikkeri, and that even the bravest warriors feared him when he went hunting in his lands. Furthermore, he stated repeatedly that it was inappropriate, in fact downright intolerable, for women to rule over his kingdom and over men in general. In sum, Sadashiva was an ideal king: a real man, of pure royal descent, first in the line of succession, held in high esteem, and commanding kingdom-wide support—and therefore wholly entitled to sit on the Ikkeri throne.²

Sadly for Sadashiva, as he had to admit in the same letter, already for nearly two decades the throne had been occupied by Chennammaji, who seems to have had few credentials to qualify as a monarch. First of all—to Sadashiva's horror—Chennammaji was a woman. She was the widow of a king who had been installed as a child, later went mad, and finally was murdered. Additionally, both Chennammaji and her deceased husband were said not to possess full royal blood but to have been born of an enslaved girl and another non-regal woman.

Yet, Chennammaji ruled as queen over Ikkeri, whereas Sadashiva was a powerless throne pretender on the run. Around early 1672, he and his elder brother Shivappa, the then king, had been imprisoned by rivals at the court, but some years later managed to flee to Mysore or one of the Deccan sultanates. Supposedly, Shivappa had escaped from being assassinated by leaving a look-alike in his room, who was then killed. After Shivappa himself died of chicken pox in the mid-1680s,

¹ An early, much shorter version of this chapter appeared in Lennart Bes, "Toddlers, Widows, and Bastards Enthroned: Dynastic Successions in Early-Modern South India as Observed by the Dutch," *Leidschrift: Historisch Tijdschrift* 27, 1 (2012). The section on the eighteenth-century successions in Ramnad has partly been taken from: idem, "The Setupatis, the Dutch, and Other Bandits," 552-61; idem, "Friendship as Long as the Sun and Moon Shine," sections of chs 4-5, 7.

² NA, VOC, no. 1463, ff. 437v-8, 440v-1: letter from "Sadaasjiwe Neijke king of Carnatica" at Vengurla to the Dutch commissioner-general (received at Nagapattinam), Feb. 1689.

Sadashiva took over his brother's quest to reclaim the Ikkeri throne. Since then, he had been wandering around south India with some dozen followers, looking for allies. His letter to the Dutch was actually a request for military assistance to expel Queen Chennammaji and help him become king, in exchange for which Sadashiva promised to grant unprecedented trade privileges to the VOC once he ruled Ikkeri. The mention of all his regal qualities was evidently meant to convince the Company of his rights.³ But apparently, the men who should be king were not always the men—or women—who would be king.

This discrepancy between ideas of rightful succession, on the one hand, and the reality of succession struggles between rivals and the enthronement of illegitimate or puppet rulers on the other, is one of this chapter's topics. After discussing the founders of Vijayanagara and its heirs in the previous chapter, here we analyse the fortunes of their descendants on the throne—totalling almost thirty imperial rulers and, until the 1760s, over sixty monarchs in the successor states under study. Central questions concern how individual successions proceeded, which broad patterns can be discerned for each dynasty, and how the kingdoms differed from one another.

This chapter starts with a general overview of ideas on succession in India, held by ancient Indian thinkers and modern scholars. Subsequently, it considers the sources for successions, comprising local texts and images as well as European records. The chapter next treats the dynasties individually, dealing with local notions on legitimate heirship, the actual practices accompanying each transition, and overall tendencies. This part begins with the successions in Vijayanagara, about whose later houses relatively much is already known. Then, the successor dynasties are examined in more detail, since European sources contain much previously unknown information about these kingdoms. All successions under the last

³ It is uncertain who this Sadashiva and his brother Shivappa were. Sadashiva and some of the ancestors mentioned in his letter do not seem to be listed in any published genealogical trees of Ikkeri's Nayakas, while his brother Shivappa possibly appears in only two of these pedigrees. See: C. Hayavadana Rao, *History of Mysore (1399-1799 A.D.)*, vol. III (Bangalore, 1948), 1287; Sundara, *The Keladi Nāyakas*, ix. But these brothers were likely great-great-grandsons of King Venkatappa Nayaka I (r. c. 1585-1629); see the section on Ikkeri successions in this chapter. This Shivappa should not be confused with his well-known namesake ruling Ikkeri in c. 1644-60. The former Shivappa also seems to be the fugitive Ikkeri king sheltered from c. 1683 by the Mysore court under Chikkadevaraja Wodeyar. For Dutch records on these brothers, see: NA, VOC, no. 1388, f. 1976; no. 1396, f. 655v; no. 1463, ff. 438-41v; no. 1474, ff. 210v-13, 329-32; letters from Cochín to Batavia and Gentlemen XVII, from "Sadaasjiwe Neijke king of Carnatica" at Vengurla to the Dutch commissioner-general, from the *commandeur* at Quilon to Commissioner Van Rheede, report on Vengurla and "Canara," July 1683, Jan. 1684, Feb.-Mar., June 1689; Coolhaas *et al.*, *Generale Missiven*, vol. IV (The Hague, 1971), 670. See also the last footnote of this chapter.

two imperial houses and in the successor states are also included in tables, listing for every monarch their dates of reign, kinship with earlier rulers (focussing on immediate predecessors), and other basic facts.⁴ The sections narrating the actual successions may make for repetitive, tedious reading, but this fittingly illustrates the frequent competition for thrones and the succession patterns that resurfaced time and again. The chapter concludes with three comparisons, all revealing clear differences: between the various types of sources, between rules and reality, and between the dynasties. But below, it first considers traditional and modern views on royal succession in India in general.

The *Mahābhārata*, one of India's classical epics (fifth century BCE to fourth century CE?, ascribed to the sage Vyasa), would not have approved of Queen Chennammaji's reign. It strongly advises against the rule of women, gamblers, and children, under whom countries are bound to "sink like stone boats in a river" (V 38:40). Besides, it urges kings to securely install their son or another appropriate successor as their heir before their own death (XII 63:19). This advice, in order to avoid succession struggles, certainly made sense in the early modern period, for the epic also allows any suitable chief, even of the Shudra *varṇa* (lowest caste category), to take the throne in times of political disorder, like contested kingship or external threats (XII 79:34-9)—conditions that often prevailed when a ruler died in Vijayanagara or its heirs.

The *Arthaśāstra*, the ancient discourse on statecraft (traditionally ascribed to the Brahmin Minister Kautilya under the Maurya dynasty in the fourth century BCE, but thought to partly date from around 300 CE), recommends that a king passing away unexpectedly be succeeded by a son with a suitable personality, preferably the eldest. Should such a son be lacking, a faultless prince, a princess, or a pregnant queen can be chosen, although eventually a male member of the royal family must become the ruler again. Further, a weak but rightful king is preferred over a usurper (V 6:1-48; VIII 2:20-4). The *Nītivākyāmrta*, a tenth-century political thesis by the south Indian Jain monk Somadevasuri, confirms the necessity of the king being succeeded by his most capable son, because both descent and personal abilities are considered essential for the throne (5:32, 36).⁵

⁴ I use dynastic tables rather than genealogical trees because the exact kinship relations between consecutive rulers are often uncertain.

⁵ Scharfe, *The State in Indian Tradition*, 55 (n. 234), 57, 62, 63 (n. 287), 122 (n. 752); Daud Ali, *Courtly Culture and Political Life in Early Medieval India* (Cambridge, 2004), 53, 71 (n. 11), 277; Vyasa, *The Mahābhārata*, vol. 3, book 5, *The Book of the Effort*, ed. J.A.B. van Buitenen, 279, vol. 7, book 12 (pt. 1), *The Book of Peace*, ed. James L. Fitzgerald (Chicago/London, 1978, 2004), 322, 367-8; Kautilya, *The Kauṭilya Arthaśāstra*, pt. II, ed. R.P. Kangle (Bombay, 1963), 359-63, 453-4; De Casparis, "Inscriptions and South Asian Dynastic Traditions," 116-20. See also Mr. Colebrooke, "A Disquisition on Regal Succession, by Jaganatha Tercapanchanana: From the Digest of Hindu Law, Translated from the Original Sanscrit,"

Finally, the *Śukranīti*, a *śāstra* (treatise) perhaps written—or reworked—in the nineteenth century in west India by a certain Shukracharya, and dealing with a range of subjects including the state, is relatively explicit on who is eligible for succession. Also emphasising both ancestry and individual skills, it states that the king should preferably select as *yuvarāja* (heir apparent, literally “young king”) a male descendant of a legally married wife able to fulfil his duties without idleness. In addition, this text provides a series of candidates for the position of crown prince. The list begins with the eldest son of the king, but if a son is unavailable or incapable, a paternal uncle younger than the king may be chosen, or else a younger brother of the king, a son’s son, an elder brother’s son, an adopted son, a daughter’s son, or finally a sister’s son (I 342-4; II 14-15).⁶

One may doubt whether any of these works—all in Sanskrit but from very different backgrounds and ages—played a normative role in Vijayanagara and its heirs with respect to successions, or indeed other subjects discussed in the present study.⁷ However, together these texts provide some insight into political notions held in India over the course of time. At any rate, it seems that Indian works treating principles of succession in detail are rare. Those that do address this topic often leave room for broad interpretation and occasionally contradict one another. Most passages above agree that a legitimate son of the king with the right capacities is the preferred successor, thus valuing a combination of birth and personality and disfavouring minors, unlawful offspring, or women on the throne. Hardly any text refers to privileges of the eldest son over his younger brothers, so primogeniture is unlikely to have been an important concept.

But opinions start to diverge strongly when the question arises of who must be selected if a competent son is unavailable. Whereas one of the texts sanctions the rule of even a low-born but suitable Shudra if need be—favouring practical needs

in *The Asiatic Annual Register, or, a View of the History of Hindustan, and of the Politics, Commerce and Literature of Asia, for the Year 1800* (London, 1801), section “Miscellaneous Tracts.”

⁶ Shukracharya, *The Śukranītiḥ (Original Sanskrit Text with Translation into English)*, ed. Krishna Lal, trans. Benoy Kumar Sarkar (Delhi, 2005), 93, 115 (see also 116-25); Vandana Nagar, *Kingship in the Śukra-Nīti* (Delhi, 1992), 10, 63-4, 70-1; Lallanji Gopal, “The Śukranīti—A Nineteenth-Century Text,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 25, 1/3 (1962), 535; Scharfe, *The State in Indian Tradition*, 25; Mahalingam, *South Indian Polity*, 92, 413; Chitnis, *Keḷadi Polity*, 44. The *Śukranīti* may have been composed much earlier than the nineteenth century. See: Nagar, *Kingship in the Śukra-Nīti*, 7-9; Saran Suebsantiwongse, “Dating and Locating the *Sāmraṣyalakṣmipīṭhikā*: A Hybrid Manual on Kingship and Tantric Practices,” *Thai Prajñā: International Journal of Indology and Culture* 1 (2017), 250; Gopal, “The Śukranīti.”

⁷ See for instance: Donald R. Davis, Jr, *The Spirit of Hindu Law* (Cambridge, 2010), 14-15; Narayana Rao, “Coconut and Honey,” 155-6; Sheldon Pollock, “Playing by the Rules: Śāstra and Sanskrit Literature,” in Anna Libera Dallapiccola, Christine Walter-Mendy, and Stephanie Zingel-Avé Lallement (eds), *Shastric Traditions in Indian Arts* (Stuttgart, 1989), vol. 1.

over conventional ideas—another work advocates the rule of a weak but legitimate king rather than an illegitimate one, regardless of who is more capable. Likewise, one text states that female members of the royal family can serve as temporary alternatives to male successors, while another work allows the enthronement of all sorts of relatives but clearly excludes women. Altogether, there appear to have been certain general notions about rightful succession, as Ikkeri's unfortunate pretender to the throne Sadashiva Nayaka himself explained, but these became ambiguous and contradictory if the most obvious heir, a suitable son, was absent or when several such sons were on hand.⁸

Scholars have conducted only limited systematic research into dynastic successions in Vijayanagara and its heirs. Based on local sources, they often conclude that many such transitions were unchallenged and proceeded peacefully. Further, some historians have constructed sets of regulations that would have governed successions under the individual houses. But since contemporary normative texts with specific instructions in this regard are scarce or non-existent, these rules have chiefly been deduced from observed practices. The regulations thus pieced together, albeit slightly different for each kingdom, can be summarised as follows: the king's sons had preference over his brothers, elder relatives over younger ones, adults over minors, the direct family line over collateral branches, men over women, and biological relatives over adopted ones.⁹ Despite these supposed preferences, however, and even when capable sons of the king were actually available, many a succession in Vijayanagara and its heirs was contested, as especially reported in European sources.

As a result—and much against the *Mahābhārata's* advice—the approximately ninety monarchs under study include a substantial number of widows, minors, bastards, and other unlikely figures, instead of mature, legitimate sons of previous rulers. Such disqualified candidates for the throne frequently succeeded their predecessors after fierce clashes between rival claimants. For Vijayanagara it has been argued that, although succession struggles and the accompanying violence could cause instability or even dynastic collapse, they were also essential to generate processes of political transition. Such periods often witnessed changes in the court's internal and external relations, extending and renewing networks, providing career opportunities to ambitious, competent courtiers and chiefs, and

⁸ See also: Chekuri, "Between Family and Empire," 47-8, 209; Robbins Burling, *The Passage of Power: Studies in Political Succession* (New York/London, 1974), 61, 63, 84; Ali, *Courtly Culture and Political Life*, 54; N. Subrahmaniam, "The Question of Succession to the Throne in the History of Tamilnad," *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 37 (1976).

⁹ See for instance: Burling, *The Passage of Power*, 58-61; Scharfe, *The State in Indian Tradition*, 26-7, 55-6; Mahalingam, *South Indian Polity*, 32; and the literature on the individual dynasties treated below.

generally accelerating a restructuring of the balance of power.¹⁰ As this chapter also concludes for Vijayanagara's heirs, struggles for the throne were therefore of an ambiguous nature: hazardous to the continuation of royal houses but instrumental in political developments.

Ambivalence also characterises the observations of the seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century Venetian gunner and traveller Niccolao Manucci (or Niccolò Manuzzi) about successions in India. Referring to "Hindu" kingdoms, Manucci states that rulers of such polities commonly imprisoned those destined to succeed them in order to avoid treachery and untimely regime changes. Only when a king died, would his successor be released and enthroned by prominent courtiers. Yet, as Manucci notes, these measures could not prevent dynastic instability from posing a continuous threat.¹¹ Although in Vijayanagara and its successors just a few heirs apparent were actually locked up, Manucci's remarks underscore the ambiguity of successions when it came to the rules devised for these occasions and the way matters unfolded in practice.

With regard to minors on the throne, it is unclear until what age minority lasted at early modern south Indian courts. Some sources suggest it differed for the various dynasties and that adulthood was attained in stages. One such phase appears to have started at the age of twelve. In 1741, when he was about twelve years old, King Sivakumara Muttu Vijaya Raghunatha Setupati of Ramnad (r. 1735-48) wrote to the Dutch that he had recently acquired new powers and honours through a special temple ceremony. According to the VOC, this event indicated a transition from a merely nominal royal position to a more substantial form of kingship. The same age figures in some of Ramnad's foundation myths, stating that the first historical Setupati, Sadaika Tevar (r. c. 1605-22), was found asleep guarded by a snake—announcing his exceptional status—and got married, both when he was twelve years old. Another local text says that the career of Ariyanatha Mudaliyar, a courtier helping Madurai's Vishvanatha Nayaka establish his kingdom, began at this age too.¹²

In all these instances, the age of twelve apparently marked a phase in the trajectory to maturity that initiated one's professional and marital life. Perhaps, this was related to the reception of the *upavīta* or consecrated cord by males belonging (or claiming to belong) to high castes. Usually taking place at the age of eight to

¹⁰ Chekuri, "Between Family and Empire," 10-11, 47, 52, 209. See also: Flores, "I Will Do as My Father Did," 1-2; Burling, *The Passage of Power*, 71.

¹¹ Niccolao Manucci, *Storia do Mogor or Mogul India 1653-1708*, ed. William Irvine, vol. III (London, 1907), 52.

¹² For Sivakumara Muttu Vijaya Raghunatha Setupati's temple ceremony and the text on Ariyanatha Mudaliyar, see respectively this chapter's section on Ramnad and the introduction to Chapter 3.

twelve, this ritual symbolised a second, spiritual birth after one's physical birth and denoted the beginning of one's formal education.

An event insinuating that complete adulthood came only later, concerns the temporary regency over Madurai's minor King Vijayaranga Chokkanatha Nayaka (r. 1707-32) by his grandmother Mangammal. This term ended when Vijayaranga Chokkanatha turned about seventeen, suggesting he had now become an adult and could reign on his own.¹³ This ties in with a passage in Kautilya's *Arthaśāstra* (III 3:1) saying that men reach maturity at the age of sixteen, at least for legal transactions like marriage. But according to classical Indian notions on the *āśramas* or stages of life, the transition from student (*brahmacarya*) to householder (*grhastha*)—the start of one's own family and career—could happen later still. Ancient philosophical and medical texts variously place this shift at one's sixteenth, twenty-fifth, or thirtieth year or even at an older age.¹⁴ All in all, it seems that no clear, single moment marked the change from minority to adulthood and that maturity arrived step by step, with the approximate ages of twelve and sixteen often considered significant.

However, since many references to south Indian kings being minors are found in European rather than Indian sources, early modern European ideas about adulthood must also be taken into account. By and large, these appear to have resembled Indian notions in that maturity was reached in stages, with the corresponding ages differing for various European courts. As in India, it seems that important transitions commonly occurred when princes were about twelve to fourteen years old and again at the approximate age of sixteen to twenty.¹⁵ One can thus surmise that according to both Indian and European ideas, full adulthood was usually not attained before one turned sixteen. Therefore, in the following sections this age is regarded as the demarcation between minority and maturity.

South Indian sources for individual successions can be divided into two kinds: those that directly concern these events; and those that refer to such transitions indirectly as they contain the earliest mention of a certain ruler, suggesting that the previous one had been succeeded. The latter type of source has often been used to determine which monarch reigned when. Many studies of dynastic histories have been based chiefly on the inscriptions issued by each ruler, using their earliest and latest dates to ascertain the minimum period of each reign. In fact, these epigraphic texts—mostly proclamations of an administrative, commemorative, or religious

¹³ For Vijayaranga Chokkanatha Nayaka's reign and Mangammal's regency, see this chapter's section on Madurai.

¹⁴ Kautilya, *The Kauṭīliya Arthaśāstra*, pt. II, 232; Patrick Olivelle, *The Āśrama System: The History and Hermeneutics of a Religious Institution* (New York/Oxford, 1993), 132-3, 138-9, 165, 167. I thank Patrick Olivelle and Nikhil Bellarykar for discussing this with me.

¹⁵ Duindam, *Dynasties*, 57-8, 60, 68-70. I am grateful to Jeroen Duindam and Judith Pollmann for sharing their ideas about this issue.

nature—are often the only sources to establish the approximate succession dates of the early rulers of Vijayanagara and its heirs. Since many inscriptions include royal pedigrees, they inform us about the relationships between consecutive monarchs, too, or at least how these were presented by those commissioning the inscriptions.¹⁶

Dynastic family relations are also frequently mentioned in local literary works such as chronicles and biographies. These texts sometimes refer directly to specific successions as well. But since all these sources were usually written under the auspices of particular rulers or even pretenders to the throne, they are likely to contain subjective views on the sequence and legitimacy of previous monarchs. Thus, the texts may establish fictitious family relationships, exaggerate reigning periods, or entirely leave out what were considered usurpers or rulers belonging to competing branches of the dynasty. Moreover, these sources are not always precise with respect to dates. Similar complications are encountered with the few visual sources on successions, available for several of Vijayanagara's heirs. These materials consist of painted or sculptured dynastic galleries, depicting only monarchs regarded as rightful predecessors by the kings commissioning such works. Some rulers were not included in these portrait groups and seem to have been considered unlawful occupants of the throne.

Besides the views of court poets, artists, and those who patronised them, there are many descriptions of successions in Vijayanagara and its heirs by Dutchmen and other Europeans. Such reporting often started as soon as vacant thrones were anticipated and continued while struggles between contenders were actually going on. On other occasions, accounts were compiled shortly after the events, when a new ruler had just been installed. Consequently, those documents usually relate in detail how such transitions unfolded over time, at least as understood by these external observers.

Dutchmen were never present at the courts in question (let alone actively involved) when successions occurred, so they drew up their accounts largely on the basis of local contacts, hearsay, or letters received from the courts themselves—thus recording information that was mostly provided by south Indian parties and represented their perspectives, but which could not easily be verified. If stories proved false later on, however, they were corrected in subsequent reports. In any case, for a number of successions European accounts are the only sources. In many other instances, these documents depict successions radically differently from what local chronicles and inscriptions suggest—as becomes clear in the sections on the individual courts below.

¹⁶ See also Chekuri, "Between Family and Empire," 65-79.

Vijayanagara

The first rulers of Vijayanagara's initial dynasty, the Sangama brothers Harihara and Bukka, were succeeded by about a dozen descendants, altogether reigning approximately one and a half centuries. Three other dynasties followed, numbering at least two, five, and seven emperors, and lasting around twenty, sixty-five, and eighty to ninety years, respectively.¹⁷ Altogether, these thirty or so men ruled more than three centuries, from around the 1340s to the 1660s—although the fourth and final house, the Aravidus, continued to exist long after its expulsion from the last imperial capital, Vellore, only commanding some local power in its various places of exile.

Relatively little has been written on succession norms at the Vijayanagara court, by both contemporaries and modern scholars, and it seems such rules were neither elaborate nor strict. Some inscriptions and literary texts suggest that under all imperial houses, rulers generally nominated a *yuvarāja* (heir apparent), who sometimes also served as a co-ruler. This was frequently the emperor's eldest son, as for instance the Portuguese traveller Duarte Barbosa wrote in the 1510s, but it could also be another son, a brother, or any other male family member. *Yuvarājas* and other relatives of the ruler were often dispatched to outlying provinces and ruled those territories fairly autonomously, using imperial titles themselves. The resultant overlap of contemporaneous claims to authority found in inscriptions has been interpreted by some historians as a sign of joint-rule.¹⁸ Others have argued that these competing claims reflected opposition between various pretenders to

¹⁷ For a comparative survey of Vijayanagara's rulers and their regnal periods as proposed by five different scholars (including Sewell, Nilakanta Sastri, and Rama Sharma), see Bridges White, "Beyond Empire," 48-52. For various (partly outdated or fictional) genealogical trees of one or more of Vijayanagara's dynasties, see: Nilakanta Sastri, *A History of South India*, 310-12; H.M. Nagaraju, *Devaraya II and His Times (History of Vijayanagara)* (Mysore, 1991), between 192-3; Eaton, *A Social History of the Deccan*, 89; Krishnaswami Aiyangar, *Sources of Vijayanagar History*, xi-iv; T.V. Mahalingam, *Administration and Social Life under Vijayanagar* (Madras, 1940), pt. II, 415-18; Rama Sarma, *Saluva Dynasty of Vijayanagar*, between 69-70; P. Sumabala (ed.), "Perundevi Samudram, Devaraja Samudram and Accharavakkam Grants of Srirangaraya III (or VI) of Aravidu Dynasty," *Journal of Indian History and Culture* 13 (2006), 147; V. Vijayaraghavacharya (ed.), *Inscriptions of Venkatapatiraya's Time* (Madras, 1937), 12; Butterworth and Venugopaul Chetty, *A Collection of the Inscriptions on Copper-Plates and Stones in the Nellore District*, pt. I, 53; V. Vijayaraghavacharya (ed.), *Epigraphical Glossary on Inscriptions* (Madras, 1938), 17-18, 25-6, 92-7; B. Suryanarain Row, *A History of Vijayanagar: The Never to Be Forgotten Empire* (Madras, 1905), Appendix, ii; Hayavadana Rao, *History of Mysore*, vol. III, 1286; Sewell, *A Forgotten Empire*, 214; idem, *The Historical Inscriptions of Southern India*, 387-8, 400-2; idem, *Lists of Inscriptions*, 3, 12-14, 16, 18, 30, 243-4, 248, 252-3; H. Krishna Sastri, "The Second Vijayanagara Dynasty: Its Viceroys and Ministers," *Annual Report 1908-9: Archaeological Survey of India* (Calcutta, n.d.), 168, 201.

¹⁸ Mahalingam, *Administration and Social Life under Vijayanagar*, pt. I, 11-16; Patil, *Court Life under the Vijayanagar Rulers*, 55-8; Nilakanta Sastri, *A History of South India*, 265-7; Nilakanta Sastri and Venkataramanayya, *Further Sources of Vijayanagara History*, vol. I, 78; Duarte Barbosa, *A Description*

the throne. These different interpretations do not necessarily exclude each other, as co-rulers could easily turn into rivals. The apparent lack of distinct succession principles must have made such struggles all the more ferocious.¹⁹

Sangamas and Saluvas

It has been estimated that the average rule of a king in pre-colonial India lasted slightly over twenty years.²⁰ As the high frequency of very brief reigns described below indicates, this period was much shorter under Vijayanagara's first dynasty, the Sangamas (c. 1340s-1485). If we just count the Sangama rulers whose reigns are acknowledged by all historians, we find that the average rule lasted just under thirteen years. If we include all fifteen possible emperors listed below, this length decreases to less than a decade. The many short reigns also hint at regular dynastic instability at the Sangama court. In fact, most Sangamas seem to have been murdered or dethroned in other ways.

Little is known about this dynasty, however, and information about successions in this period is found chiefly in inscriptions, to a lesser extent in literary texts—produced at both Vijayanagara and adjacent sultanate courts—and in a few accounts of foreign visitors. Besides, the sources, and by extension historians, do not entirely agree on the composition of the Sangama house. But by and large, the dozen or so successions appear to have proceeded as follows.

Already the first transition, from Harihara (r. c. 1340s-55) to Bukka (r. c. 1355-77)—initially perhaps co-rulers—is said to have been contested by the sons of one of their brothers, albeit in vain. Bukka was followed by his son Harihara II (r. 1377-1404), upon whose death at least three sons competed for the throne. It seems that two of them, Virupaksha (r. c. 1404-5) and Bukka II (r. 1405-6?), briefly ruled, before the third brother, Deva Raya (r. 1406-22), ousted them and remained in power for a substantial period. However, early in his reign he may have been temporarily deposed by a fourth brother, Sadashiva (r. 1408?). Most scholars presume that upon Deva Raya's passing, his son Ramachandra (r. 1422?) took over but died after a few months, to be replaced by another son, Vijaya alias Bukka III, whose rule lasted one or two years (r. c. 1422-3?).

of the Coasts of East Africa and Malabar in the Beginning of the Sixteenth Century, ed. H.E.J. Stanley (London, 1866), 88.

¹⁹ Chekuri, "Between Family and Empire," 47-8, 51, 65-7, 78-9; idem, "'Fathers' and 'Sons'," 148-9; Patil, *Court Life under the Vijayanagar Rulers*, 57-8, 132, 145-6; Stein, *Vijayanagara*, 27-8, 91-3; Saletore, *Social and Political Life in the Vijayanagara Empire*, vol. I, 303-6; Nilakanta Sastri, *A History of South India*, 305-6.

²⁰ Thomas R. Trautmann, "Length of Generation and Reign in Ancient India," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 89, 3 (1969); Scharfe, *The State in Indian Tradition*, 26.

The few sources on this earliest period contain no specific references to violence accompanying this series of quick successions, but a plot in the 1440s to murder Vijaya's son Deva Raya II (r. c. 1423-46) resulted in a bloodbath. Accounts by the Timurid ambassador Kamaluddin Abd al-Razzaq Samarqandi and the Portuguese horse trader Fernão Nunes both report that in an effort to seize the throne, a brother or a nephew of the emperor hosted a banquet for the entire court. During the deliberately noisy festivities, he invited the courtiers one by one into a separate room and had them all silently killed, while Deva Raya II himself barely survived an assassination attempt in his palace.

The latter's eventual death in 1446 was perhaps followed by the brief reign of his younger brother, Vijaya II alias Deva Raya III (r. 1446-7?), whose demise is thought to have led to a succession struggle between his own son Virupaksha II and a son of Deva Raya II, Mallikarjuna. The former may initially have sat on the throne for a short time but was soon expelled by his rival. When Mallikarjuna passed away after a long reign (c. 1447-65), he was possibly briefly succeeded by his son, Ramashekara or Ramachandra (r. 1465?). However, the earlier claimant Virupaksha II now invaded the capital, murdered all his opponents, and became emperor (r. c. 1465-85). In what seems to have been an effort to legitimise his usurpation, Virupaksha II omitted his cousin Mallikarjuna from the pedigrees in his inscriptions, suggesting he was the successor of Deva Raya II. But a chronicle that in its English manuscript form is titled "Hurry-Hurra Royer Vumshum" (*Harihara rāya vaṃśam?*) leaves out Virupaksha II instead, perhaps considering him an unlawful ruler. Further, some inscriptions by Mallikarjuna and his son Ramashekara seem to date from Virupaksha II's reign, suggesting they had not died and in fact maintained their claim to the throne.

In any case, Emperor Virupaksha II was assassinated by his own son, who could reportedly no longer bear his father's whimsical and cruel rule. Repenting for his sin, this son refused to ascend the throne and passed it to his younger brother Praudha (r. c. 1485?). Fearing his elder brother's brutality, Praudha in turn had him killed as well. Soon after, however, he was dethroned by the empire's most powerful general, Saluva Narasimha, which meant the end of the Sangama dynasty.²¹

²¹ Rāma Sharma, *The History of the Vijayanagar Empire*, vol. I, 44-8, 50, 54-5, 60-1, 66-7, 70, 73, 81-2; Nilakanta Sastri and Venkataramanayya, *Further Sources of Vijayanagara History*, vol. I, 85-6, 93-4, 112, 122-5, 139-40; Krishnaswami Aiyangar, *Sources of Vijayanagar History*, 68-9; Nilakanta Sastri, *A History of South India*, 268-9, 271-3; Venkata Ramanayya, *Vijayanagara*, 126-7; Kumari Jhansi Lakshmi, "The Chronology of the Sangama Dynasty," *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 21 (1958); BL/AAS, MG, no. 3, pt. 4c: "Hurry-Hurra Royer Vumshum," f. 134; W.M. Thackston (ed.), *A Century of Princes: Sources on Timurid History and Art* (Cambridge (MA), 1989), 311-12; R.H. Major (ed.), *India in the Fifteenth Century: Being a Collection of Narratives of Voyages to India, in the Century Preceding the Portuguese Discovery of the Cape of Good Hope* (London, 1857), pt. I, 33-5; Joan-Pau Rubiés, "Late Medieval Ambassadors and

Although perhaps somewhat overwhelming, this summary makes clear that under the Sangama house all rulers were succeeded by sons or brothers, with only one exception, when a cousin took over. Sources do not mention any minors, queens, or illegitimate sons on the throne. Thus, this pattern appears to adhere neatly to the advice of Indian treatises on statecraft. Nevertheless it was virtually always fraternal competition that led to violence and caused dynastic instability. This friction probably also resulted in the Sangamas' demise, as it seemingly provided Generalissimo Saluva Narasimha with the opportunity to oust Praudha and assume imperial authority himself.²²

Saluva Narasimha, founder of Vijayanagara's Saluva dynasty (c. 1485-1503), appears in inscriptions from the 1450s onward. The generalissimo initially served as the governor of the empire's Chandragiri province and was related to the Sangama house through his uncle's marriage to a sister of Deva Raya II. Earlier members of the Saluva family also held military functions under the Sangamas and intermarried with them. It is thought that already in 1459, under the weak reign of Mallikarjuna, Narasimha practically took over the emperor's powers, but allowed him and his few successors to maintain their formal position.²³ However, after Narasimha officially ascended the Vijayanagara throne, both his own reign and his dynasty turned out to be short-lived, as demonstrated by the few successions under the Saluva house, described below.

Probably of an advanced age by now, Narasimha passed away after a rather brief reign (c. 1485-91). It is not entirely clear what happened next, but his sons—possibly all minors—seem to have been the object of competition between various courtiers. Before his death, Narasimha had entrusted the care of these princes to his General Narasa Nayaka, who placed one of them on the throne. But this ruler, perhaps called Timmabhupa, died very soon and it is generally assumed he was murdered by an opponent of Narasa. A second son may have followed, suffering a similar fate.

the Practice of Cross-Cultural Encounters, 1250–1450,” in Palmira Brummett (ed.), *The “Book” of Travels: Genre, Ethnology, and Pilgrimage, 1250-1700* (Leiden, 2009), 86-7; Stein, *Vijayanagara*, 92; Patil, *Court Life under the Vijayanagar Rulers*, 132-4; Chekuri, “Between Family and Empire,” 52-4; Nagaraju, *Devaraya II and His Times*, 20-1 and between 192-3; Rama Sarma, *Saluva Dynasty of Vijayanagar*, 72-6, 175-82; Sewell, *The Historical Inscriptions of Southern India*, 193; Dodamani, *Gaṅgādevī's Madhurāvijayaṁ*, 29-30; Madhav N. Katti, “Some Important Epigraphs of the Sangama Dynasty,” in Dikshit, *Early Vijayanagara*, 150. For discussions of the writings of Fernão Nunes, see: Rubiés, *Travel and Ethnology in the Renaissance*, ch. 8 (first part); Subrahmanyam, *Penumbra Visions*, 188-92.

²² Stein, *Vijayanagara*, 30.

²³ For references, see the next footnote.

Eventually, another of Narasimha's sons, Immadi Narasimha, was installed as emperor and reigned for a longer period (c. 1491-1503), albeit under the regency of Narasa, whose own titles displayed growing imperial ambitions. All real power being in Narasa's hands, relations between the ruler and his regent gradually deteriorated and at one point Immadi Narasimha was even removed from the capital to the town of Penukonda to be kept under tight control. Again, sources and scholars disagree on the subsequent course of events, but sometime between 1501 and 1505 Immadi Narasimha was killed, signalling the end of the Saluvas.²⁴

The Saluva house lasted too briefly to allow general conclusions, but it seems to have been characterised by instability. The dynastic founder was probably succeeded only by minor sons and these two or three successions apparently witnessed much brutality and the strong involvement of rivalling courtiers.

Tuluvas

The violence and factionalism at the Sangama and Saluva courts continued under the third imperial family, the Tuluvas (c. 1503-70), especially during later decades. The beginnings of this dynasty are somewhat obscure, despite the emergence of regular European records on south India in this period. Historians differ on the question of whether the aforementioned General Narasa Nayaka, founder of the Tuluva house, was involved in the assassination of the last Saluva ruler. Further, there is no consensus about whether he officially assumed imperial status, despite the fact that some texts claim he did ascend the throne. Finally, it is not clear if Narasa was related to the Saluva dynasty, although one literary work states his father's father was Saluva Narasimha's elder brother.²⁵ In any case, after Narasa's death in 1503, the Tuluvas counted at least five rulers (see table 2 towards the end of this section), who succeeded one another in the following way.

The dynasty began with the consecutive reigns of three sons of Narasa Nayaka, the eldest of whom, Vira Narasimha (r. c. 1503-9), was initially and unsuccessfully

²⁴ Rama Sarma, *Saluva Dynasty of Vijayanagar*, 39-40, between 69-70, 193-206, 223-6; G. Anjaiah, "Saluva Usurpation and Its Historical Importance in the History of Vijayanagar Empire," *Itihas: Journal of the Andhra Pradesh State Archives & Research Institute* XXVII, 1-2 (2001); Rama Sharma, *The History of the Vijayanagar Empire*, vol. I, 69-70, 82, 87-8, 92-5, 97-8; Nilakanta Sastri and Venkataramanayya, *Further Sources of Vijayanagara History*, vol. I, 141, 150-6, 164-6, 177; Nilakanta Sastri, *A History of South India*, 274-6; Patil, *Court Life under the Vijayanagar Rulers*, 134-7; Sewell, *The Historical Inscriptions of Southern India*, 230.

²⁵ For references, see the next footnote.

opposed by a son of the last Saluva ruler.²⁶ At the end of his rule, as the Portuguese merchant Fernão Nunes reported, Vira Narasimha wished to be succeeded by his minor son rather than his half-brother Krishna(deva) Raya. On his death-bed, he ordered his Minister Saluva Timmarasu to have Krishna Raya blinded and thus render him unfit for the throne. The minister pretended he had carried out the demand by showing the eyes of a goat to Vira Narasimha, who then passed away contented.

No other sources confirm this story and various literary works in fact declare that Vira Narasimha installed Krishna Raya as his successor, according to the Telugu *Rāyavācakamu* and the Kannada *Śrī kṛṣṇadēvarāyaṇa dinacārī* by handing over the imperial diadem or ring. Some sources even suggest they were joint rulers for a while. There are also texts, however, that leave out Vira Narasimha's reign and place Krishna Raya's accession directly after the rule of his father (there also called Vira Narasimha), suggesting an attempt to stress Krishna Raya's monarchical claims rather than those of his predecessor.²⁷

Whether there was friction between the half-brothers or not, Krishna Raya was next to sit on the throne (r. c. 1509-29).²⁸ But according to several texts, including one in Persian, he was not of full royal blood.²⁹ For example, a Mackenzie manuscript

²⁶ Rama Sarma, *Saluva Dynasty of Vijayanagar*, 223-6; Rāma Sharma, *The History of the Vijayanagar Empire*, vol. I, 97-107; Krishnaswami Aiyangar, *Sources of Vijayanagar History*, 106; Nilakanta Sastri and Venkataramanayya, *Further Sources of Vijayanagara History*, vol. I, 176-9; BL/AAS, MG, no. 10, pt. 11: "Kaalaganum," ff. 213-15 (translated from a Kannada text found in 1801 at "Gutpurtee" near Chitradurga "among some rubbish thrown out of a house after the ruins of the village by one of those plundering parties of Marattas that at one period overrun the country"; see f. 218 and Cotton, Charpentier, and Johnston, *Catalogue of Manuscripts in European Languages*, vol. I, pt. II, 95); Nilakanta Sastri, *A History of South India*, 276; Kamath, *Krishnadevaraya of Vijayanagara*, 21, 23.

²⁷ Sewell, *A Forgotten Empire*, 314-15; Wagoner, *Tidings of the King*, 87; BL/AAS, MG, no. 11, pt. 18a: "Historical account of Panoo Conda," f. 167 (compiled in 1801 by Mackenzie's assistant Borayya Kavali Venkata at Penukonda "from information collected there," see f. 163); no. 40, last pt.: "History of the kings of Beejayanagurr," f. 373; Krishnaswami Aiyangar, *Sources of Vijayanagar History*, 111, 129; Mahalingam, *Mackenzie Manuscripts*, vol. II, 45; Rāma Sharma, *The History of the Vijayanagar Empire*, vol. I, 109-110; Nilakanta Sastri and Venkataramanayya, *Further Sources of Vijayanagara History*, vol. I, 186-8; Narayana Rao, Shulman, and Subrahmanyam, "A New Imperial Idiom," 77; Nilakanta Sastri, *A History of South India*, 277; Patil, *Court Life under the Vijayanagar Rulers*, 132-3. See also: H.K. Narasimhaswami (ed.), *South-Indian Inscriptions*, vol. XVI, *Telugu Inscriptions of the Vijayanagara Dynasty* (New Delhi, 1972), iv; Kamath, *Krishnadevaraya of Vijayanagara*, 26-7, 29.

²⁸ Krishna Raya's reign is generally thought to have commenced on 8 August 1509, but it has also been argued it started on 24 January 1510. See D.V. Devaraj, "Date of Krishnadevaraya's Coronation," *The Quarterly Journal of the Mythic Society* XCIX, 1 (2008).

²⁹ Wilson, *The Mackenzie Collection*, vol. I, 288, 295-6; Srinivas Sistla, "Allegory in Telugu Poetry during the Time of Krishnadevaraya," in Anila Verghese (ed.), *Krishnadevaraya and His Times* (Mumbai, 2013), 104, 107; Krishna(deva) Raya, *Sri Krishna Deva Raya: Āmuktamālyada*, 83-5, 112; Sri Sri Sri Raja Saheb, "The Origin of Vizayanagar in Kalinga," 282, 284; BL/AAS, MT, class I (Persian), no. 18: "The Keefeyet of Panoocundah," f. 43; MG, no. 10, pt. 4a: "Account of Bisnagur," ff. 64-5; no. 11, pt. 2:

titled “Kyfieth of Roya Vellore” (*Kaifiyat* of the Rayas of Vellore?), translated from a Tamil original, contains an extensive explanation of his supposed illegitimate descent. Starting with Krishna Raya’s father—here again named Vira Narasimha instead of Narasa Nayaka—the story can be summarised thus (retaining the original spelling of names):

King Narasimmah had two sons: Mookoondaraja and Achooda-*raja*.³⁰ Astrologers predicted that these princes would die young, making the king worry about who should succeed him. After extensive consultations, the astrologers advised Narasimmah to unite with a queen during the fourth day of her monthly cycle, thus enabling him to beget a long-living and wise son, who was to enjoy many victories and great fame. The king now requested one of his wives, who happened to meet the stipulated condition, to prepare for an amorous encounter. But she took such a long time washing and beautifying herself for the occasion, that Narasimmah feared the auspicious moment might pass before she got ready. At that instant, a maidservant named Deebalanaikee entered the king’s room to light the candles, and he begged her to bring him any woman who was in the fourth day of her monthly cycle. Upon her reply that nobody in the palace but she satisfied this demand, he hugged her and lay beside her at the right moment, nine months after which she gave birth to a son possessing the thirty-two royal attributes.

When the Pattastree [lawful queen] heard about this, she ordered Appajee [Minister Saluva Timmarasu] to kill the child, but he hid the boy in his house, slaying another child instead. The Pattastree found out about this too and Appajee then secretly sent the boy to Tirooppadee [Tirupati], where he was educated in many subjects. When he turned seven years old, the other two sons of Narasimmah died, as foretold by the astrologers, and some days later the king passed away as well. Realising with grief there was no rightful successor to the throne, the various Pattastrees regretted the murdering of Deebalanaikee’s son, who could have been crowned now. Then Appajee revealed the boy was alive, and after the Pattastrees promised not to kill him, he was summoned from Tirooppadee and placed on the throne as a full sovereign, with the title of Kishnta-Royer.³¹

Giving a slightly different version of the tale, the Telugu poem *Kṛṣṇa rāya caritra* states that it was the mother of Vira Narasimha—here Krishna Raya’s predecessor and elder half-brother—who ordered Krishna Raya’s killing as she was jealous of

“Preliminary note to the historical account of the kings of Beejanagur,” f. 8; no. 11, pt. 3b: “History of the kings of Beejanagur & Anagoondy,” f. 18 (see also Mackenzie, “History of the Kings of Veejanagur”). See also Ilanit Loewy Shacham, “Expanding Domains and the Personal, Imperial Style of Kṛṣṇadevarāya,” *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* 56, 3 (2019), 334.

³⁰ It is unclear to me which princes these names refer to. “Achooda-*raja*” may be associated with Krishna Raya’s half-brother and successor Achyuta Raya, but it seems illogical that a text would suggest he died before Krishna Raya came to power, and no other sources seemingly do so.

³¹ BL/AAS, MT, class II (Tamil: Tonda Mandalam), no. 12: “Kyfieth of Roya Vellore,” ff. 11–21.

his great qualities, which surpassed those of her son.³² Other traditions have it that Krishna Raya was not entitled to succeed Vira Narasimha because his other half-brother Achyuta(deva) Raya was older than he. Further, at the end of his reign, Krishna Raya would have accused his Minister Saluva Timmarasu of unlawfully installing him as emperor instead of Vira Narasimha's son, thereby committing treason.³³ These stories, while mostly acknowledging Krishna Raya's greatness, apparently aim at portraying him as an illegitimate or under-aged ruler, although most other sources declare he was a son of one of his father's official queens and had reached maturity when he ascended the throne.

Perhaps these attempts date from the reign of the next emperor, Achyuta Raya (r. 1529-42), who was possibly not Krishna Raya's preferred heir and therefore may have wished to downplay his predecessor. Indeed, there are even texts that entirely ignore Krishna Raya's reign and move straight from his father Narasa Nayaka to his successor Achyuta Raya.³⁴ Local inscriptions and Fernão Nunes' writings suggest that in 1524 Krishna Raya designated his minor son Tirumalai as *yuvarāja* (heir apparent). During the subsequent coronation festivities, however, the young prince fell sick and died, supposedly being poisoned by order of Minister Saluva Timmarasu, whose influence had decreased after Tirumalai's rise.³⁵ Now left with the choice between another, even younger son and a half-brother, Krishna Raya shortly before his death appointed the latter, Achyuta Raya, as his successor.³⁶

But Vijayanagara's Generalissimo Rama Raya, who was married to one of Krishna Raya's daughters (earning him the name Aliya or son-in-law), favoured Krishna Raya's remaining infant son. While Rama Raya tried to enthrone this boy, the nominated Achyuta Raya hurried to the imperial capital from Chandragiri, where Krishna Raya had detained him earlier. On the way, Achyuta Raya performed coronation ceremonies at two different places—Tirupati and Kalahasti, its temples devoted to Vishnu and Shiva respectively—in an effort to bolster his claims. In the

³² Wilson, *The Mackenzie Collection*, vol. I, 295-6. For yet another version, see Velcheru Narayana Rao and David Shulman (eds), *A Poem at the Right Moment: Remembered Verses from Premodern South India* (Delhi, 1999), 130-1. For still more stories on competition between Vira Narasimha and Krishna Raya, see Reddy, *Raya*, 8-10.

³³ K.G. Gopala Krishna Rao, "Krishnaraya as a Great King in Politics and Warfare," in Anila Verghese (ed.), *Krishnadevaraya and His Times* (Mumbai, 2013), 30-1.

³⁴ Krishnaswami Aiyangar, *Sources of Vijayanagar History*, 172, 176. See also Kamath, *Krishnadevaraya of Vijayanagara*, 74.

³⁵ Some scholars claim the Portuguese were involved in Tirumalai's death, hoping to cause Saluva Timmarasu's downfall. See Gopala Krishna Rao, "Krishnaraya as a Great King in Politics and Warfare," 47-8.

³⁶ Given the lack of sources on Krishna Raya's death, he may have retired and renounced the court rather than passed away before he was succeeded. See Loewy Shacham, "Expanding Domains and the Personal, Imperial Style of Kṛṣṇadevarāya," 334-5.

end, the two parties resolved that Achyuta Raya would be the formal emperor, yet share much of his power with Rama Raya. But although the infant son of Krishna Raya died soon after, Achyuta Raya's position remained insecure. Rama Raya may even have removed him briefly from the throne, initially to sit on it himself, and after courtiers had objected against this, to temporarily install a son of Achyuta Raya's brother Ranga, named Sadashiva.³⁷

When Achyuta Raya passed away, he was succeeded by his minor son and alleged *Yuvarāja* Venkatadri (r. 1542), reigning under the regency of his maternal uncle Salakaraju China Tirumala. This arrangement was however opposed by Venkatadri's mother (Salakaraju China Tirumala's sister), many courtiers, and Generalissimo Rama Raya, who all took turns seeking the assistance of the sultan of Bijapur to defeat their rivals. A brief period of rapid and violent developments ensued, with the Bijapur army invading and having to retreat thrice. Although Rama Raya proclaimed Achyuta Raya's minor nephew Sadashiva emperor, the capital's inhabitants are said to have chosen as their ruler Salakaraju China Tirumala, who then had his sister's son Venkatadri—the designated ruler—and several of his relatives assassinated. Salakaraju China Tirumala's possible (but in any case very brief) reign is acknowledged in a few literary texts, but Rama Raya eventually killed him and performed the coronation of Sadashiva (r. c. 1542-70), whose regent he became.

While all power now lay with Rama Raya, Sadashiva was to be the last ruler of the Tuluva house and acted as emperor in name only, placed as he was under strict surveillance, especially when he grew older and more assertive. Once a year, Rama Raya and his brothers Tirumala and Venkatadri (not to be confused with abovementioned people with similar names) publicly prostrated themselves before Sadashiva and formally recognised him as their overlord. Yet, Rama Raya assumed a kind of imperial status himself in the course of Sadashiva's reign, and several literary texts and inscriptions state he did actually take the throne. Emperor Sadashiva died in or around 1570, perhaps by murder and probably still in confinement. Five

³⁷ Rāma Sharma, *The History of the Vijayanagar Empire*, vol. I, 113-14, 145-6, 149, 171, 174-5; Chekuri, "Between Family and Empire," 55-9; Rubiés, *Travel and Ethnology in the Renaissance*, 271-3; Stein, *Vijayanagara*, 113; Nilakanta Sastri, *A History of South India*, 283-7; Sewell, *A Forgotten Empire*, 359-61, 366-7; Nilakanta Sastri and Venkataramanayya, *Further Sources of Vijayanagara History*, vol. I, 232, 234-8; Patil, *Court Life under the Vijayanagar Rulers*, 137-40; Venkata Ramanayya, *Studies in the History of the Third Dynasty*, 3-15, 56-75; TV. Mahalingam, "Tirumalaideva Maharaya," *Journal of Indian History* XVII, 1 (1938); idem, *Readings in South Indian History*, 124-6. For Achyuta Raya's double coronation, see also: Lidia Sudyka, "A War Expedition or a Pilgrimage? Acyutarāya's Southern Campaign as Depicted in the *Acyutarāyābhūdaya*," in idem and Anna Nitecka (eds), *Cracow Indological Studies*, vol. XV, *History and Society as Depicted in Indian Literature and Art*, pt. II, *ŚRĀVYA: Poetry & Prose* (Cracow, 2013), 87-8; Jackson, *Vijayanagara Voices*, 181-93.

Table 2: Tuluvas of Vijayanagara, regnal years, relations to predecessors, and further remarks.

	name	accession date	ending date	relation to predecessors	remarks († = natural death at end of reign)
0	Narasa Nayaka	1490s?	1503?	— (founder)	†, general under Saluvas, formal reign unsure
1	Vira Narasimha	c. 1503	c. 1509	1st son of 0	†, contested by son of last Saluva
2	Krishna(deva) Raya	c. 1509	1529	half-brother of 1 & 2nd son of 0	†, contested minor son of 1?
3	Achyuta(deva) Raya	1529	1542	half-brother of 2 & 1, & 3rd son of 0	†, contested son of 2, contested himself by Rama Raya
4	Venkatadri	1542	1542	son of 3	minor, under regency of 5, killed by 5
5	Salakaraju China Tirumala	1542	1542	maternal uncle of 4 & brother-in-law of 3	formal reign unsure, contested and killed by Rama Raya
6	Sadashiva Raya	1542	c. 1570	nephew of 5 & brother's son of 3	†? minor at accession? under regency of Rama Raya, imprisoned by Aravidus during reign

For sources, see the references in the preceding section.

years earlier, Vijayanagara city had been sacked and Generalissimo Rama Raya killed by a coalition of several Deccan sultanates, after which the court, led by Rama Raya's brother Tirumala, had fled the capital. Tirumala was also Sadashiva's successor, becoming the first monarch of Vijayanagara's fourth and last dynasty, the Aravidus.³⁸

³⁸ Nilakanta Sastri and Venkataramanayya, *Further Sources of Vijayanagara History*, vol. I, 238-9, 243, 291-4, 298-300, vol. III, 16, 185-7; BL/AAS, MG, no. 3, pt. 1: "Sketch of the general history of the peninsula," f. 48; no. 3, pt. 4d: "Veera Narasinga Royer Vumsham," f. 141; no. 10, pt. 11: "Kaalaganum," ff. 214-15; no. 11, pt. 3a: "History of the Anagoondy Rajahs," f. 10 (see also Mackenzie, "History of the Anagoondy Rajahs"); no. 11, pt. 3b: "History of the kings of Beejanagur & Anagoondy," f. 18 (see also Mackenzie, "History of the Kings of Veejanagur"); no. 11, pt. 18a: "Historical account of Panoo Conda," f. 170; Sewell, *The Historical Inscriptions of Southern India*, 257; Rubiés, *Travel and Ethnology in the Renaissance*, 274-6; Rama Sharma, *The History of the Vijayanagar Empire*, vol. I, 181-3, 185-6, 219-26; Eaton, *A Social History of the Deccan*, 91-2, 95, 100-1; V. Srinivasan, "Disputed Succession after Achyutharaya," *The Quarterly Journal of the Mythic Society* LXIII, 1-4 (1972); Stein, *Vijayanagara*, 113-14, 119-20; Eaton and Wagoner, *Power, Memory, Architecture*, 114; Venkata Ramanayya, *Studies in the History of the Third Dynasty*, 76-90; Heras, *The Aravidu Dynasty of Vijayanagara*, vol. I, 1-17, 244-6, 511-12; Nilakanta Sastri, *A History of South India*, 288-9, 295; Krishnaswami Aiyangar, *Sources of Vijayanagar History*, 158, 170, 172; Patil, *Court Life under the Vijayanagar Rulers*, 140-2. For a different version of some of the events,

According to most historians, during the approximately sixty-five years of Tuluva rule (c. 1503-70) there were five emperors, whose reigns thus lasted an average of about thirteen years. Should one also count the possible rules of Narasa Nayaka and Salakaraju China Tirumala, this period would shrink to just over nine years. In both cases, the average reign under the Tuluvas was roughly as long as that under the initial Sangama house. Like the Sangamas, the Tuluva rulers were nearly always succeeded by their sons or brothers, and once by a cousin. In addition, Salakaraju China Tirumala—if we consider him a Tuluva monarch—was a maternal uncle of his predecessor and was followed by his nephew.

However, all successions under the Tuluvas appear to have been contested in one way or another. Krishna Raya was probably not Vira Narasimha's successor of choice and Krishna Raya himself detained Achyuta Raya since he wished his son to succeed him. Venkatadri and Sadashiva were minors when they ascended the throne, dominated by their regents, while Salakaraju China Tirumala was regarded by many as a usurper. Besides, it seems the latter three rulers were all assassinated. Although generally seen as presiding over Vijayanagara's most glorious phase, the Tuluva dynasty, like the Sangama house, can thus be regarded as rather unstable.

Aravidus

The empire's fourth dynasty, the Aravidus (or Aravitis, c. 1570-1660s) numbered seven "official" monarchs, but between the 1540s and 1565 Generalissimo Rama Raya was its first *de facto* ruler (see table 3 later in this section). Although regarded as a separate house, the Aravidu family was in fact very closely related to and partially overlapped with the preceding Tuluva dynasty, by both marital and blood ties. Rama Raya and his brother Tirumala were each married to a daughter of Krishna Raya. Consequently, all their sons, grandsons, and great-grandsons who became rulers under the Aravidus were direct descendants of this Tuluva emperor, albeit through the female line.

Literary works composed under or otherwise concerning the Aravidus make much of their connections with the preceding house. Several texts state that Rama Raya bestowed the sovereignty of the empire on the last Tuluva, Sadashiva, or was appointed *yuvarāja* (heir apparent) under him. According to another work, Rama Raya's brother Tirumala served as Sadashiva's *yuvarāja*. Still other texts claim that Rama Raya already acquired this status from Krishna Raya, the latter having no male offspring. As remarked in the previous chapter, one work even declares that

partially exchanging the roles of Salakaraju China Tirumala and Achyuta Raya's brother Ranga, see Rāma Sharma, *The History of the Vijayanagar Empire*, vol. I, 180-1.

Rama Raya was Krishna Raya's son.³⁹ These may all have been efforts to legitimise the Aravidus' takeover of imperial sovereignty from the Tuluvas.

Turning to the successions under the Aravidus, in the five years between the ransacking of Vijayanagara city (1565) and the formal beginning of Aravidu rule, the dynasty's first official monarch, Tirumala (r. c. 1570-2), tried to resettle at the former imperial capital. But the remaining citizens there preferred that Rama Raya's son Peda (who was also Krishna Raya's grandson) rather than Tirumala be the regent of the last Tuluva emperor, Sadashiva. While Tirumala then established his court—in name still under Sadashiva—around 1567 at Penukonda, his nephew Peda enlisted the support of the Deccan sultanates to claim the regency. This proved to be fruitless, and in 1570 Tirumala had himself proclaimed emperor, to retire only two years later.

His *yuvārāja* and successor was his eldest surviving son, Sriranga (r. c. 1572-85), who, dying childless, was succeeded by his youngest brother, Venkata (r. c. 1585-1614). During his reign, the imperial capital was first moved from Penukonda to Chandragiri (c. 1592), close to the peninsula's eastern shore and the important Tirupati sanctity, and subsequently to nearby Vellore (c. 1604), although the court would continue to shift regularly between these towns. At the end of his long rule, Venkata nominated his middle brother's son, Sriranga II (r. 1614), as his successor. In a ceremony described by the Jesuit Manuel Barradas, the emperor passed to his nephew the imperial regalia, including the so-called ring of state, other jewellery, and a precious robe.⁴⁰

Despite this official transfer, the succession was heavily contested. The same Jesuit account has it that because Venkata had no sons, his Queen Obamamba (or

³⁹ Nilakanta Sastri and Venkataramanayya, *Further Sources of Vijayanagara History*, vol. III, 168, 182-3, 186, 199-200, 250; BL/AAS, MG, no. 3, pt. 4d: "Veera Narasinga Royer Vumsham," f. 141; no. 11, pt. 3a: "History of the Anagoondy Rajahs," f. 10 (see also Mackenzie, "History of the Anagoondy Rajahs"); no. 11, pt. 3b: "History of the kings of Beejanagur & Anagoondy," f. 18 (see also Mackenzie, "History of the Kings of Veejanagur"); no. 11, pt. 18a: "Historical account of Panoo Conda," f. 169; Mahalingam, *Mackenzie Manuscripts*, vol. II, 312.

⁴⁰ Heras, *The Aravidu Dynasty of Vijayanagara*, vol. I, 221-3, 229-37, 248-50, 260, 264-6, 277, 300-4, 310-12, 320, 506-8; idem, "Venkatapatiraya I and the Portuguese," *The Quarterly Journal of the Mythic Society* XIV, 4 (1924), 313-14; Cesare Frederici, "The Voyage of Master Cesar Frederick into the East India, and beyonde the Indies, Anno 1563," in Richard Hakluyt (ed.), *The Principal Navigations Voyages Traffiques & Discoveries of the English Nation ...*, ed. John Masefield (London, 1927), vol. III, 213, 216; Nilakanta Sastri and Venkataramanayya, *Further Sources of Vijayanagara History*, vol. I, 294-9, 301-2, 308-11, 325, vol. III, 254, 266; Rāma Sharma, *The History of the Vijayanagar Empire*, vol. I, 224-5, vol. II (Bombay, 1980), 1-2, 14, 38-9, 91-2; Eaton and Wagoner, *Power, Memory, Architecture*, 115-16; Sewell, *A Forgotten Empire*, 223-4; Krishnaswami Aiyangar, *Sources of Vijayanagar History*, 217, 244; Rubiés, *Travel and Ethnology in the Renaissance*, 304-5; Stein, *Vijayanagara*, 120; Nilakanta Sastri, *A History of South India*, 295-9; Patil, *Court Life under the Vijayanagar Rulers*, 141-3.

Bayamma) passed off the son of a Brahmin woman in the imperial household as her own. But the emperor reportedly saw through this and perhaps for that very reason wanted his nephew to succeed him. Once on the throne, Sriranga II seems to have disregarded a number of courtiers and fell out with them. Also, the new ruler was allegedly considered to maintain too close links with Tanjavur's Raghunatha Nayaka, whose kinship with Vijayanagara's former Tulava dynasty—his father being Achyuta Raya's brother-in-law—made him suspect to most members of the Aravidu house.

Subsequently, one court faction, headed by the queen's brother Gobburi Jagga Raya, imprisoned Sriranga II with his close relatives and enthroned the queen's putative son, Chikka Raya (r. c. 1614-16). Another faction, led by the chief Velugoti Yacama Nayaka, favoured the now jailed monarch and made several unsuccessful attempts to free him. Eventually, Jagga Raya had Sriranga II and his family killed, save for a minor son named Ramadeva, who was supposedly smuggled out of prison by a washerman.⁴¹

When Velugoti Yacama proclaimed this boy emperor, the resultant rivalry between the two young pretenders and their supporters reached beyond the Vijayanagara court, involving the formally still subordinate Nayaka rulers of Tanjavur, Senji, and Madurai. Although the latter two supported Jagga Raya and his protégé Chikka Raya, in a battle at Toppur village around 1616 Tanjavur-backed Velugoti Yacama defeated Jagga Raya and most of his allies. The victor acquired the imperial treasure and regalia, and made Ramadeva access the throne at the approximate age of fourteen.

After the death of his rival Chikka Raya in 1619, the emperor came to an agreement with Etiraja, brother of the murdered Jagga Raya, and even married the former's daughter, thus finally concluding this succession struggle. Although the young Ramadeva consolidated his position in the following years, his reign (c. 1616-30) continued to be contested by a grandson and a great-grandson of the dynasty's founder Rama Raya. The former, Peda Venkata, assumed imperial titles and was acknowledged as the rightful emperor by several chiefs, including even the Nayaka of Madurai.⁴²

⁴¹ The escape of royal heirs with the help of washermen seems a recurring theme in south Indian dynastic histories. For a Dutch account hinting at such an escape by a young Tuluva prince, see Vink, *Mission to Madurai*, 290, 346.

⁴² Sewell, *A Forgotten Empire*, 222-30; idem, *The Historical Inscriptions of Southern India*, 271; Narayana Rao, Shulman, and Subrahmanyam, *Symbols of Substance*, 252-6; Subrahmanyam, *Improvising Empire*, 259; Heras, *The Aravidu Dynasty of Vijayanagara*, vol. I, 494-505; Rāma Sharma, *The History of the Vijayanagar Empire*, vol. II, 69-70, 91-2, 126-30, 136-9, 144-6, 155-7; Stein, *Vijayanagara*, 122-3; Nilakanta Sastri and Venkataramanayya, *Further Sources of Vijayanagara History*, vol. I, 326-34; Foster, *The English Factories in India 1624-1629: A Calendar of Documents in the India Office, etc.* (Oxford, 1909), 346-7; Chekuri, "Between Family and Empire," 60-4; Nilakanta Sastri, *A History of South India*,

According to Dutch reports, Ramadeva died on 24 May 1630, having fallen very ill. As the seventeenth-century Dutch Pastor Abraham Rogerius wrote in his treatise on south Indian Hinduism, some believed the emperor's early passing was caused by his taking of the ruby crown and other treasures belonging to the deity of the Tirupati Temple. Whatever the reason for his death, historians disagree on its consequences. Some say that by the time Ramadeva's end was nearing, so many chiefs had switched allegiance to his second cousin Peda Venkata or Venkata II (r. 1630-42), a grandson of Rama Raya, that the emperor had no choice but to pass the throne to him. Others say that since Ramadeva had no sons or brothers, he voluntarily nominated Venkata II as his successor—a view also found in VOC documents (referring to the new ruler as “Anij Goundij Pederagie,” or Anegondi Peda Raja). Although nowhere explicitly stated, Venkata II alias Peda Venkata was probably identical to Ramadeva's rival pretender mentioned in the previous paragraph, as they bore the same name and were both grandsons of Rama Raya.

However, as various accounts say, the new emperor was challenged by Ramadeva's paternal uncle Timma Raja, an imperial general, who took control of the government for a while. Some sources claim that Venkata II stayed near Vijayanagara city during this period, but the Dutch wrote in 1632 that Timma Raja held Venkata II in captivity. In any case, since several courtiers and also the Nayakas of Madurai, Tanjavur, and Senji considered Timma Raja a usurper, they backed Venkata II, who eventually defeated his opponent and commenced his actual rule in 1635.⁴³

The next and final succession under the Aravidus occurred in 1642, when Venkata II passed away. The VOC reported that on 10 October, he died of a high fever combined with what may have been loose bowels (*loop*), and left only a “pet child or bastard” (*speelkindt off bastaert*) behind, who “according to the customs and laws of this land” could not succeed him. Meanwhile, what remained of the empire was rapidly disintegrating, as the Bijapur and Golkonda sultanates were repeatedly invading it, while many subordinate chiefs—including Vijayanagara's larger successor states—grew increasingly disloyal. Some of them supported Sriranga III, son of Venkata II's younger brother, who had opposed his uncle since

300-2; R. Sathianathaier, *Tamilaham in the 17th Century* (Madras, 1956), 28-30; Patil, *Court Life under the Vijayanagar Rulers*, 142-5.

⁴³ NA, VOC, no. 1100, ff. 95v, 99; letters from Pulicat, May, Aug. 1630; BL/AAS, Mackenzie Private collection, no. 47, pt. 1: final report (*memorie van overgave*) of Coromandel Governor Maerten IJsbrantsz, July 1632 (copy from c. 1740), f. 8; MacLeod, *De Oost-Indische Compagnie*, vol. I, 491; Abraham Rogerius, *De open-deure tot het verborgen heydendom*, ed. W. Caland (The Hague, 1915), 123-4; Rāma Sharma, *The History of the Vijayanagar Empire*, vol. II, 163, 167-70, 200-2; Nilakanta Sastri and Venkataramanayya, *Further Sources of Vijayanagara History*, vol. I, 338-40; Nilakanta Sastri, *A History of South India*, 302-3. See also *Beknopte historie*, 22-4.

Table 3: Aravidus of Vijayanagara, regnal years, relations to predecessors, and further remarks.

	name	accession date	ending date	relation to predecessors	remarks († = natural death at end of reign)
0	Rama Raya	c. 1540s	1565	son-in-law of Krishna Raya of Tuluvas	formal reign unsure, killed in battle with Deccan sultanates
1	Tirumala	1565, formally in 1570	1572	brother of 0	†, contested by nephew
2	Sriranga	1572	1585	son of 1	†, childless
3	Venkata	1585	1614	youngest brother of 2 & son of 1	†, childless
4	Sriranga II	1614	1614	son of middle brother of 3 & 2	contested by 5, imprisoned, killed by uncle-in-law
5	Chikka Raya	c. 1614	c. 1616	“cousin” of 4 & putative son of queen of 3	minor? dethroned for 6
6	Ramadeva	c. 1616	1630	distant “nephew” of 5 & son of 4	†, minor at accession, contested by descendants of 0
7	Timma Raja	c. 1630	c. 1635	paternal uncle of 6	formal reign unsure, imprisoned 8, dethroned for 8
8	(Peda) Venkata II	1635, formally in 1630	1642	second cousin of 6 & grandson of 0	†, no legitimate sons, contested by 7 & 9
9	Sriranga III	1642 & 1650s	c. 1646 & c. 1660s	brother’s son of 8	initially dethroned by Bijapur

For sources, see the references in the preceding section and the Epilogue.

the late 1630s and in fact was instrumental in Bijapur’s invasions. Upon Venkata II’s death, however, Sriranga III deserted the Bijapur troops, presented himself as the imperial heir, and was proclaimed emperor (r. c. 1642-6, 1650s-60s) on 29 October, with, as the Dutch wrote, the usual ceremonies.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ NA, VOC, no. 1151, f. 725v: letter from Pulicat to Batavia, Jan. 1643; Colenbrander *et al.*, *Dagh-register gehouden int Casteel Batavia ... anno 1643–1644* (The Hague, 1902), 244; MacLeod, *De*

He was the last ruler who could claim this title with any justification. After Bijapur drove Sriranga III away from the capital Vellore around 1646, the empire gradually collapsed over the next two decades, although the Aravidu house itself continued to exist for a much longer period. For these later fortunes of the final imperial family, see the Epilogue.

The Aravidus are generally considered to have included seven truly imperial rulers, reigning from approximately 1570 to the 1640s, so their average reign would have lasted slightly over eleven years. But if Timma Raja is counted too—who after all belonged to the Aravidu family and briefly sat on the throne—this time span dwindles to just under a decade. Should we also regard as Aravidu emperors the dynasty's de facto founder Rama Raya (say, from Sadashiva's reign onward) and Venkata's putative son Chikka Raya, the length would grow again, but by no more than a few years. Thus, on average, reigns under the Aravidus were about as long as those under the Tuluvas and the Sangamas.

During the first half of its existence, the Aravidu dynasty appears to have been rather stable, as the initial rulers were succeeded by sons or brothers, without violent rivalries, regicides, or infants on the throne. With the death of the childless Venkata in 1614, all this changed. The subsequent emperors included two minors (if Chikka Raya is counted) and only one ruler who was succeeded by his son. In the other successions, nephews, (distant) cousins, and an uncle followed their predecessors. All these later reigns were contested by relatives, leading to several bloody usurpations and two assassinated monarchs.

This period also witnessed a shift between the family's two branches, replacing the descendants of Tirumala with those of his brother Rama Raya. The latter had never forfeited their claim to the throne and finally won it back during the empire's last two decades. Furthermore, it appears that these developments were increasingly influenced by parties beyond the dynasty: courtiers, formally subordinate chiefs—including Vijayanagara's successor states—and the Deccan sultanates.

Oost-Indische Compagnie, vol. II, 173, 176-7; S. Krishnasvami Aiyangar, "Srirangarayalu: The Last Emperor of Vijayanagar," *Journal of Indian History* XVIII, 1 (1939), 21-4; Rāma Sharma, *The History of the Vijayanagar Empire*, vol. II, 234-8, 268-9; Nilakanta Sastri and Venkataramanayya, *Further Sources of Vijayanagara History*, vol. I, 346-8; Nilakanta Sastri, *A History of South India*, 302-3; Saulière, "The Revolt of the Southern Nayaks" [pt. 1], 93 (n. 12).

If one compares successions under the consecutive imperial dynasties, similarities seem more numerous than differences. Depending on which rulers are counted as formal emperors, for each house the average reign lasted between slightly less than a decade and about twelve years, around half the length of the estimated average rule in pre-colonial India. Under each dynasty, this short time span was largely the result of the many contested successions, which often led to brief reigns ending with dethronements or assassinations. Some historians have concluded that violent transitions even outnumbered harmonious ones.⁴⁵

Notably, few of these rivalries resulted from cases where the imperial court ignored the advice of the *Mahābhārata* and other texts to exclude women, children, and illegitimate offspring from the throne. In fact, none of Vijayanagara's dynasties included female reigns, while just two rulers, Krishna Raya and Chikka Raya, have been portrayed as bastards. Since the former bastard case is contradicted by numerous sources, there probably was only one instance of an unlawful son becoming emperor. Infant monarchs were not common either, with just four out of around thirty accessions reportedly involving minors. Indeed, nearly all successions under the Sangamas, Saluvas, and Tuluvas—and half of the successions under the Aravidus—proceeded from father to son or from brother to brother.

Therefore, it seems that it was precisely those transitions that regularly instigated conflicts. As principles of heirship were ambiguous, all the ruler's sons might claim the throne, causing opposition between brothers or, when a son succeeded, between uncles and nephews. Thus, rivalry could arise between different branches of a dynasty, often continuing into later generations, as happened under the last Sangama emperors and throughout the Aravidu house.

For as long as a dynasty lasted, however, pretenders to the throne had to be related by blood to former rulers. If someone took the throne who did not meet that condition, this was regarded as the beginning of another dynasty, even if that ruler had marital ties with the previous house. Thus, the Aravidu rulers Rama Raya and his brother Tirumala, although sons-in-law of the Tuluva emperor Krishna Raya, were considered founders of a new house—or that is at least the view of modern historians. However, we have seen that texts produced under Vijayanagara's successive dynasties made great efforts to establish family ties with previous houses and thereby emphasised dynastic continuation.

Finally, under the later dynasties, when more varied sources become available, one notes a growing number of references to the interventions of courtiers, regional chiefs, and neighbouring states in successions. In addition to the three generalissimos who founded new imperial houses, courtiers often exerted decisive influence from at least the first Tuluvas onward. Usurpation attempts in particular

⁴⁵ Patil, *Court Life under the Vijayanagar Rulers*, 123, 145; Stein, *Vijayanagara*, 92.

seem to have been successful only if backed by a court majority. Subordinate chiefs, including rulers of the successor states, appear to have played a similar role each time they recognised one of several pretenders and thus improved his chances of becoming emperor.⁴⁶ In contrast, interventions of the Deccan sultanates (especially Bijapur and Golkonda), although frequent and weakening the empire as a whole, were seemingly insignificant for the outcome of succession struggles. Sultanate armies invading Vijayanagara to support pretenders to the throne were usually repulsed or, in one case, deserted by the pretender himself.

Successor States

As shown above, sources on successions in Vijayanagara become increasingly varied and detailed around the turn of the sixteenth century. For the successor states, only in the seventeenth century do sources begin to shed more light on successions. From roughly 1650 on, inscriptions and literary texts of local origin are supplemented with regular accounts by the Dutch. In addition to reconstructing the successions themselves, the sections below examine how various sources complement and contradict each other. Again, Ikkeri in the Kannada region is discussed first, followed by Tanjavur (under both royal houses), Madurai, and Ramnad in the Tamil area.

Nayakas of Ikkeri

As told in the origin stories of Ikkeri's Nayakas, the dynasty and its kingdom were founded by Chaudappa and his son Sadashiva Nayaka. They were succeeded by fifteen descendants, although this number is subjective, depending on the criteria used to count monarchs. To begin with, in one case, historians do not agree on whether certain names and titles refer to one single king or denote two or even three different rulers. Further, a few kings are mentioned in just one or two sources, while others reigned only over outlying parts of the kingdom, competing with the central court. Here, monarchs are defined as people who occupied the capital's throne as the main ruler for any length of time. During this dynasty's lifespan, from the early 1500s to 1763, seventeen persons seem to have met these admittedly arbitrary conditions (see table 4 towards the end of this section).⁴⁷

⁴⁶ See also Stein, *Vijayanagara*, 91-5, 109.

⁴⁷ For a comparative survey of Ikkeri's rulers and their regnal periods as proposed by five different scholars (including Swaminathan, Chitnis, and Naraharaya), see Bridges White, "Beyond Empire" 80-4. See also the genealogical table in G. Kuppuram, "The Genealogy and Chronology of Keladi Rulers: A Review," *The Quarterly Journal of the Mythic Society* LXIX, 1-2 (1978), 71. For various

Scholars have tried to establish Ikkeri's succession principles. These alleged rules are constructed on the basis of actual practices, however, instead of normative texts concerning successions. In fact, Ikkeri's main literary work dealing with statecraft, the early eighteenth-century Sanskrit *Śivatattva ratnākara* by King Basavappa Nayaka, describes royal duties and qualities at length but seems to provide no guidelines for selecting a successor to the throne. It merely mentions the capacities required of princes, confirming the importance that earlier Sanskrit texts attach to a combination of descent and personality (V 15:35-6).⁴⁸

Scholars who have reconstructed regulations for successions in Ikkeri argue that primogeniture was the preferred procedure and that in the absence of an able son a brother could be selected. But they also note that these rules were regularly bent. Perhaps as a consequence, some historians observe a beneficial flexibility that allegedly characterised Ikkeri's successions. Joint-rule, voluntary abdications, early nomination of *yuvarājas* (heirs apparent), queens' regencies, adoptions, and regular shifts between different family branches are all said to have been conscious, peaceful, and usually effective strategies to accommodate various pretenders and minimise the risk of destabilising struggles for the throne.⁴⁹ However, the survey of successions that follows demonstrates that more often than not successions were accompanied by violent clashes between rival claimants.

Much about Ikkeri's Nayaka house during its first century or so remains unclear. This includes a number of successions and even some of the first kings themselves. All inscriptions and literary texts agree that the dynastic founder Chaudappa Nayaka (r. c. 1500-30?) was succeeded by a son, generally known as Sadashiva

(partly outdated) genealogical trees, see: Swaminathan, *The Nāyakas of Ikkeri*, between 280-1; Chitnis, *Keladi Polity*, 57 and between 224-5; Hayavadana Rao, *History of Mysore*, vol. III, 1287; Lennart Bes, "The Ambiguities of Female Rule in Nayaka South India, Seventeenth to Eighteenth Centuries," in Elena Woodacre (ed.), *A Companion to Global Queenship* (Kalamazoo/Bradford, 2018), 212; Gopal, "A Note on the Genealogy of the Early Chiefs of Keladi," 31, 58; N. Lakshminarayan Rao, "The Nayakas of Keladi," in S. Krishnaswami Aiyangar et al. (eds), *Vijayanagara Sexcentenary Commemoration Volume* (Dharwar, 1936), 269; Sundara, *The Keladi Nāyakas*, viii-ix; K. Gunda Jois (ed.), "Keladi Inscriptions on Gold Sandals and Pinnacles," *The Quarterly Journal of the Mythic Society* LXXXII, 1-2 (1991), 66; Krishnaswami Aiyangar, *Sources of Vijayanagar History*, xv; Lewis Rice, *Mysore and Coorg*, 157; L.D. Barnett, "The Keladi Rajas of Ikkeri and Bednur," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (New Series) 42, 1 (1910), 150; Sewell, *The Historical Inscriptions of Southern India*, 359-60; idem, *Lists of Inscriptions*, 177-8.

⁴⁸ Krishnamurthy, *Śivatattva Ratnākara of Keladi Basavaraja*, 23-71; Chitnis, *Keladi Polity*, 62-6; idem, "Śivatattvaratnakara with Special Reference to Polity."

⁴⁹ G. Kuppuram, "Principles of Succession under Keladi Rule," *Bulletin of the Institute of Traditional Cultures* 71 (1979); Chitnis, *Keladi Polity*, 39-41, 43-51; Swaminathan, *The Nāyakas of Ikkeri*, 163-4; Krishnamurthy, *Śivatattva Ratnākara of Keladi Basavaraja*, 124-5; S.N. Naraharaya, "Keladi Dynasty" [pt. 2], *The Quarterly Journal of the Mythic Society* XXII, 1 (1931), 73.

Nayaka (r. c. 1530-65?).⁵⁰ But at this point the sources become ambiguous and modern analyses begin to diverge. According to the dynasty's main chronicles, by his two wives Sadashiva had two sons, Dodda Sankanna Nayaka (r. c. 1565-70?) and Chikka Sankanna Nayaka (r. c. 1570-80), succeeding their father one after another. Next, the throne was consecutively occupied by two of Dodda Sankanna's sons, Ramaraja Nayaka (r. c. 1570-85) and Venkatappa Nayaka (r. c. 1585-1629), the former probably initially co-ruling with his uncle Chikka Sankanna.⁵¹ Most modern studies adopt this version of the dynasty's early genealogy.⁵²

But all important chronicles, although they refer to events in the sixteenth century, date from the eighteenth century. Questioning the reliability of these late texts, it has been suggested on the basis of contemporary inscriptions that Sadashiva and Dodda Sankanna were one single person. Originally called (Dodda) Sankanna, this son of the founder Chaudappa would have assumed the name (Immadi) Sadashiva to show his loyalty to Vijayanagara's similarly named emperor Sadashiva Raya, and by extension to the empire's de facto ruler Rama Raya. Consequently, Chikka Sankanna as well as Ramaraja and Venkatappa would all have been sons of Dodda Sankanna alias Sadashiva.⁵³ Whatever were the exact family relations, during this period most rulers were apparently succeeded by sons or brothers, with elder ones probably preceding younger ones.

⁵⁰ BL/AAS, MG, no. 6, pt. 11: "Historical account of Beedoonoor or Caladee Samstanum" (*Keḷadi arasara vaṃśāvali*), ff. 62, 65v; Krishnaswami Aiyangar, *Sources of Vijayanagar History*, 194-5; Nilakanta Sastri and Venkataramanayya, *Further Sources of Vijayanagara History*, vol. III, 97, 189-90; Krishnamurthy, *Sivatattva Ratnākara of Keladi Basavaraja*, 104, 106; Gopal, "A Note on the Genealogy of the Early Chiefs of Keḷadi," 18-26; Kuppuram, "The Genealogy and Chronology of Keḷadi Rulers," 59-60.

⁵¹ BL/AAS, MG, no. 6, pt. 11: "Historical account of Beedoonoor or Caladee Samstanum," ff. 65v, 67v-8, 70, 71; Krishnaswami Aiyangar, *Sources of Vijayanagar History*, 194-6, 337-9; Nilakanta Sastri and Venkataramanayya, *Further Sources of Vijayanagara History*, vol. III, 193-4; Krishnamurthy, *Sivatattva Ratnākara of Keladi Basavaraja*, 104, 106-8; Kuppuram, "The Genealogy and Chronology of Keḷadi Rulers," 60-3.

⁵² See: Swaminathan, *The Nayakas of Ikkēri*, 19-21, 30-2, 34-40; Chitnis, *Keḷadi Polity*, 12-14, 39, 43-6, 50; Lakshminarayan Rao, "The Nayakas of Keladi," 256-62; Naraharaya, "Keladi Dynasty" [pt. 1], 378-9; idem, "Keladi Dynasty" [pt. 2], 72-3. The last work claims Sadashiva was first succeeded by his brother Bhadrappa, who then installed Sadashiva's son Dodda Sankanna when he reached maturity.

⁵³ Gopal, "A Note on the Genealogy of the Early Chiefs of Keḷadi," passim, especially 35, 37. For a local account also suggesting there was only one ruler called Sankanna, see Mahalingam, *Mackenzie Manuscripts*, vol. II, 420-1. See also Lakshminarayan Rao, "The Nayakas of Keladi," 259, where Dodda Sankanna is identified with Immadi Sadashiva, the latter however thought to be different from Sadashiva himself. For these and other interpretations, see also B.S. Subhadra, "Art and Architecture of the Keḷadi Nayakas" (unpublished dissertation, Karnatak University, 1991), 34-7. The names Ramaraja and Venkatappa were possibly also expressions of loyalty to the roughly contemporary Vijayanagara rulers Rama Raya (fl. 1542-65) and Venkata I (r. 1585-1614) of the Aravidu dynasty. See also Naraharaya, "Keladi Dynasty" [pt. 2], 74.

That does not mean these successions were uncontested. While the treatise *Śivatattva ratnākara* declares that Chikka Sankanna installed Venkatappa as his successor and Ramaraja as *yuvārāja*, the chronicle *Keḷadinṛpa vijayam* asserts that Chikka Sankanna was murdered by his successor Ramaraja.⁵⁴ There are no further texts either supporting or negating the latter story, but with the reigns of Venkatappa and his successor, his son's son Virabhadra Nayaka (c. 1629-44), European sources become available, which underscore that competition for the throne was often fierce. The Italian traveller Pietro Della Valle, visiting the Ikkeri court in 1623, reported that although Venkatappa was preparing Virabhadra to be his successor, this transition would likely be challenged, since another of Venkatappa's grandsons, Sadasivayya (born of one of his daughters), wanted to be king too. Besides, as the Italian traveller wrote, two sons of Venkatappa's brother and predecessor Ramaraja had been imprisoned out of fear that they would claim the throne as well.⁵⁵

As Della Valle expected, Virabhadra's succession in 1629 was disputed. The Portuguese recorded that the eldest of Ramaraja's jailed sons, Vira (or Virappa) Vodeyar, escaped and had himself installed as king, probably while Virabhadra was away from the capital on a military campaign. In 1631, the Portuguese viceroy at Goa even concluded a treaty with Vira Vodeyar, regarding him as the legitimate king. He died a few months later, however, making Virabhadra the sole monarch. But in 1635, according to the Portuguese, another pretender took advantage of the king's absence from the capital and spent six months on the throne before Virabhadra ousted him.⁵⁶ This usurper was in all likelihood Sadasivayya, the other grandson of Venkatappa whom Della Valle thought to be harbouring royal ambitions.

That is at least suggested by the chronicle *Keḷadi arasara vaṃśāvaḷi*, which relates that, when Virabhadra was out of the capital, first his "uncle Veeravadeyaloo" (Vira Vodeyar) and next his brother-in-law "Sadaseeva" (Sadasivayya) were crowned king, although both of them passed away soon after. The *Śivatattva ratnākara* and the *Keḷadinṛpa vijayam* largely confirm these events, the latter adding that Sadasivayya mutilated Vira Vodeyar's brother

⁵⁴ Krishnaswami Aiyangar, *Sources of Vijayanagar History*, 339; Krishnamurthy, *Sivatattva Ratnākara of Keladi Basavaraja*, 108; Narasimhachar, "The Keladi Rajas of Ikkeri and Bednur," 190; Gopal, "A Note on the Genealogy of the Early Chiefs of Keḷadi," 30; Swaminathan, *The Nāyakas of Ikkeri*, 38, 87; Chitnis, *Keḷadi Polity*, 50.

⁵⁵ Pietro Della Valle, *The Travels of Pietro Della Valle in India: From the Old English Translation of 1644 by G. Havers*, ed. Edward Grey (London, 1892), vol. II, 262, 284. See also Chitnis, *Keḷadi Polity*, 47-8.

⁵⁶ Shastri, *Goa-Kanara Portuguese Relations*, 156, 158, 167; Pinto, *History of Christians in Coastal Karnataka*, 66-77; Subrahmanyam, *The Political Economy of Commerce*, 234-5; Teotonio R. de Souza, *Medieval Goa: A Socio-Economic History* (New Delhi, 1979), 36.

Basavalinga to prevent him from turning into a rival.⁵⁷ Perhaps as a consequence, in or around 1639, Virabhadra shifted the capital from Ikkeri to nearby Bednur (also Bidnur), considered a location with better strategic and mercantile advantages.⁵⁸

While many texts thus mention the competition Virabhadra faced from certain family members, literary works unanimously praise the assistance he received from his relative Shivappa Nayaka, a powerful general. The latter is usually referred to as a (grand-)uncle of the king, but since he was a grandson of the former ruler Chikka Sankanna, he may actually have been a second cousin of Virabhadra. The *Keḷadi arasara vaṃśāvali* describes a short period during which Shivappa was disloyal to Virabhadra. Having subsequently fled the capital, Shivappa was nevertheless caught but then forgiven because of his great stature, and even appointed governor of an important fort.⁵⁹ Apart from this episode, the text agrees with the other main works that Shivappa was a highly trusted servant and played an essential role in the kingdom's administration and defence. At the end of his reign, Virabhadra allegedly voluntarily withdrew from worldly affairs or died a natural death, and, as he had no sons, Shivappa would have been acknowledged as the new ruler (r. c. 1644-60).⁶⁰

But a chronicle of the Wodeyar dynasty ruling neighbouring Mysore, the Kannada *Chikkadēvarāya vaṃśāvali*, declares that Shivappa took the Ikkeri throne by killing Virabhadra.⁶¹ Most historians consider this improbable because other Indian sources do not mention a violent take-over and in fact all glorify Shivappa's achievements. And since Ikkeri's chronicle *Keḷadinṛpa vijayam* does not conceal

⁵⁷ BL/AAS, MG, no. 6, pt. 11: "Historical account of Beedoonoor or Caladee Samstanum," ff. 74v-5; Narasimhachar, "The Keladi Rajas of Ikkeri and Bednur," 190-1; Krishnaswami Aiyangar, *Sources of Vijayanagar History*, 344, 346; Krishnamurthy, *Sivatattva Ratnākara of Keladi Basavaraja*, 110; Kuppuram, "The Genealogy and Chronology of Keḷadi Rulers," 63. Sadasivayya was not only a grandson of Venkatappa I like Virabhadra himself, but also the latter's brother-in-law. See also: Swaminathan, *The Nāyakas of Ikkēri*, 52, 67-72; Chitnis, *Keḷadi Polity*, 17-18, 44, 48.

⁵⁸ Swaminathan, *The Nāyakas of Ikkēri*, 82-3; BL/AAS, MG, no. 6, pt. 11: "Historical account of Beedoonoor or Caladee Samstanum," ff. 74v, 77; Bridges White, "Beyond Empire," 110, 208.

⁵⁹ BL/AAS, MG, no. 6, pt. 11: "Historical account of Beedoonoor or Caladee Samstanum," ff. 76-6v.

⁶⁰ Krishnaswami Aiyangar, *Sources of Vijayanagar History*, 346; Krishnamurthy, *Sivatattva Ratnākara of Keladi Basavaraja*, 110-11; BL/AAS, MG, no. 6, pt. 11: "Historical account of Beedoonoor or Caladee Samstanum," ff. 74v, 77-7v; Swaminathan, *The Nāyakas of Ikkēri*, 86; Chitnis, *Keḷadi Polity*, 50; Kuppuram, "The Genealogy and Chronology of Keḷadi Rulers," 63-4. See also the remarks about Virabhadra in the mid-1630s in Peter Mundy, *The Travels of Peter Mundy in Europe and Asia, 1608-1667*, vol. III, pt. I, ed. Richard Carnac Temple (London, 1919), 82.

⁶¹ Krishnaswami Aiyangar, *Sources of Vijayanagar History*, 309. See also Hayavadana Rao, *History of Mysore*, vol. I (Bangalore, 1943), 3.

Ramaraja's murder of Chikka Sankanna in the late sixteenth century, it would be unlikely to ignore Shivappa's assassination of Virabhadra.⁶²

However, Portuguese, Jesuit, and Dutch reports all indicate that the Mysore text is probably correct. Either of these European documents say that in mid-1644 Shivappa besieged a fortress where Virabhadra was staying and reportedly had him poisoned. As the Jesuit Simon Martins put it some years later: "Xinapa Naique, who, having been captain general in Canara [Ikkeri] and desiring to get the sceptre, deprived of his life the lawful king, and by force of arms crowned himself king." In 1672 the Dutch phrased it largely similarly: "Sivapanijcq" had "usurped the sovereignty" from "his natural lord" and "repudiated the rightful heirs" (*de reghte erven verstooten*).⁶³

These views—that other members of the Nayaka house had stronger claims to the throne than Shivappa—are shared by modern historians. They regard Shivappa's reign as the start of the domination of the family's collateral line. Despite the praise of some scholars for a supposedly regular and cordial alternation between the dynasty's two branches, in fact no member of the initial line ever ruled again, with one very brief exception. This more or less definite shift could explain why none of the literary works refers to Shivappa's killing of Virabhadra: these texts were all composed or commissioned by the former's descendants, who owed their place on the throne to Shivappa's usurpation and probably preferred to portray that transition as legitimate and peaceful. For the same reason, it did make sense to include Ramaraja's murder of Chikka Sankanna in the *Keladinṛpa vijayam*, as the latter was Shivappa's grandfather, whose reign was allegedly brutally ended by a member of the family's competing branch.

In late 1660, at the approximate age of sixty, Shivappa passed away after a long sickbed, perhaps again caused by poison, as a rumour recorded by Jesuits had it. He was succeeded by his younger brother Venkatappa Nayaka II (r. 1660-1), who according to some literary texts had already partaken in his predecessor's reign. Such co-rulership is also referred to in Dutch reports stating that Venkatappa II reigned together with Shivappa's son Bhadrappa Nayaka, who served as the second king. One VOC document even speaks of a diplomatic mission to "greet these two kings in their new reign."⁶⁴ However, within a year after his accession, in September 1661, Venkatappa II died and was succeeded by his nephew and co-ruler Bhadrappa (r. 1661-4).

⁶² Chitnis, *Keladi Polity*, 47; Swaminathan, *The Nāyakas of Ikkēri*, 87; Kuppuram, "Principles of Succession under Keladi Rule," 77.

⁶³ NA, VOC, no. 1224, f. 76; no. 1288, f. 635v: report on "Canara," July 1657, letter from Cochín to Batavia, July 1672; D. Ferroli, *The Jesuits in Mysore* (Kozhikode, 1955), 30-1; Shastry, *Goa-Kanara Portuguese Relations*, 176-7, 179 (n. 68).

⁶⁴ NA, VOC, no. 1236, ff. 35, 191-3: letters from Vengurla to Batavia, Oct. 1660, Jan. 1661; BL/AAS, MG, no. 6, pt. 11: "Historical account of Beedoonoor or Caladee Samstanum," ff. 77-7v, 78v-9; Krishnaswami Aiyangar, *Sources of Vijayanagar History*, 346-7; Krishnamurthy, *Sivatattva Ratnakara of Keladi*

This is another case in which eighteenth-century court chronicles present the transition as a tranquil affair, with Venkatappa II himself crowning Bhadrappa as the new king,⁶⁵ while Dutch and Jesuit sources have an entirely different story to tell. A letter sent from the VOC settlement at Vengurla to the Company's headquarters at Batavia in May 1662, only eight months after the event, deserves a lengthy quotation for its detailed coverage of the developments. As this account explains, the succession to the throne occurred:

... because that Ventapanijck [Venkatappa Nayaka II] loved the single-headed reign too much, which not only made him forget to pay appropriate respect to the said prince [Bhadrappa Nayaka] and general [named Shivalinga],⁶⁶ but moreover he secretly decided to take Sivalingia's life and Badrapanijck's sight. But they, observing matters were not right, wangled for so long that they found out about the secret, and seeing the approaching danger that threatened them, they resolved to make a virtue of necessity [*de noot een deucht te maken*] and let Ventapanijck fall into the trap that was set for them [*vallen in den strick die haer geschooren was*]...

On 8 September last, the aforesaid prince and general, both provided with a good sabre, without any retinue but 2 or 3 trusted guards, moved in the morning at dawn to the palace of Ventapanijck, whom they caught in his bedroom as he was waking up, accompanied by the chief councillor and a chamberlain. Grasping the betrayal, the king called for his hand-gun, but jumping to him, Sivalingia dealt Ventapanijck a blow on the head so heavy that he fell on the ground and vomited his soul right away [*zijn ziel aenstonts uijt braeckte*]. The councillor and chamberlain, who tried to protect the king, were also hacked down. Seeing their intention accomplished as desired, they hastily commanded that the gates of the palace be closed and reinforced with trusted guards, until order had been restored. In the late afternoon a mandate was proclaimed around the entire town of Bidroer [Bednur] that Badrapanijck had been inaugurated [*gehult*] in his lord father's [Shivappa] place as king over the Cannarase realm [Ikkeri]. And although a great tumult ensued because of this murder, this was halted without further bloodshed.

But we can suspect that this deed will drag along some difficulties, of which the first signs appear already. Because some time ago we heard that in early February the said Badrapanijck went to Tirthalli [Tirthahalli] (which that nation considers a holy place) and

Basavaraja, 113; Ferrolì, *The Jesuits in Mysore*, 56; Shastry, *Goa-Kanara Portuguese Relations*, 184, 191, 202-3, 207; Swaminathan, *The Nāyakas of Ikkēri*, 101-2; Chitnis, *Keladi Polity*, 19.

⁶⁵ BL/AAS, MG, no. 6, pt. 11: "Historical account of Beedoonoor or Caladee Samstanum," ff. 77v, 79; Krishnaswami Aiyangar, *Sources of Vijayanagar History*, 347-8; Krishnamurthy, *Sivatattva Ratnākara of Keladi Basavaraja*, 111, 113; Swaminathan, *The Nāyakas of Ikkēri*, 104-5.

⁶⁶ According to the *Keladinrpa vijayam*, Shivalinga Nayaka (also Sivalingaiya) was a son-in-law of Shivappa Nayaka I. The general died in 1662 in a battle with Mysore. See Swaminathan, *The Nāyakas of Ikkēri*, 104-6.

there gave 500 cows as charity [*aelmoes*], besides much handed-out cash money, to ask for forgiveness of his sins, to which end that Neijck [Nayaka] would also have executed some person there, as a sacrifice of life. This became known in the town of Bidroer, whereupon it was decided to stop His Majesty from entering his palace, with the intention to forcibly crown the brother's son of a former king named Vira Bhadranijsck [Virabhadra Nayaka] (since this Badrapanijsck did not reign well) and declare him king of the lands.

The houweldaer [*havāldār*, commander] in Bidroer, being informed of this intention, immediately had the king's palace secured and the doors closed, and wrote some letters to advise His Highness Badrapanijsck, who after their reception hastily went to Bidroer. But he found the town gates closed and the people out and about [*d'gemeente op de been*], who prevented him from entering. He treated them very friendly, pledging that he would renounce whatever displeased them and that they would receive complete satisfaction from him. With these and other amicable words he got into his palace, where without delay he had called the aforementioned brother's son, named Alij Venttaija [unidentified prince], who was asked about all that had passed. But he answered that he had no guilt nor gave cause for this revolt, but that they wanted to put him on the throne with force, which he had not accepted, and he asked for permission to leave.

The following day, the king noticed that the revolting people, some 8,000 men strong, still continued their rebellion in order to crown the other, whom he summoned for the second time. But he ["Alij Venttaija"] appeared only after a long search (as he had hidden out of fear of being harmed), when he, by order of the aforementioned Badrapanijsck, was robbed of his sight, which was cut out with red-hot piercers, but shortly afterwards he hanged himself out of misery. The common mob [*gemeene graeuw*] did not calm down because of this but started running around, so that several groups, 7 to 8 thousand heads strong, trooped up and stopped all distinguished persons who travelled from and to Bidroer, which made the roads very unsafe. Also, all letters reaching their hands were held up, but although these disturbances have been smoothed and silenced, we trust that the mentioned kingdom will not remain calm for long, since a great hatred has arisen between the General Sivalingia (who already draws the power quite to himself) and Badrapanijsck, for which one of the two will likely have to pay with his life ...⁶⁷

Other VOC letters add that the court merchant Mallappa Malu was closely involved in the conspiracy against Venkatappa II and served as an indispensable aide to the subsequent reign of Bhadrappa. It was even rumoured that Mallappa Malu had poisoned Bhadrappa's father Shivappa one year before.⁶⁸ In any case, the usurpation by Bhadrappa and his supporters clearly did not go uncontested. Apparently, the capital's

⁶⁷ NA, VOC, no. 1240, ff. 584-7: letter from Vengurla to Batavia, May 1662 (translation mine).

⁶⁸ NA, VOC, no. 1240, ff. 532-3, 602-3: letters from Vengurla to Batavia, May, Dec. 1662; Coolhaas *et al.*, *Generale Missiven*, vol. III, 434-5; Ferroli, *The Jesuits in Mysore*, 56.

angered inhabitants attempted to install another king, whose identity is uncertain but who seemingly was a nephew of the former ruler Virabhadra and therefore belonged to the dynasty's other branch, which originally governed the kingdom.

The Dutch documents concerning this succession are typical for the sort of descriptions these records provide about such occasions. The reports relate developments in great detail but do not explain how the VOC acquired this knowledge and how reliable its sources were. However, these accounts most probably contain information received from south Indian parties and therefore largely present local interpretations of the affairs. Anyhow, although the precise course of events cannot be verified, several elements can be distinguished in this source material, many of which seem typical for most successions in Ikkeri. These include rivalry and violence between members of the royal family and different dynastic lines, influence of court factions, some form of engagement by the common people, an apparent need to do penance for one's sins,⁶⁹ and, soon after the instalment of a new king, rising tensions once again.

As the Dutch had anticipated, Bhadrappa's reign did not last long: he died within three years, around mid-1664. The *Śivatattva ratnākara* and *Keḷadi arasara vaṃśāvaḷi* state that the childless Bhadrappa, having co-ruled with his half-brother Somashekara Nayaka, nominated him as his successor and before his death even handed over the kingdom to him (r. 1664–71).⁷⁰ But according to Dutch, Portuguese, and English sources, courtiers—reportedly involving some Brahmins—poisoned Bhadrappa and replaced him with Somashekara (“Esomsackernijck”), who was eight or nine years old. Bhadrappa's death initially caused disorder and threatened the position of the powerful court merchants Mallappa Malu and his brother Narayana Malu. Still, the latter supposedly managed to create stability and took the minor Somashekara under his protection.⁷¹ However, the death of this young ruler only seven years later, in December 1671,⁷² led to perhaps the most instable period in the dynasty's history.

The various sources offer quite different and often somewhat confused descriptions of this episode, although many accounts agree that Somashekara went mad

⁶⁹ See also Lewis Rice, *Mysore and Coorg*, 159, saying Basavappa I (r. 1697–1713) raised money to feed pilgrims as a penance for the murder of Somashekara I (r. 1664–71).

⁷⁰ Krishnamurthy, *Sivatattva Ratnākara of Keladi Basavaraja*, 112–13; Krishnaswami Aiyangar, *Sources of Vijayanagar History*, 348; BL/AAS, MG, no. 6, pt. 11: “Historical account of Beedoonoor or Caladee Samstanum,” ff. 77v, 79, 80.

⁷¹ NA, VOC, no. 1246, ff. 1619–20: report on Vengurla, July 1664; Foster, *The English Factories in India 1661–64* (Oxford, 1923), 343; Shastry, *Goa-Kanara Portuguese Relations*, 209–10; Swaminathan, *The Nāyakas of Ikkeri*, 108–9; Chitnis, *Keḷadi Polity*, 20, 39, 46, 48; Pinto, *History of Christians in Coastal Karnataka*, 82.

⁷² Shastry, *Goa-Kanara Portuguese Relations*, 216; De Souza, *Medieval Goa*, 38.

during his reign. Local chronicles attribute this to the consumption of elephant medicine, opium, or another intoxicant that, so the young king was assured, improved his physical condition. The VOC reported instead that Somashekara spent much time tending animals while others actually ruled the kingdom.⁷³ In any case, as most sources have it, the king was killed by some courtiers, in the wake of which several years of violence ensued, involving a whole range of pretenders to the throne and their supporters.

The Dutch wrote in July 1672 that before Somashekara's death one court faction asked the neighbouring, dominating Bijapur sultanate to overthrow Ikkeri's alleged puppet government, whereupon the sultan sent an ambassador with 1,600 troops. When Somashekara resisted the subsequent takeover by the envoy and his local supporters, he was assassinated, which led to great tumult. Many courtiers were killed, while the Bijapur ambassador was forced to hastily return home, with only 400 men left. Amidst the confusion a new king had to be crowned, for which—still according to the Dutch—the options were either the nearest heir of Somashekara, from the dynasty's collateral branch of Shivappa Nayaka, or someone from the original, “rightful” line, which had ended with Virabhadra Nayaka around 1644. The choice fell on a member of the latter branch, a fourteen-year old boy named Shivappa (r. c. 1672).⁷⁴

This Shivappa Nayaka II was in all probability the elder brother of Sadashiva Nayaka who in 1689 approached the VOC for military assistance, as related at the outset of this chapter. The *Keladinṛpa vijayam* says Shivappa II was a grandson of Sadasivayya, who in the mid-1630s had competed with King Virabhadra Nayaka for the throne and himself was a grandson of King Venkatappa Nayaka I (r. c. 1585–1629). Thus, Shivappa II would indeed have been a member of the initial ruling line of the Nayaka dynasty.⁷⁵ Dutch accounts dating from 1672 and 1673 describe how upon Shivappa II's instalment many more people were murdered, including all close relatives of the previous ruler Somashekara. Around the same time, Ikkeri was attacked by the still disgruntled sultan of Bijapur and the rulers of the adjacent Mysore and Kannur (or Cannanore) kingdoms. On top of all this, some Ikkeri courtiers, among whom court merchant Narayana Malu and General Timmanna, started backing another pretender to the throne.

The aspirant in question was a son of a certain Kasiyya Bhadrappa (“Cassibadria” as the Dutch called him), who also belonged to the dynasty's original branch.

⁷³ BL/AAS, MG, no. 6, pt. 11: “Historical account of Beedoonoor or Caladee Samstanum,” f. 80; Buchanan, *A Journey from Madras*, vol. III, 127–8; Swaminathan, *The Nāyakas of Ikkēri*, 115; Mahalingam, *Mackenzie Manuscripts*, vol. II, 418; NA, VOC, no. 1288, f. 635: letter from Cochin to Batavia, July 1672.

⁷⁴ NA, VOC, no. 1288, ff. 635–5v: letter from Cochin to Batavia, July 1672. See also Fawcett, *The English Factories in India* (New Series), vol. I, 308–9.

⁷⁵ Chitnis, *Keladi Polity*, 48–9. See also Shama Shastry, “Malnad Chiefs,” 49.

Assisted by Bijapur, this coalition dethroned the young Shivappa II soon after his accession, locked him up together with his brother Sadashiva and their blinded father, and cut off Shivappa II's right little finger, thus forever rendering him unfit to become king. While preparations were next made to crown Kasiyya Bhadrappa's son, Kasiyya Bhadrappa himself fell out with General Timmanna, disagreeing about the spending of Ikkeri's treasure. The general subsequently put the father and son in jail and removed from the latter not only a finger but an ear too. Despite this measure, it transpired that Kasiyya Bhadrappa and his son still commanded support among some of the kingdom's local chiefs. Timmanna then had both beheaded and nearly all other members of their dynastic line killed as well. Probably in an effort to prevent yet other assaults by aspiring royals on his power, by early 1673 the general had installed a new monarch on Ikkeri's now long-vacant throne: the widow of the former ruler Somashekara.⁷⁶

That widow was Queen Chennammaji (r. c. 1673-97), whose rule horrified the escaped pretender Sadashiva Nayaka, as he wrote to the VOC. But in spite of his view on female rule, she would become one of Ikkeri's longest ruling monarchs. In a report written shortly after her death, the Dutch explain that the queen had achieved her power by what they called a "very political trick" (*seer politijcque streek*). When Chennammaji's husband Somashekara was killed in 1671, she was supposed to commit *satī* and die on his funeral pyre. She pretended to be pregnant, however, and was thus able to postpone her death by giving people hope she would give birth to a son and heir to the throne. Meanwhile, she forged such strong ties with parties at court that once her pregnancy proved false, no one could remove her from her ruling position and force her to perform *satī*.⁷⁷

Initially, her most important ally was doubtlessly General Timmanna, who seems to have emerged from the tumultuous early 1670s as the kingdom's most powerful courtier and allegedly had Chennammaji crowned. He apparently harboured royal ambitions too, having himself addressed as the Nayaka of Ikkeri, and the queen and the general gradually turned into rivals, even engaging in military clashes. But Chennammaji remained seated on the throne and grew increasingly powerful, especially after Timmanna's death around mid-1676.⁷⁸ When she passed away herself, in early 1697, she had presided over a quarter-century of relative

⁷⁶ NA, VOC, no. 1288, ff. 636-8v; no. 1291, ff. 586v-7v; no. 1295, ff. 264v-6; no. 1299, f. 484; no. 1474, ff. 329-9v: letters from Cochin to Batavia and Gentlemen XVII, July 1672, Apr., Nov. 1673, Nov. 1674, report on Vengurla and "Canara," Mar. 1689.

⁷⁷ NA, VOC, no. 1593, ff. 876-6v: diary of Commissioner Zwaarddekroon's tour in Malabar, Sept. 1697.

⁷⁸ NA, VOC, no. 1291, f. 587; no. 1308, ff. 642v-3; no. 1315, f. 740; no. 1321, f. 953; no. 1329, f. 1331-1v: letters from Cochin to Gentlemen XVII and Batavia, Nov. 1673, Apr. 1675, June 1676, Feb.-Mar. 1677; Coolhaas et al., *Generale Missiven*, vol. IV, 119-20; Fawcett, *The English Factories in India* (New Series), vol. I, 337. See also: Shastry, *Goa-Kanara Portuguese Relations*, 216-18; John Fryer, *A New Account of East-India and*

dynastic stability, following a decade that witnessed three regicides, two pretenders mutilated, and the enthronement of two minors.

It would lead too far to discuss here all details other sources offer on the upheavals between Somashekara's death and Chennammaji's ascendancy. For example, various texts, including VOC documents,⁷⁹ mention yet more royal aspirants—including an in-law of the queen named Basavalinga—and yet more killing or, in the case of this Basavalinga, mutilation and exile. But what seems most notable is that the chronicles produced under Chennammaji's descendants paint a much rosier picture of the commencement of her reign than Dutch records do. According to the *Keladi arasara vaṃśāvaḷi* and the *Keladinṛpa vijayam*, Chennammaji took over the rule of her husband Somashekara as soon as he became mad. The queen is next said to have defeated or briefly tolerated Shivappa II, Kasiyya Bhadrappa's son, and other short-lasting pretenders. And she would herself have actively enlisted General Timmanna's assistance in her actions, after she had temporarily fled Bednur.

Further, these texts do mention the invasion of Bijapur, but state that Chennammaji ward off or bribed the sultanate's officers and made them return home. The *Śivatattva ratnākara* simply ignores the succession struggles of the early 1670s, declaring that Somashekara first co-ruled with his wife Chennammaji and then, shortly before his death, entrusted the kingdom to her.⁸⁰ In his letter to the VOC, Shivappa II's brother Sadashiva presented yet another version of the events. Besides what we read in this chapter's introduction, Sadashiva claimed that his brother, in his youthful naivety, had appointed General Timmanna, and that "son-of-a-slave" Somashekara had lived through all the turmoil to eventually dethrone Shivappa II himself and subsequently, on Timmanna's advice, pass the throne to Chennammaji.⁸¹

Whatever the reliability of these various documents with their competing claims, they obviously represent attempts to stress the legitimacy of each dynastic line, pointing to the defects of the opponents and glorifying their own power, status, and descent. Besides such usage of texts to bolster claims to kingship, this episode also points to another element that could play a role in successions: the influence of neighbouring kingdoms, in this case the Bijapur sultanate, to which Ikkeri had become tributary.

Persia in Eight Letters Being Nine Years Travels, Begun 1672, and Finished 1681 (London, 1698), 162. See also Bes, "The Ambiguities of Female Rule in Nayaka South India."

⁷⁹ NA, VOC, no. 1593, f. 876v: diary of Commissioner Zwaarddekroon's tour in Malabar, Sept. 1697.

⁸⁰ BL/AAS, MG, no. 6, pt. 11: "Historical account of Beedoonoor or Caladee Samstanum," ff. 80-80v; Narasimhachar, "The Keladi Rajas of Ikkeri and Bednur," 192; Swaminathan, *The Nāyakas of Ikkeri*, 115-18; Chitnis, *Keladi Polity*, 20, 48-9; Krishnaswami Aiyangar, *Sources of Vijayanagar History*, 349; Krishnamurthy, *Sivatattva Ratnākara of Keladi Basavaraja*, 114; Kuppuram, "The Genealogy and Chronology of Keladi Rulers," 65, 69 (n. 52); Shama Shastry, "Malnad Chiefs," 49.

⁸¹ NA, VOC, no. 1463, ff. 438-8v: letter from "Sadaasjiwe Neijke king of Carnatica" at Vengurla to the Dutch commissioner-general, Feb. 1689.

Looking at the Nayakas' seven successions between the late sixteenth and late seventeenth centuries, from Venkatappa I to Chennammaji, one observes that the throne no longer always passed to a son or brother of the king, as happened in the dynasty's first century. Instead, in more than half of these cases, successors were the previous ruler's grandson, second cousin or grand-uncle, even more distant cousin, or widow. Furthermore, of the three kings who were their predecessor's son or brother, one was a minor. The five successions following Chennammaji's death continued this eclectic pattern.

Chennammaji and her deceased husband Somashekara being childless, the queen adopted a boy named Basavappa and acted as his regent until he would be old enough to rule alone.⁸² The *Keladinṛpa vijayam* declares that Basavappa was a distant relative of the royal house, being the sister's son of the wife of King Bhadrappa Nayaka (r. 1661-4), who in turn was a half-brother of Somashekara.⁸³ Notably, a Dutch letter of 1673 mentions a three-year old boy kept by Chennammaji to be crowned in the future, who supposedly was one of the few remaining members of the dynasty's first branch.⁸⁴ This may well have been Basavappa, although there is no further evidence he descended from Ikkeri's originally ruling line. The *Keladi arasara vaṁśāvali* has the following to say (in its English manuscript translation) about Basavappa's adoption:

When some time had passed, Chinnamaujee resolved to adopt a successor in the government of the state & accordingly after consideration adopted the son of Badrapa-Naik, called Bawapah-Naik [Basavappa Nayaka], a near cousin of Somasakar-Naik, her husband, & acknowledged him as the legal head of the kingdom with the consent of all the citizens, relations of the family, & the principal officers ... She then embraced him as her own son and named him Caladeevroopaula-Baswapa-Naik, the true Rajah of the Caladee [Ikkeri] kingdom; she prayed that he might reign over the kingdom as happily as his ancestors.⁸⁵

Remarkably, several of these claims presenting Basavappa's succession as rightful—stressing royal descent, formal recognition, and public, familial, and courtly consent—seem to be lacking in the work written by Basavappa himself, the *Śivatattva ratnākara*. Possibly seeking legitimation through a direct relationship with a male ruler, Basavappa instead declares he was both adopted and crowned

⁸² Chitnis, *Keladi Polity*, 21, 45-7; Swaminathan, *The Nāyakas of Ikkeri*, 124-6; Fryer, *A New Account of East-India and Persia*, 162.

⁸³ Narasimhachar, "The Keladi Rajas of Ikkeri and Bednur," 189; Chitnis, *Keladi Polity*, 40, 57.

⁸⁴ NA, VOC, no. 1291, ff. 586v-7v: letter from Cochin to Gentlemen XVII, Nov. 1673.

⁸⁵ BL/AAS, MG, no. 6, pt. 11: "Historical account of Beedoonoor or Caladee Samstanum," ff. 80v-1 (original spelling retained).

by Somashekara, who had subsequently instructed his wife Chennammaji to take care of the boy and the kingdom until the former could reign over the latter.⁸⁶

VOC records have several matters to add. The Dutch called Basavappa (“Bassap Neijk”) a “supposed” (*suppositijf*) and unlawful king, who descended from a non-royal or “private house” (*particulier huijs*), since he was a nephew of a certain Mannappa Chetti. The latter was probably a brother of Mariyappa “Setti,” mentioned as Basavappa’s biological father in the *Keḷadinṛpa vijayam*. Judging from their second name, these brothers were merchants. According to the Dutch, Mannappa was a rich, important courtier of Queen Chennammaji, who managed to have his nephew Basavappa installed as king and himself became Ikkeri’s most powerful man. However, soon after Chennammaji’s death, in July 1698, Mannappa Chetti died as well, reputedly poisoned by rivals who hated him for his greed.

It seems that not long after Chennammaji ascended the throne, the young Basavappa was crowned king. Perhaps born around 1670, Basavappa is already referred to as “the Nayaka” in VOC documents of the late 1670s. During a VOC embassy to Bednur in 1684, he appeared as the official king beside Chennammaji and several times negotiations were conducted, and gifts presented, in his name. The English traveller John Fryer, calling at one of Ikkeri’s ports in the mid-1670s, also reported that Basavappa, although a minor, was considered the king.⁸⁷ The adoption of this young and distant cousin as Ikkeri’s new ruler could have been orchestrated by his uncle Mannappa Chetti to enhance his own power, but for Chennammaji it may have served as a way to legitimise her position, functioning as the king’s regent and securing the dynasty’s continuity.

After Chennammaji died, Basavappa Nayaka became Ikkeri’s sole monarch (r. 1697-1713). Still, in 1703 the Dutch wrote that his father Mariyappa Chetti (“Mariap Chittij”) was thought to actually control the kingdom.⁸⁸ Basavappa passed away in January 1713 after, as the *Keḷadinṛpa vijayam* has it, crowning his eldest son as Somashekara Nayaka II (r. 1713-39) shortly before his death.⁸⁹ The *Keḷadi arasara vaṃśāvaḷi* and VOC records are both somewhat confused in their portrayal of this succession. The chronicle seems to have mixed up the names of Basavappa and

⁸⁶ Krishnaswami Aiyangar, *Sources of Vijayanagar History*, 349-50; Krishnamurthy, *Sivatattva Ratnākara of Keladi Basavaraja*, 114-15.

⁸⁷ NA, VOC, no. 1406, ff. 913, 920v, 923v, 931v; no. 1593, ff. 7-7v, 864, 872v, 876v, 901, 928; no. 1606, f. 98v; no. 1607, f. 90v: diary of mission to Ikkeri, Apr.-May 1684, diary of Commissioner Zwaarderkroon’s tour in Malabar, Aug.-Oct. 1697, letters from Cochin to Batavia, Dec. 1697, Dec. 1698, instructions of Zwaarderkroon to Cochin, May 1698; s’Jacob, *De Nederlanders in Kerala*, 192; Fryer, *A New Account of East-India and Persia*, 57-8, 162.

⁸⁸ Shastri, *Goa-Kanara Portuguese Relations*, 222; NA, VOC, no. 1593, ff. 7, 864, 872v, 876, 901; no. 1694, f. 74: letter from Cochin to Batavia, Dec. 1697, diary of Commissioner Zwaarderkroon’s tour in Malabar, Aug.-Sept. 1697, report on the renewed trade in Ikkeri, Mar. 1703.

⁸⁹ Swaminathan, *The Nāyakas of Ikḱēri*, 129-31; Chitnis, *Keḷadi Polity*, 22.

Somashekara II's younger brother Virabhadra. If that is really the case, the text confirms that Basavappa was succeeded by his son Somashekara II.⁹⁰ Dutch accounts speak of the death of the "state governor of Ikkeri" (*rijcx bestierder van Canara*), named Mariyappa Chetti, on 9 January. His successor is referred to as his son, the "long ignored" (*langh agter de banck verschovene*) Somashekara ("Cham Chanker"), who had now become the "lawful king and regent" (*wettige koningh en regent*).⁹¹ It seems the VOC still associated the deceased Basavappa with his biological father and uncle, Mariyappa and Mannappa Chetti, thought to have forced him on the throne, thus making him a mere governor rather than a rightful king in the eyes of the Dutch. But now that Basavappa's son had been crowned, the family line was apparently considered to have become legitimate.

By all accounts, the following succession, in July 1739, was uneventful. The local chronicles agree with the VOC records that the childless Somashekara II fell ill, passed away at the age of about fifty-five, and was succeeded by Basavappa Nayaka II (r. c. 1739-54), the son of his brother Virabhadra and aged about twenty years old. Dutch reports further mention that Somashekara II had long suffered from a tumour in his lower back, and that already in late 1737 the recently matured Basavappa II was expected to become his successor, rather than another candidate, Somashekara II's sister's son—perhaps another indication of the preference for succession through male lines.⁹²

Basavappa II remained childless too and therefore adopted a young boy, Chenna Basavappa Nayaka. None of the sources seem to indicate how or even if he was biologically related to the royal family, except for one short local text stating he was a grandson of Somashekara II's chief minister ("duwan").⁹³ However, both the main chronicles and VOC documents say that when Chenna Basavappa succeeded his adoptive father around late 1754 (r. c. 1754-7), he was still a minor and Basavappa II's widow Virammaji would serve as his regent, ruling in his name.⁹⁴

⁹⁰ BL/AAS, MG, no. 6, pt. 11: "Historical account of Beedoonoor or Caladee Samstanum," ff. 82-2v.

⁹¹ NA, VOC, no. 1838, ff. 178v-9: letter from Cochin to Batavia, Apr. 1713; Coolhaas *et al.*, *Generale Missiven*, vol. VII (The Hague, 1979), 30.

⁹² BL/AAS, MG, no. 6, pt. 11: "Historical account of Beedoonoor or Caladee Samstanum," ff. 82v-3; Swaminathan, *The Nāyakas of Ikkeri*, 129, 143-4; Chitnis, *Keladi Polity*, 22; NA, VOC, no. 2201, f. 1898; no. 2432, f. 79; no. 2433, ff. 443v-4, 505v; no. 2435, ff. 2233v-4; no. 2446, f. 1098; no. 2461, f. 21v; Cochin diary, Apr. 1730, letters from Cochin to Batavia and Gentlemen XVII, from Basrur to Cochin, Mar.-Apr. 1738, Oct. 1739, report of meeting with Ikkeri's envoy, Dec. 1737, letter from Basrur interpreters, Jan. 1738 (both in "indigenous" diary (*inheems dagregister*), Oct. 1737-Nov. 1738), instructions for mission to Ikkeri, Mar. 1738.

⁹³ BL/AAS, MG, no. 25, pt. 27: "Memoir of Barkoor," f. 209 (compiled by "the Curneeck Ramiah" in 1800, from a copy provided by the British official Thomas Munro; see f. 207).

⁹⁴ BL/AAS, MG, no. 6, pt. 11: "Historical account of Beedoonoor or Caladee Samstanum," ff. 83-3v; Narasimhachar, "The Keladi Rajas of Ikkeri and Bednur," 189; Swaminathan, *The Nāyakas of Ikkeri*, 149-51; Chitnis, *Keladi Polity*, 23, 40; NA, VOC, no. 2857, f. 36: letter from Cochin to Batavia, Mar. 1755.

The next and final succession in Ikkeri occurred soon after, when Chenna Basavappa died on 17 July 1757. The *Keḷadi arasara vaṃśāvaḷi* and the *Keḷadinṛpa vijayam* simply declare that he passed away, but according to the Kannada *Haidar nāma*, a work composed in Mysore in the 1780s, this succession was once more accompanied by violence. Supposedly, the widowed Queen Virammaji had fallen in love with an enslaved man, and the ensuing scandal made Chenna Basavappa protest against her loose manners. Rumour had it that the young king was then strangled in bath or buried alive with broken limbs by an athlete who used to soap him. British sources and a local text mention the murder of Chenna Basavappa too and hold the queen responsible.

In any case, the main chronicles go on to say that Virammaji next consulted with the principal courtiers and adopted another boy. This new king—a son of the queen's maternal uncle or her father's brother-in-law—was installed as Somashekara Nayaka III, again under Virammaji's regency (r. 1757-63). One text adds that from now on she reigned in her own name. Dutch records confirm that because of Somashekara III's minority, the queen continued to be the main ruler, assisted by courtiers.⁹⁵ Notwithstanding, less than six years later, in January 1763, both the Ikkeri kingdom and the Nayaka dynasty came to an end when Mysore's new ruler Haidar Ali Khan conquered Bednur. The subsequent demise of the royal family is treated in the Epilogue.

Reflecting on Ikkeri's sixteen successions, one notices several patterns and developments. During the approximately 260 years of its existence, seventeen persons ruled the kingdom, meaning that the average period between successions lasted about one and a half decades. This time span is significantly influenced by the four brief reigns in the 1660s-70s and 1750s, which all ended with the king being killed or put in prison. But rulers sitting on the throne for more than a few years were also often removed. In fact, just about half of the monarchs died a natural death at the end of their reign, while the others were all dethroned, with almost nobody surviving the occasion.

⁹⁵ BL/AAS, MG, no. 6, pt. 11: "Historical account of Beedoonoor or Caladee Samstanum," f. 83v; no. 25, pt. 27: "Memoir of Barkoor," f. 209; Swaminathan, *The Nāyakas of Ikkēri*, 151-2; Chitnis, *Keḷadi Polity*, 23, 40-1, 47, 49, 238; Nair, "Eighteenth-Century Passages to a History of Mysore," 81-3; Mahalingam, *Mackenzie Manuscripts*, vol. II, 431; Buchanan, *A Journey from Madras*, vol. III, 128; Lewis Rice, *Mysore and Coorg*, 160; NA, VOC, no. 2928, f. 93; no. 2929, f. 248: secret letter from Cochin to Batavia, Apr. 1758, Cochin proceedings (*resoluties*), June 1758; Godefridus Weijerman, *Memoir of Commandeur Godefridus Weijerman Delivered to His Successor Cornelis Breekpot ...*, ed. P. Groot (Madras, 1910), 53; Adriaan Moens, *Memoir Written in the Year 1781 A.D., by Adriaan Moens ...*, ed. P. Groot (Madras, 1908), 55; Hayavadana Rao, *History of Mysore*, vol. II (Bangalore, 1945), 453-4. See also: Mahalingam, *Mackenzie Manuscripts*, vol. II, 405; Bes, "The Ambiguities of Female Rule in Nayaka South India."

Table 4: Nayakas of Ikkeri, regnal dates, relations to predecessors, and further remarks.

	name	accession date	ending date	relation to predecessors	remarks († = natural death at end of reign)
1	Chaudappa Nayaka	c. 1500	c. 1530?	— (founder)	†, son of village headman
2 a	(Immadi) Sadashiva Nayaka	c. 1530?	c. 1565?	(1st?) son of 1	†, a & b same person, or father and son
b	Dodda Sankanna Nayaka	c. 1565?	c. 1570		
3	Chikka Sankanna Nayaka	c. 1570	1580	1st son of 2, or brother of 2b	killed by 4?
4	Ramaraja Nayaka	c. 1570	c. 1585	brother or nephew of 3 & son of 2(b)	†, co-rule with 3?
5	Venkatappa Nayaka	c. 1585	1629, Nov. 10	brother of 4 & son of 2(b)	†
6	Virabhadra Nayaka	1629	c. 1644	son's son of 5	two brief usurpations by relatives, childless, poisoned by 7?
7	Shivappa Nayaka	c. 1644	late 1660	grand-uncle or 2nd cousin of 6 & son's son of 3	†? 1st of collateral branch
8	(Chikka) Venkatappa Nayaka II	late 1660	1661, Sept. 8	brother of 7 & son's son of 3	co-rule with 7? killed by 9
9	Bhadrappa Nayaka	1661, Sept. 8	mid-1664	nephew of 8 & 1st son of 7	co-rule with 8, childless, poisoned
10	Somashekara Nayaka	mid-1664	1671, Dec.	half-brother of 9 & son of 7	minor at accession, no sons, killed
11	Shivappa Nayaka II	c. early 1672	c. early 1672	great-great-grand-son of 5?	minor at accession, dethroned, finger cut
12	Chennammaji	c. early 1673	early 1697	widow of 10	†, female, temporary co-rule with 13
13	Basavappa Nayaka	early 1697	1713, Jan. 9	adopted by 12 & nephew of 9 (9 was brother-in-law of 12)	†, co-rule (partially as minor) with 12

	name	accession date	ending date	relation to predecessors	remarks († = natural death at end of reign)
14	Somashekara Nayaka II	1713, c. Jan. 9	1739, July	1st son of 13	†, no sons
15	(Kiriya) Basavappa Nayaka II	1739, c. July	c. late 1754	half-brother's son of 14	†, no sons
16	Chenna Basavappa Nayaka	c. late 1754	1757, July 17	adopted by 15	minor at accession, killed by 17?
17	Virammaji	1757, c. July 17	1763, Jan.	widow of 15	female, co-rule with adopted cousin Somashekara III, dethroned by Mysore

For sources, see the references in the preceding section, Chapter 1, and the Epilogue.

Only around five rulers were sons of their immediate predecessors and two of these were adopted minors. Some eight kings were (half-)brothers or grandsons of previous rulers, the former group often also being sons of non-immediate predecessors. The other monarchs comprised two widows and one distant cousin. Altogether, five minors ascended the throne, including Basavappa and Somashekara III who commenced their reigns under the regencies of their adoptive mothers Chennammaji and Virammaji respectively. By and large, the recommendations on succession in the *Mahābhārata*, *Arthasāstra*, and other such texts appear to have been paid little heed.

This is particularly true for the second half of the dynasty's existence. The first 130 years or so seem to have been relatively stable, with just five or six successions—all by sons or brothers of predecessors and with only one assassination—resulting in an average reign of close to a quarter of a century. But when European sources become available, around the 1620s, we observe a rise in regicides, much shorter reigns (averaging about a decade), and unlikely throne occupants. For this latter period, it turns out that Ikkeri's literary texts often portray successions differently from European reports. The local chronicles were apparently written with the descent of the then ruler in mind, ignoring murders, usurpations, or even kings themselves. These texts depict transitions as peaceful and focus on dynastic continuity, frequently referring to periods of joint-rule by consecutive monarchs. They also emphasise the exalted ancestry and qualities of the kings' wives and mothers, stressing the family's royal purity.⁹⁶ As said earlier, more or less contemporaneous

⁹⁶ For references to rulers' wives and mothers, see BL/AAS, MG, no. 6, pt. 11: "Historical account of Beedoonoor or Caladee Samstanum," ff. 61, 62, 65v, 71, 74, 77v, 80, 81v-2, 83.

inscriptions in the name of different kings are often thought to point to co-rulership as well.⁹⁷

VOC records never speak of joint-rule, with the exception of Venkatappa II and his nephew Bhadrappa, and Chennammaji and her adopted son Basavappa. Instead, these and other external sources emphasise dynastic instability, competition, and violence. Although European materials may have exaggerated or misunderstood succession struggles, it is unlikely these transitions were the harmonious events that local sources purport them to be. Thus, the abovementioned inscriptions could signify competing claims rather than cordial co-rulership.⁹⁸ We should therefore ask what picture would emerge of the dynasty's earlier successions if sources other than local ones were available for that period.

In any case, when sources grow more varied, several patterns become apparent. Most striking are the fierce rivalry within the dynasty, the influence of courtiers, some form of participation by the common people, and the interference of neighbouring kingdoms. The latter two factors are occasionally mentioned in sources, but on the whole their effect seems to have been limited. Bijapur was engaged in the assassination of Somashekara I in 1671, Shivappa II's subsequent brief reign, and the rise of Queen Chennammaji. The kingdom of Mysore appears to have been involved, too, as it probably sheltered Shivappa II after his escape from Bednur and later his brother Sadashiva.⁹⁹ These were isolated events, however, without far-reaching consequences. As for Ikkeri's common people, in 1662 they allegedly opposed Bhadrappa and tried to have another member of the royal family crowned, all in vain. And according to one chronicle, public consent was sought for Chennammaji's adoption of Basavappa. But these cases also seem to have been exceptions rather than the rule.

Much more constant and influential were conflicts between pretenders to the throne and the role of court factions. These factors were interrelated, heightening their impact. Courtiers could exploit competition within the dynasty, and royal aspirants could take advantage of rivalry among court factions. From the moment the VOC started reporting on successions, in the 1660s, one notices the close and persistent involvement of courtiers. Chapter 3 discusses these people in detail, but the events described above make clear they frequently played a decisive part in the outcome of succession struggles.

⁹⁷ Swaminathan, *The Nāyakas of Ikkeri*, 36, 164; Chitnis, *Keladi Polity*, 14, 45-7; Kuppuram, "Principles of Succession under Keladi Rule," 75-7.

⁹⁸ See also Chekuri, "Between Family and Empire," 78-9.

⁹⁹ See the third and last notes of this chapter.

One significant element in these clashes was the coexistence of two opposed dynastic branches, which had its roots in the dynasty's early phase. When King Chikka Sankanna died in 1580, possibly by murder, his descendants saw the throne being transferred to Chikka Sankanna's brother or nephew and his close relatives. Chikka Sankanna's grandson Shivappa must have literally felt passed over and around 1644 he acquired the throne for his line, probably by force, and thus initiated what is generally called the collateral branch. With one very brief exception, members of the other line never ruled again, but they remained threatening rivals for a substantial period. This was probably an important cause for the dynastic crises in the 1660s and 1670s, no matter how hard court chroniclers attempted to write it out of their accounts. Only the extinction of nearly all members of one of the branches around 1673 brought this destabilising competition to a brutal end.

Nayakas of Tanjavur

With regard to both the way successions proceeded and the availability of sources, Tanjavur's Nayakas stand in contrast with their Ikkeri namesakes. Between the installation of this dynasty by Vijayanagara in the 1530s and its dethronement by Madurai in 1673, probably just five men ruled, perhaps later followed by a brief reign of the house's last scion (see table 5 at the end of this section).¹⁰⁰ Few sources discuss the four successions in question. Local literary works and inscriptions can be corroborated with only a small number of European accounts, most importantly Jesuit and Danish reports.

Neither contemporary texts nor modern historiography seem to have treated the principles of succession in Nayaka Tanjavur in much detail. Based on the successions themselves, modern scholarship simply has concluded that the transfer of royal power was hereditary. *Yuvarājas* (heirs apparent) are thought to have been nominated quite a long time before they ascended the throne, until then functioning as co-rulers. Voluntary abdication to make space for successors is said to have been common practice.¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ For genealogical trees of Tanjavur's Nayakas, see: S. Srikantha Sastri, "Development of Sanskrit Literature under Vijayanagara," in S. Krishnaswami Aiyangar *et al.* (eds), *Vijayanagara Sexcentenary Commemoration Volume* (Dharwar, 1936), 324; Krishnaswami Aiyangar, *Sources of Vijayanagar History*, 254; Vijayaraghavacharya, *Epigraphical Glossary on Inscriptions*, 101; N. Venkata Rao, *The Southern School in Telugu Literature* (Madras, 1978), 22; Pradeep Chakravathy and Vikram Sathyanathan, *Tanjavur: A Cultural History* (New Delhi, 2010), 188; Sewell, *The Historical Inscriptions of Southern India*, 394.

¹⁰¹ Vriddhagirisana, *The Nayaks of Tanjore*, 169.

Little is known with certainty about the individual successions, even with respect to dates. But in most cases, the king appears to have died a natural death after a long reign and been succeeded by an adult son without much disorder at court. That is at least the picture presented by inscriptions and the main literary works produced in the kingdom. The latter include the earlier mentioned *Raghunāthanāyakābhyudayamu*, *Raghunāthābhyudayamu*, and *Tañjāvūri āndhra rājula caritra*—as well as the Sanskrit poem *Sāhitya ratnākara*, dealing with the dynasty's third ruler Raghunatha Nayaka and written by Yagnanarayana Dikshita, son of the well-known Minister Govinda Dikshita. According to these texts, only four men sat on the throne. The dynastic founder Shevappa Nayaka (r. c. 1530s-70s) was succeeded by his son Achyutappa Nayaka, who was followed by his son Raghunatha Nayaka, whose place was taken by his son Vijayaraghava Nayaka.

As claimed by the literary works and suggested by simultaneous inscriptions of different rulers, each king appointed his son as *yuvarāja* early in his reign, whereupon a period of joint rule began in which the father gradually passed royal duties to his son. The *Sāhitya ratnākara* states that Achyutappa (r. c. 1570s-97?) even formally abdicated, had his son Raghunatha crowned (r. c. 1597?-1626), and retired to a religious life. The Icelander Jón Ólafsson, staying in Tanjavur in the early 1620s as servant of the Danes at the port of Tranquebar, also relates that the then king (Raghunatha) had nominated a son as his heir apparent. As Ólafsson writes, portraits of the ruler and his intended successor even hung in the Danish church at Tranquebar.¹⁰²

There are also sources, south Indian and European, that present a different picture of some successions. Several Jesuit letters confirm that Achyutappa resigned to make way for Raghunatha, in or shortly before 1597, but they also declare that Raghunatha was not the eldest son. Reportedly, his anonymous elder brother had been imprisoned during his father's reign and was killed soon after his brother's accession. With regard to the next succession, Jesuit, Dutch, and Danish accounts as well as some south Indian texts say Raghunatha also had several sons, including Ramabhadra and the younger Vijayaraghava. Additionally, Danish documents of the 1620s and early 1630s indicate that Ramabhadra, rather than the often mentioned Vijayaraghava, was the *yuvarāja* and became king when his father passed away on 25 November 1626 (see illustration 3).

Ramabhadra's reign is also specifically mentioned in several less well-known local texts and a Dutch work of the 1750s. Moreover, although not giving personal

¹⁰² Krishnaswami Aiyangar, *Sources of Vijayanagar History*, 255, 269-70, 273, 285-6, 323-4; Vriddhagirisana, *The Nayaks of Tanjore*, 34-5, 57-66, 125-30; Heras, *The Aravidu Dynasty of Vijayanagara*, vol. I, 287, 399-402; Jón Ólafsson, *The Life of the Icelander Jón Ólafsson: Traveller to India*, vol. II, ed. Bertha S. Phillpotts, Richard Temple, and Lavinia Mary Anstrey (London, 1932), 114.



Illustration 3: Address of a letter of April 1631 by Christian IV of Denmark to “The mighty high-born prince, lord Rambadro Naico [Ramabhadra Nayaka], king of Taniura [Tanjavur], our specially good friend,” *Rigsarkivet*, Copenhagen, *Den Ledreborgske Dokumentsamling* (1466-1701), no. 89 (11 April 1631) (photo by P.S. Ramanujam, courtesy *Rigsarkivet*).

names, contemporary VOC records report that on 24 January 1631, the Nayaka of Tanjavur died after a reign of three years. If correct, this could refer to neither Raghunatha nor Vijayaraghava and must have denoted Ramabhadra. The Dutch account further claims that this ruler had earlier blinded his elder brother—who subsequently poisoned himself—and was now succeeded by a younger brother of fifteen or sixteen years old. This should have been Vijayaraghava, who supposedly was a minor when he ascended the throne. However, Jesuit materials declare it actually was Vijayaraghava who around 1630 blinded two brothers—in all likelihood including Ramabhadra—and subsequently put them in jail.¹⁰³ In sum,

¹⁰³ Saulière, “The Revolt of the Southern Nayaks” [pt. 2], 178; P.S. Ramanujam, *Unheard Voices: A Tranquebarian Stroll* (Odense, 2021), ch. 1 (fig. 1.6); *Rigsarkivet*, Copenhagen (hereafter RA), *Den Ledreborgske Dokumentsamling* (1466-1701) (The Ledreborg document collection), no. 89: letter from Christian IV to Ramabhadra Nayaka, 11 Apr. 1631; Johann Heinrich Schlegel, *Samlung zur Dänischen Geschichte, Münzkennntniß, Oekonomie und Sprache*, vol. I, pt. 4 (Copenhagen, 1773), 162-3; “The Indo-Danish Connect,” *The Hindu* (3 May 2015) (discussing research by P.S. Ramanujam); NA, VOC, no. 1103, ff. 131-1v: letter from Pulicat to Batavia, Feb. 1631; Mac Leod, *De Oost-Indische Compagnie*, vol. I, 492;

while sources do not fully agree, it seems certain that Ramabhadra succeeded his father Raghunatha first and reigned over Tanjavur (1626-31) before his brother Vijayaraghava took over (1631-73), and that either one or both of these transitions was accompanied by violence.

After a long reign, Vijayaraghava, the dynasty's last real king, died in 1673 on the battlefield together with his eldest son Mannarudeva (or Mannarudasa) when Tanjavur was besieged by the Nayakas of Madurai. Mannarudeva had been released from jail by his father just before this battle. It was said he was imprisoned after inappropriate advances towards a daughter of Minister Govinda Dikshita.¹⁰⁴ But given this dynasty's tradition of appointing *yuvarājas* early and letting them co-rule, and Vijayaraghava's advanced age at this time, one would think there was a more pressing reason to lock up what must have been the heir apparent. Perhaps this was another example of a Tanjavur Nayaka preventing a possible rival from taking his place, in this case his own son.

Anyhow, Madurai's invasion virtually terminated Tanjavur's Nayaka house as only an infant prince—named Chengamaladasa and probably a younger son of Vijayaraghava—managed to escape from the siege. The dynasty's last surviving member, this boy perhaps briefly sat on Tanjavur's throne two years later and he certainly played an important role in the kingdom's transfer to the Bhonsle house. But for a discussion of the Nayakas' fall and the exploits of Chengamaladasa and his descendants, see the Epilogue.

An analysis of the successions in Nayaka Tanjavur reveals substantial differences between how they are depicted in the main court chronicles and in other sources, including European materials—at least from the late sixteenth century onward. The former texts portray Raghunatha and Vijayaraghava as rightful successors and ignore Raghunatha's anonymous brother and Ramabhadra. One historian has

Srinivasan, "Some Interesting Aspects of the Maratha Rule," 45; S. Raju (ed.), *Taṅcāi Marāṭṭiyar Ceppēṭukal*-50 (Tanjavur, 1983), 112 and subsequent pages; Heras, *The Aravidu Dynasty of Vijayanagara*, vol. I, 399-402; Vriddhagirisān, *The Nayaks of Tanjore*, 127-8; Sathianathaier, *Tamiḷaham in the 17th Century*, 59-60; BL/AAS, MG, no. 1, pt. 6: "A brief account of the ancient Rajahs in the Solah Dhesam," f. 38; no. 1, pt. 8: "The Cheritee or actions of the Vadaka-Rajahs of Tanjore, Trichinopoly & Madura," f. 72; MM, no. 110, pt. 7: "The Charythy of the Vadoka Raja of Tonjore, Trinchunnapully & Madura," ff. 3-4; no. 118, pt. 74: "Names of the Rayers who have reigned Techanautterady," f. 3; Hickey, *The Tanjore Mahratta Principality*, 36-7; *Beknopte historie*, 96. Not mentioning its sources, the latter Dutch work gives the following succession dates: Achyutappa, 1553; Raghunatha, 1588; Ramabhadra, 1626; Vijayaraghava, 1629. See also: Valentijn, *Oud en Nieuw Oost-Indiën*, vol. 5, 1st book, 4, which mentions "Ramapattiza" but places him before Achyutappa. Several less well-known local texts also have it that Achyutappa was not Shevappa's son but his younger brother.

¹⁰⁴ Vriddhagirisān, *The Nayaks of Tanjore*, 153 (including n. 16); Narayana Rao, Shulman, and Subrahmanyam, *Symbols of Substance*, 306 (n. 3).

Table 5: Nayakas of Tanjavur, regnal dates, relations to predecessors, and further remarks.

	name	accession date	ending date	relation to predecessors	remarks († = natural death at end of or after reign)
1	Shevappa Nayaka	c. 1530s	c. 1570s	— (founder)	†, former courtier at Vijayanagara, married into Tuluva house
2	Achyutappa Nayaka	c. 1570s	c. 1597?	son of 1	†, co-rule with 1? abdicated
3	Raghunatha Nayaka	c. 1597?	1626, Nov. 25	(2nd?) son of 2	†, co-rule with 2? killed brother?
4	Ramabhadra Nayaka	1626, c. Nov. 25	1631, Jan. 24	(2nd?) son of 3	blinded elder brother? jailed and blinded by 5?
5	Vijayaraghava Nayaka	1631, c. Jan. 24	1673, Sept. 29	brother of 4, (3rd?) son of 3	minor at accession? jailed or blinded 4, another elder brother, and 1st son? killed by Madurai
6	Chengamaladasa	c. 1675?	c. 1675?	later son of 5	installed and dethroned as a minor by Ekoji Bhonsle? reign unsure

For sources, see the references in the preceding section, Chapter 1, and the Epilogue.

fiercely criticised Jesuit observations as being unreliable,¹⁰⁵ but as in Ikkeri, court chronicles were written from the author's or commissioner's point of view. In the case of Tanjavur's Nayakas, such works were compiled by Vijayaraghava himself and by the court poets Ramabhadramba and Yagnanarayana Dikshita, whose patron was Raghunatha. It is unlikely these texts would mention opposition from the rulers' brothers, let alone the blinding or killing of these brothers.

Therefore, as Jesuit, Danish, and Dutch documents indicate, competition probably did arise between pretenders on several occasions. Even so, those rivalries appear to have been limited to what most Indian treatises on statecraft consider rightful heirs to the throne: the king's sons. Furthermore, these fraternal struggles were settled relatively fast—if brutally—seemingly without widespread violence at court or the involvement of neighbouring kingdoms. For want of detailed sources, little, if anything, can be said about the role of courtiers in those events. But compared to their Ikkeri counterparts, Tanjavur's Nayakas formed a stable dynasty, as almost all rulers occupied a secure position until their death and were succeeded by a son. Further—if we discount the infant Chengamaladasa—they ruled for an average of around twenty-eight years. That was about twice the length

¹⁰⁵ Vriddhagirisan, *The Nayaks of Tanjore*, 59–61.

of the average reign in Ikkeri, and also in Tanjavur under its next dynasty, the Bhonsles.

Bhonsles of Tanjavur

The Maratha Bhonsle house of Tanjavur reigned from 1676, when the Bijapur General Ekoji assumed power, to 1855, when the last ruler, Shivaji II, passed away. The dynasty was then pensioned off by the British colonial government on the pretext that there was no direct male successor. But in 1773 already, King Tuljaji II was removed for three years by the Nawab (ruler) of Arcot. The latter was backed by the British, who in the last decades of the eighteenth century grew increasingly powerful in Tanjavur and in the 1790s even took over its administration.¹⁰⁶

Therefore, this study only considers the successions until Tuljaji II's accession in 1763, after which the Bhonsles soon lost much of their autonomy. From the 1670s to the 1760s, eight men and one woman ruled the kingdom (see table 6 towards the end of this section).¹⁰⁷ For almost all their successions, both Indian and European sources are available, including court chronicles, Dutch accounts, and a few nineteenth-century series of dynastic portrait murals, one of which includes captions mentioning the relationships between consecutive monarchs (see illustration 4).

There seem to be very few works, contemporary or modern, that refer to rules of succession under Tanjavur's Bhonsles. One rare case is an anonymous Tamil chronicle collected and translated in the early 1810s, titled "The history of the Tonjore Rajas." According to a passage in this text, the "rule of the law" dictated that a successor be the son of a real queen rather than of a so-called sword-wife (*khāṇḍārāṇī*). The latter held not the king's hand but a royal sword during her wedding, and in a sense was married to this sword rather than the monarch. Sword-wives, and their offspring, had a lower status than queens and their progeny. Referring to the rule of Ekoji II (1735-6), the chronicle explains that even though the conduct of this son of a queen was considered inappropriate,

¹⁰⁶ Subramanian, *The Maratha Rajas of Tanjore*, 61-76; Srinivasan, *Maratha Rule in the Carnatic*, 301-41; Subrahmanyam, *Penumbra Visions*, 151-2, 156-75, 183-5.

¹⁰⁷ For (partly outdated) genealogical trees of Tanjavur's Bhonsles, see: Bhosale, *Rajah Serfoji – II*, 152-3; Srinivasan, *Maratha Rule in the Carnatic*, 30; Tryambakayajvan, *The Perfect Wife*, 13, 15; Pratap Sinh Serfoji Raje Bhosle, *Contributions of Thanjavur Maratha Kings* (2nd edition, Chennai, 2017), 21, 302-3; *Beknopte historie*, between 76-7; Chakravathy and Sathyanathan, *Thanjavur: A Cultural History*, 189; Sewell, *The Historical Inscriptions of Southern India*, 395; idem, *List of Inscriptions*, 193; T. Venkasaami Row, *A Manual of the District of Tanjore, in the Madras Presidency* (Madras, 1883), 764.



Illustration 4: Murals depicting Sarabhoji Bhonsle I (left) and Sujana Bai Bhonsle (right) of Tanjavur, Subrahmanya shrine, Brihadishvara Temple, Tanjavur, mid-19th century (left image: photo by Pulavar N. Thyagarajan, source: George Michell and Indira Viswanathan Peterson, *The Great Temple at Thanjavur: One Thousand Years, 1010-2010* (Mumbai: Marg Publications, 2010), 30, courtesy The Marg Foundation; right image: courtesy Clare Arni).

his reign was preferred over that of his elder half-brothers who were born of sword-wives.¹⁰⁸

Further, some modern studies discuss principles of succession under this house, but, as with other dynasties, this is based on observed practices rather than contemporary normative texts. In brief, it is thought that rulers were preferably succeeded by their eldest son (previously functioning as *yuvarāja* or heir apparent), or else another son, a younger brother, a prince adopted from a collateral dynastic branch, or the chief queen.¹⁰⁹ Literature dealing with successions among other

¹⁰⁸ BL/AAS, MT, class III, no. 32: "The History of the Tonjore Rajas," ff. 91v-2. See also: BL/AAS, MG, no. 4, pt. 9: "History of Tanjore," f. 220 (probably translated from a Marathi text); Subramanian, *The Maratha Rajas of Tanjore*, 23. For sword-wives in Tanjavur, see: Vidayanand Swami Shrivastava, "Are Maratha-Rajput Marriages Morganatic?," in Usha Sharma (ed.), *Marriage in Indian Society: From Tradition to Modernity* (New Delhi, 2005), vol. I, 172-3; Gadgil, "The Bṛhadiśvara Temple Inscription of the Bhosales of Tanjore," 300. One tradition has it that one of the wives of Vijayanagara's Krishna Raya, a daughter of Orissa's Gajapati ruler called Lakshmi, was also married to the emperor's sword. See Sistla, "Allegory in Telugu Poetry during the Time of Krishnadevaraya," 104.

¹⁰⁹ K. Manamalar, "Administration and Social Life under the Mahrathas of Thanjavur" (unpublished dissertation, Bharathidasan University, 1995), 12-14; Gadgil, "The Bṛhadiśvara Temple Inscription of the Bhosales of Tanjore," 299.

Maratha houses, in western India, broadly agrees with these regulations as well as with ideas advocated in general Indian discourses on politics, requiring the king to be succeeded by sons rather than brothers, by elder rather than younger relatives, by men rather than women, and so on.¹¹⁰

During the initial phase of Tanjavur's Bhonsle house, these notions were well adhered to. The dynasty's founder Ekoji (r. 1676-84) was succeeded by three sons one after another. Dutch records report that on 25 December 1684, after a period of illness, Ekoji summoned his eldest son Shahaji (r. 1684-1711) before him, transferred "all his jewels, riches, etc." to him, and died three hours later. Some time before, still according to the VOC, the sick king had already passed the actual rule of the kingdom to his son. This may account for the statement that Ekoji had abdicated in favour of Shahaji, found in several literary texts, such as the *Śāhendra vilāsa* (I 98), a Sanskrit poem by Sridhara Venkatesa (alias Ayyaval) glorifying Shahaji's life.

Another local work, the *Tañcai marāṭṭiya maṇṇar varalāru*, says that while the new king resided in Tanjavur town, his brothers Sarabhoji (or Serfoji) and Tukkoji (or Tuljaji) became governors in the kingdom's northern and southern regions respectively, seated at Tiruvidaimaruthur (north-east of Kumbakonam) and Mahadevipatnam (perhaps fifteen miles south of Adirampatnam). According to some literature Shahaji was about twelve to fourteen years old when he ascended the throne, but VOC documents declare that his age was thought to be nineteen. In any case, as both local and Dutch sources mention, from the beginning the young king was assisted by powerful courtiers and his influential mother Dipamba Bai.¹¹¹

The latter seems to have played an important role in the next succession too, which occurred, as VOC letters state, after Shahaji died on 28 September 1711 at the approximate age of forty-five, having long suffered from dropsy, tuberculosis, and other ailments. Since Shahaji had no children, the elder of his two full brothers, Sarabhoji, was placed on the throne, showered with 10,000 *pardao* coins, and thus installed as the new ruler (r. 1711-29), upon which all the kingdom's chiefs and

¹¹⁰ Burling, *The Passage of Power*, 58-61.

¹¹¹ NA, VOC, no. 1398, f. 406v; no. 1411, ff. 96v, 103-4v, 303-3v: letters from Nagapattinam and Pulicat to Batavia, Oct. 1684, Feb. 1685, "register of news," Jan. 1685; BL/AAS, MT, class III, no. 87: "The historical account of the Tonjore" (*Bhomsale vaṃśa caritra*), ff. 81v (?), 95; class III, no. 32: "The History of the Tonjore Rajas," ff. 90v-1; Śridhara Venkatēśa, *Śāhendra Vilāsa*, 1, 4-5, 7; Michael Christian Linderman, "Charity's Venue: Representing Indian Kingship in the Monumental Pilgrim Rest Houses of the Maratha Rajas of Tanjavur, 1761-1832" (unpublished dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 2009), 158; Subramanian, *The Maratha Rajas of Tanjore*, 18-19, 28; Srinivasan, *Maratha Rule in the Carnatic*, 171-2, 228; Velcheru Narayana Rao and David Shulman (eds), *Classical Telugu Poetry: An Anthology* (New Delhi, 2002), 354; Bhosale, *Rajah Serfoji – II*, 24-5.

officers came to swear allegiance to him.¹¹² The court chronicle *Bhomsale vaṃśa caritra* and other works portray this succession as a peaceful event, proceeding with the consent of the third brother, Tukkoji, who was allegedly only two years younger. Literary texts and an inscription from 1718 state that the latter even functioned as co-ruler.¹¹³

Upon Sarabhoji's accession, the Tanjavur court informed the Dutch that Tukkoji had indeed been given control over some southern coastal districts, as well as 1,000 horsemen and 2,000 foot soldiers, to enable him to maintain his state.¹¹⁴ As it turned out, however, he was discontented with his brother's succession and rumours said he had tried to prevent it.¹¹⁵ After the throne passed to Sarabhoji, Tukkoji at first apparently accepted the situation and maintained more or less cordial relations with his brother, which the Dutch ascribed to the skills of their mother Dipamba Bai. By now of advanced age, she was said to command great respect at court while making continuous efforts to keep her sons on friendly terms. Her prominence also transpires from local literary works, mentioning her as a patron of art and learning, and her entitlement to the revenues of certain districts.¹¹⁶ Yet, in the subsequent years the brothers fell out with each other, arguing about land rents and revenues, and in 1723 Tukkoji demanded half of the kingdom. Sarabhoji's refusal had Tukkoji retreat to a fort near Adirampatnam in Tanjavur's far south (possibly the abovementioned Mahadevipatnam) and gather around him other opponents to the king.

¹¹² NA, VOC, no. 1329, f. 1172v; no. 1803, ff. 98, 302v-3, 467-7v: report of mission to Tanjavur, Jan. 1677, letters from Nagapattinam to Batavia, July, Sept., Nov. 1711.

¹¹³ BL/AAS, MT, class III, no. 87: "The historical account of the Tonjore," ff. 83, 94v, 95v; class III, no. 32: "The History of the Tonjore Rajas," ff. 90v-1; Subramanian, *The Maratha Rajas of Tanjore*, 26; Srinivasan, *Maratha Rule in the Carnatic*, 230; Bhosale, *Rajah Serfoji – II*, 28; Sewell, *List of Inscriptions*, 2; idem, *The Historical Inscriptions of Southern India*, 294. A few south Indian texts say Shahaji nominated as his successor one Anna Sahib, a son of Tukkoji. But their mother (Dipamba Bai) intervened and had Sarabhoji placed on the throne. See BL/AAS, MG, no. 1, pt. 8: "The Cheritee or actions of the Vadaka-Rajahs of Tanjore, Trichinopully & Madura," f. 73; MM, no. 110, pt. 7: "The Charythy of the Vadoka Raja of Tonjore, Trinchunnapully & Madura," f. 7.

¹¹⁴ The districts presented to Tukkoji were Kivalur, Katchanam, and what is perhaps Kadambadi ("Kadaramban"), all in the vicinity of (but excluding) Nagapattinam. See NA, VOC, no. 1803, ff. 467, 469: letter from Nagapattinam to Batavia, Nov. 1711.

¹¹⁵ Already in 1710, the Dutch reported there were conflicts between Shahaji, Sarabhoji, and Tukkoji, causing some political instability. See NA, VOC, no. 1796, f. 119: letter from Nagapattinam to Batavia, Aug. 1710.

¹¹⁶ She also managed to reconcile Ekoji with his half-brother Shivaji in the late 1670s. For Dipamba Bai, see: P.K. Gode, "Raghunātha, a Protégé of Queen Dipābāi of Tanjore, and His Works – Between A. D. 1675-1712," in idem, *Studies in Indian Literary History*, vol. II (Bombay, 1954), 393-7; idem, "The Identification of Raghunātha, the Protégé of Queen Dipābāi of Tanjore and His Contact with Saint Rāmadāsa – Between A. D. 1648 and 1682," in idem, 414; Tryambakayajvan, *The Perfect Wife*, 14, 20-2.

When two years later Sarabhoji, having no legitimate children, adopted a boy—apparently to become his heir—Tukkoji protested, claiming that according to an earlier agreement his own sons would succeed to the throne. Ignored again, he now retired from court altogether, although he still had the decency to ask Sarabhoji for permission to leave. This was granted with all due honours and Tukkoji then straightaway departed with his troops. But when the king came to know that his brother was about to enter the Bijapur sultanate, looking to team up with other Maratha bands, Sarabhoji went after him in an attempt to solve their differences. Although Tukkoji tried to evade an encounter, his brother eventually tracked him down near the town of Tiruvarur and managed to make him return to the court voluntarily. This seems to have soothed the dispute only temporarily, because soon the Dutch reported that the succession struggle had not terminated.¹¹⁷

A few years later, on 17 November 1729, Sarabhoji passed away, aged around sixty. Hereupon Tukkoji finally ascended the throne (r. 1729-35), with, as VOC records say, the usual ceremonies and his subjects' consent. But these documents also state that the court was not in full agreement on Tukkoji's right to succeed, several courtiers preferring the abovementioned boy adopted by Sarabhoji. Even though the succession dispute between Sarabhoji and Tukkoji had been settled some years earlier, the child was considered the rightful successor by both the deceased king and a large court faction. Still, Tukkoji became the new ruler, supported in exchange for 3.5 million *rupees* by Arcot's Nawab Sa'adatullah Khan, who was campaigning in the region to enforce peace between Tanjavur, Madurai, and Ramnad, and collect tribute.¹¹⁸ In contrast to the Dutch accounts, local chronicles present this succession again as largely harmonious, as they do with the next transition in 1735.¹¹⁹

On 23 July of that year, at the age of about sixty-four, Tukkoji died and was succeeded by his eldest son born of an official queen, Baba Sahib alias Ekoji II (r. 1735-6). Like his father, Ekoji II had already been given control over some lands prior to his accession to the throne, perhaps denoting his status as *yuvarāja*, but again this had led to disagreements about revenues between the king and his son.

¹¹⁷ NA, VOC, no. 1803, ff. 467-9; no. 1819, f. 42v; no. 1849, ff. 319v-20; no. 1997, ff. 22-3, 18 (2nd numeration); no. 2031, ff. 436-8, 1359; no. 2043, f. 144v; no. 8844, f. 45; letters from Nagapattinam to Batavia, Nov. 1711, May 1712, Aug. 1714, May, Sept. 1723, May, Aug. 1725, May, Oct. 1726; *Beknopte historie*, 97. See also Subrahmanyam, *Penumbra Visions*, 149-50.

¹¹⁸ NA, VOC, no. 1329, f. 1172v; no. 2147, f. 4833v; no. 2166, ff. 69-71: report of mission to Tanjavur, Jan. 1677, Nagapattinam proceedings and letter from there to Batavia, Mar. 1730; *Beknopte historie*, 97; Subrahmanyam, *Penumbra Visions*, 150-1. See also Love, *Vestiges of Old Madras*, vol. II, 251.

¹¹⁹ BL/AAS, MT, class III, no. 87: "The historycal account of the Tonjore," ff. 95v-6, 97v-8; class III, no. 32: "The History of the Tonjore Rajas," ff. 91-2; Subramanian, *The Maratha Rajas of Tanjore*, 40, 42-3; Srinivasan, *Maratha Rule in the Carnatic*, 236, 242-3; Bhosale, *Rajah Serfoji – II*, 29-32.

Before Ekoji II could now ascend the throne himself, however, he had to undergo a test—so Lutheran missionaries reported—where he was blindfolded and had to select one of three objects: rice, coal, and a dagger.¹²⁰ Although he picked the last, considered a bad omen as it represented war and calamities, Ekoji II commenced his reign on 14 August. As VOC documents specifically mention, the Nawab of Arcot did not object to Ekoji II's succession, indicating that this kingdom's role in Tukkoji's enthronement was not a one-time affair.¹²¹

The rule of Ekoji II marked the beginning of a short, atypical period of dynastic instability. Several brief reigns followed each other in quick succession, seeing one widow and two low-born princes ascending the throne, one of the latter with considerable aggression. On 1 August 1736, less than a year after his coronation, Ekoji II passed away without issue, leaving behind, as Dutch records say, a half-brother born of a concubine and two pregnant wives. The eldest of these queens, Sujana Bai, was installed as regent (r. 1736-8), but this was soon contested by courtiers supporting Ekoji II's half-brother, perhaps named Siddhoji Dada. This dispute made some Arcot troops, camping nearby, march to the capital to collect tribute and force the court factions to agree that, until a new heir was born, Queen Sujana Bai would reign, albeit with the half-brother's assistance.¹²² Local texts also speak of one Siddhoji—possibly Ekoji II's half-brother referred to by the Dutch—mentioning him as a very important courtier, but they ignore both any rivalry with Sujana Bai and Arcot's role in solving it.¹²³

With respect to the next two successions, not only VOC documents but also court chronicles point to accompanying conflicts, considering the first transition a usurpation. Yet, the sources give divergent and sometimes slightly confused accounts and

¹²⁰ This seems to have been an ancient ritual for newly selected kings. See Gonda, *Ancient Indian Kingship*, 92.

¹²¹ NA, VOC, no. 1329, f. 1172v; no. 2350, ff. 118, 438-41, 578-9; no. 2351, ff. 3994-5; no. 8866, f. 129: report of mission to Tanjavur, Jan. 1677, letter from Nagapattinam to Batavia, Aug. 1735, Nagapattinam proceedings, Jan., Apr., Oct. 1735; Axel Utz, "Cultural Exchange, Imperialist Violence, and Pious Missions: Local Perspectives from Tanjavur and Lenape Country, 1720-1760" (unpublished dissertation, Pennsylvania State University, 2011), 35; *Beknopte historie*, 97-8; Subrahmanyam, *Penumbra Visions*, 153.

¹²² NA, VOC, no. 2387, ff. 94-5; no. 2443, f. 2690; no. 2538, f. 1619: letter from Nagapattinam to Batavia, Sept. 1736, final report of Coromandel *Commandeur* Elias Guillot, Sept. 1738, instructions for mission to the Tanjavur king (in Nagapattinam proceedings), May 1741. See also: *Beknopte historie*, 98; Utz, "Cultural Exchange, Imperialist Violence, and Pious Missions," 35; Subrahmanyam, *Penumbra Visions*, 153.

¹²³ BL/AAS, MT, class III, no. 87: "The historycal account of the Tonjore," ff. 98v-9; class III, no. 32: "The History of the Tonjore Rajas," ff. 92-2v; Subramanian, *The Maratha Rajas of Tanjore*, 43; Srinivasan, *Maratha Rule in the Carnatic*, 243; Bhosale, *Rajah Serfoji – II*, 32-3.

historians disagree on the most likely course of events. For both successions, we first examine the VOC records and then discuss how other sources differ from them.

The reign of Queen Sujana Bai was, again, short-lived and ended violently. As the Dutch reported, in June 1738 a pretender to the throne approached Tanjavur with troops. He declared he was Shahaji, the aforementioned adopted son of Sarabhoji (r. 1711-29), and that his right to succeed his father had been denied by Sarabhoji's brother Tukkoji (r. 1729-35). The latter had claimed that this boy was actually the son of a Brahmin, presented by one of Sarabhoji's queens as her own child, while in fact she had given birth to a daughter. At his accession, Tukkoji's son Ekoji II (r. 1735-6) had ordered that the boy be killed, but it was said his executioner had spared him and entrusted him to the care of a local chief outside Tanjavur. Now the pretender had come back to take what was rightfully his. When he was nearing the capital, Sujana Bai's forces refused to fight, thinking his army was stronger. Moreover, all the queen's courtiers, except for her aide Siddhoji Dada, went over to her opponent. Thus, in July he took Tanjavur without resistance, ascended the throne as Shahaji II (r. 1738-9), and had Siddhoji and some supporters murdered. Sujana Bai, in order to escape a dishonourable death, poisoned herself.¹²⁴

Court chronicles such as the *Bhomsale vaṃśa caritra* and "The history of the Tonjore Rajas" have much to add. One or both of these works have it that the boy adopted by Sarabhoji was the son of a Shudra woman—not a Brahmin—and had been killed by Sarabhoji himself when his identity was discovered. The pretender who dethroned Queen Sujana Bai was just a young betel-keeping servant born of an enslaved or washer woman and exploited by a courtier named Koyaji Kattigai, who was displeased with Sujana Bai's reign. According to the chronicles, this courtier pretended that the betel-keeping servant was Sarabhoji's adopted son and convinced various parties, including the British and the Dutch ("Vollandan"), to support him financially in order to raise troops. Koyaji Kattigai also allied himself with the commander of Tanjavur town, Sayyid, and thus managed to enthrone his protégé as Shahaji II. Some local texts seem to emphasise this king's illegitimate status by saying that, since he supposedly had spent years hiding in the woods, people mockingly called him "Kattu Raja," or jungle king, which was a mark of contempt.¹²⁵

¹²⁴ NA, VOC, no. 2427, ff. 425, 435v, 441v; no. 2442, ff. 608-10, 633; no. 2443, ff. 1963, 2035, 2690-1; no. 2538, f. 1619; Nagapattinam proceedings extract, July 1738, letter from Porto Novo to Nagapattinam, July 1738, letter from the Tanjavur court to Nagapattinam (in Nagapattinam proceedings extract), July 1738, letters from Nagapattinam to Batavia, June, Sept. 1738, instructions for mission to the Tanjavur king, May 1741, final report of Guillot, Sept. 1738; *Beknopte historie*, 98.

¹²⁵ BL/AAS, MT, class III, no. 87: "The historycal account of the Tonjore," ff. 97-7v, 99-100v; class III, no. 32: "The History of the Tonjore Rajas," ff. 92v-4v; MG, no. 4, pt. 9: "History of Tanjore," f. 219; Orme Collection, India series (hereafter OI), no. I, pt. 27: "Morratoe kings of Tanjore" [3rd pt.], f. 244.

There is considerable confusion about Shahaji II's reign. Some sources claim he actually ruled for two brief periods, securing his second accession to the throne with French help. Other works state that Queen Sujana Bai was first succeeded by one Saiyaji, a legitimate son of Tukkoji, before Shahaji II became king. It has also been suggested that Saiyaji and Shahaji II were the same person.¹²⁶ However, no Saiyaji is mentioned in either the chronicles or Dutch documents, nor does he figure in two portrait galleries of the Bhonsle house: one in the Subrahmanya shrine on the grounds of Tanjavur's Brihadishvara Temple, and the other in the audience hall of the royal palace. As for Shahaji II, while he does figure in the *Bhomsale vaṃśa caritra*, compiled around 1800—albeit as some kind of usurper—he too is ignored in both sets of dynastic murals, executed in the nineteenth century. This is particularly obvious in the temple series, where Sujana Bai's portrait is directly followed by that of Pratapasimha (r. 1739-63), suggesting he succeeded her.¹²⁷ Apparently, the later Bhonsles did not consider Shahaji II and the possible Saiyaji as members of their dynasty, or at least did not recognise their reigns as rightful.¹²⁸

In any case, Shahaji II occupied the throne for an even shorter period than Sujana Bai. According to the VOC, he used opium and spent all his time pursuing “sensualities” (*wellustigheeden*). Moreover, he soon got into disputes with the town-commander Sayyid, as well as with the French and Arcot. A general of that kingdom, Chanda Sahib, had arrived to collect tribute from the new king, who seemed unwilling to pay. At the same time, the French wanted permission to settle at the port of Karaikal, promised to them in return for financial assistance. But Shahaji II argued he had already conquered Tanjavur without their backing, so there was no need for compensation. Consequently, as the Dutch wrote in around

See also: Subrahmanyam, *Penumbra Visions*, 154; Subramanian, *The Maratha Rajas of Tanjore*, 40, 43-6; Srinivasan, *Maratha Rule in the Carnatic*, 235-6, 243-8; Bhosale, *Rajah Serfoji – II*, 33-4; Hemingway, *Tanjore Gazetteer*, vol. I, 44-5.

¹²⁶ Srinivasan, *Maratha Rule in the Carnatic*, 242-8; Subramanian, *The Maratha Rajas of Tanjore*, 43-6; Hemingway, *Tanjore Gazetteer*, vol. I, 44-6. See also Srinivasachari, *Ananda Ranga Pillai*, 93-5 (n. 18), 393 (n. 1).

¹²⁷ Michell and Peterson, *The Great Temple at Thanjavur*, 30-1, 35, 153-9; *Annual Report on South-Indian Epigraphy for the Year Ending 31st March 1925* (Madras, 1926), 61-2 (nos 863-74). In the palace murals, Queen Sujana Bai appears to be missing as well, as is the case in at least one inscription from 1758, for which see Raju, *Taṅṅai Marāṭṭiyar Ceppēṭukaḷ-50*, xlv (no. 22). For more reproductions of some of the portraits, see: Indira Viswanathan Peterson, “Portraiture at the Tanjore Maratha Court: Toward Modernity in the Early 19th Century,” in Rosie Llewellyn-Jones (ed.), *Portraits in Princely India 1700-1947* (Mumbai, 2008), 55-6; Daud Ali, “Tanjavur: Capital of the Delta,” in George Michell (ed.), *Eternal Kaveri: Historical Sites along South India's Greatest River* (Mumbai, 1999), 104-5; Chakravarthi and Sathyanathan, *Tanjavur: A Cultural History*, 10, 34.

¹²⁸ See also Srinivasan, *Maratha Rule in the Carnatic*, 247-8

August 1738, Arcot's Chanda Sahib and the French planned to attack Tanjavur together, no doubt finding Sayyid a useful ally at the court.¹²⁹

Thus, the king was overthrown within a year. VOC documents say that in July 1739, on the instigation of the invading General Chanda Sahib, Shahaji II was imprisoned by town-commander Sayyid, considered as he was to be not of royal blood but born of an enslaved woman. His actual parents, interrogated about this, had admitted that Shahaji II was their child. Sayyid now wanted to enthrone Tukkoji's son Pratapasimha, who, although of royal descent, was reluctant to become king. With some amazement the Dutch reported that Pratapasimha visited Shahaji II in prison, telling him he could not ascend the throne unless his predecessor formally renounced it to him. Shahaji II's reply came clearly: "If you do not accept the reign we shall both lose our heads, but if we stay alive we can see what will be next, therefore go and sit on the throne," advice which Pratapasimha duly followed (r. 1739-63).

It was also said that another Arcot general, Safdar Ali Khan, had made an offer to Shahaji II to reinstall him in exchange for a financial reward. However, around early September Tanjavur and Arcot concluded a peace treaty, stipulating that the former kingdom would pay the latter six million *rupees* in cash, elephants, horses, and jewellery, as well as the revenues of several districts. Besides, it was agreed that Pratapasimha would remain on the throne while town-commander Sayyid actually governed the kingdom, and that Shahaji II would be given some lands to live off. An agreement was also reached with the French, allowing them to stay at Karaikal, much to the VOC's dismay.¹³⁰

Local chronicles mostly agree with the Dutch accounts and add some dynastic details. All texts state that Pratapasimha was born of a sword-wife of Tukkoji, not of a formal queen. But according to the *Bhomsale vamśa caritra*, this sword-wife, named Annapurna Bai, belonged to a Maratha caste rather than a south Indian one.¹³¹ That background, and Pratapasimha's alleged physical resemblance to his father,

¹²⁹ NA, VOC, no. 2427, ff. 425-5v, 435-6, 471-2, 478-9v, 530v-1; no. 2443, ff. 2034-67: Nagapattinam proceedings extract, July-Aug. 1738, letters from Porto Novo and Teganapatnam to Nagapattinam, from Nagapattinam to Colombo and Batavia, July-Sept. 1738; *Beknopte historie*, 98; V.G. Hataikar, *Relations between the French and the Marathas (1668-1815)* (Bombay, 1958), 62.

¹³⁰ NA, VOC, no. 2470, ff. 70-2, 75-7, 303, 323, 355-7; no. 2471, ff. 51-2; no. 2538, f. 1620: letters from Nagapattinam to Batavia, July, Sept. 1739, Nagapattinam proceedings, Mar.-May 1739, instructions for mission to the Tanjavur king, May 1741; *Beknopte historie*, 98-9; text of first VOC letter also in Tamil Nadu Archives, Chennai (hereafter: TNA), Dutch records (hereafter: DR), no. 282, ff. 54v-61v: letter from Nagapattinam to Cochin, July 1739; Aniruddha Ray, "French Establishment at Karikkal: Early Efforts," *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 62 (2001), 268-75; K. Rajayyan, *A History of British Diplomacy in Tanjore* (Mysore, 1969), 23-5; quote of Shahaji II also in Subramanian, *The Maratha Rajas of Tanjore*, 44.

¹³¹ See also Shrivastavya, "Are Maratha-Rajput Marriages Morganatic?," 173.

rendered him an acceptable monarch. "The history of the Tonjore Rajas" has it that his lower descent was even the very reason that town-commander Sayyid chose him as the new king. His imperfect royal status supposedly made him vulnerable to other pretenders and therefore dependent on, and obedient to, Sayyid. The fact that the town-commander had proven himself a traitor could explain Pratapasimha's hesitation to accept the throne. However, he still ascended it around July 1739 and, perhaps not surprisingly, after some time had Sayyid executed.¹³²

Some local texts say that before Pratapasimha was installed, his predecessor Shahaji II was killed by Sayyid.¹³³ This is improbable because during the subsequent decades many attempts were made to dislodge Pratapasimha, including several by what appears to have been Shahaji II himself. Indeed, this made the king remark in 1757 that he had dealt with no fewer than twenty-five opponents so far.¹³⁴ One such endeavour took place in 1749,¹³⁵ when the British received a request from Shahaji II that greatly resembles the plea made by Ikkeri's pretender Sadashiva Nayaka to the Dutch, mentioned at this chapter's beginning. As the British reported:

In April 1749, Sahagie Maha Rajah [Shahaji II] applyd to the [British] president & co. at Fort St. David, setting forth that he had been deprived of his right as lawful king of Tanjour [Tanjavur] about seven years [ago] by an illegitimate brother [Pratapasimha], representing the latter as a tyrant & much dislik'd by the subjects of that kingdom, that ever since he [Shahaji II] had been dethron'd, he had been oblig'd to keep himself very private, fearing his brothers resentment, but that very lately having rec. [received] letters & agents from several of the great officers & others at Tanjour, who gave him assurances of their assistance in being reinstated in his kingdom, provided he could engage any nation to join him, that no great force was required, as they (his friends) would immediately join him upon his appearing in arms in that kingdom, where he assur'd us he was greatly beloved

¹³² BL/AAS, MT, class III, no. 87: "The historycal account of the Tonjore," ff. 96-6v, 100-1, 102v-3; class III, no. 32: "The History of the Tonjore Rajas," ff. 91v, 93, 94v-6v; MG, no. 4, pt. 9: "History of Tanjore," ff. 219-20; Subramanian, *The Maratha Rajas of Tanjore*, 42, 44-9; Srinivasan, *Maratha Rule in the Carnatic*, 242-3, 245-6, 248-51; Subrahmanyam, *Penumbra Visions*, 151, 153-4; Bhosale, *Rajah Serfoji – II*, 30, 34; Hemingway, *Tanjore Gazetteer*, vol. I, 44-6.

¹³³ BL/AAS, MT, class III, no. 32: "The History of the Tonjore Rajas," f. 94v; MG, no. 4, pt. 9: "History of Tanjore," f. 219.

¹³⁴ Subramanian, *The Maratha Rajas of Tanjore*, 47-54; Srinivasan, *Maratha Rule in the Carnatic*, 248, 250, 253, 261-4, 279-80; Subrahmanyam, *Penumbra Visions*, 154-8. The latter two works respectively say that Pratapasimha was temporarily pensioned off by Arcot around 1740 and replaced by Shahaji II in 1740-2. See: Srinivasan, *Maratha Rule in the Carnatic*, 252-3; Subrahmanyam, *Penumbra Visions*, 154. Dutch records seem to make no mention of this. See: NA, VOC, nos 2489, 2505-6, 2556, 2573-4, 2608, 2631; Coolhaas *et al.*, *Generale Missiven*, vols X (The Hague, 1997), XI.

¹³⁵ For an effort by Shahaji II in 1746, involving Arcot and the French, see Ananda Ranga Pillai, *The Private Diary*, vol. I, 356-8, 389.

& did not in the least doubt his being reinstated in the possession of that kingdom, without effusion of blood ...¹³⁶

This is another case of a pretender declaring himself the rightful monarch while an unlawful relative was occupying the throne against the will of the common people and most courtiers, who would welcome him, should he have the opportunity to dislodge the alleged usurper. Unlike the Dutch with Sadashiva Nayaka, the British sympathised with Shahaji II and decided to assist him with troops, no doubt encouraged by his offer to hand over the fort of Devikottai and the revenues of the surrounding land in return. But Pratapasimha's position turned out not to be as unstable as Shahaji II made his allies believe. The British report continues:

... upon marching into the Tanjour country, the English were in hourly expectation of being join'd (according to Sahagee Maha Rajah's frequent assurances that it would be so) by the grandees of that kingdom, but not a man came over to him & we were soon informed that he had not a friend among them, that he certainly was the right & lawful heir to the kingdom of Tanjour & was in the possession thereof, but was so very weak a prince & gave himself up to the guidance of favorites of low condition, thereby causing great confusion in that kingdom, that the great men dethroned him & set up his brother [Pratapasimha] who has the character of a very brave man & [is held] in great esteem with his subjects.¹³⁷

Thus it seems Shahaji II was actually considered Tanjavur's rightful king because of his descent, but had proven to be an unsuitable ruler, whereas his "brother" Pratapasimha did meet the requirements regarded as more essential than ancestry: appropriate skills and the people's respect. Despite the recommendation of many Indian treatises that kings combine proper descent and correct personality, in this case the latter aspect was apparently favoured. At any rate, Shahaji II never regained the throne. After the failed expedition of 1749, Pratapasimha agreed to provide Shahaji II with an annual income on the condition that the British henceforth be responsible for him and guarantee he caused no more disturbances.¹³⁸

¹³⁶ BL/AAS, OOV, no. 247, pt. 1: "Application to Fort St. David by Sahajee ... for assistance to recover his rights at Tanjore," ff. 1-2. For published descriptions by the collector of the manuscripts mentioned here and in the following footnotes, see Orme, *A History of the Military Transactions*, vol. 1, 111-22.

¹³⁷ BL/AAS, OOV, no. 247, pt. 1: "Application to Fort St. David by Sahajee ... for assistance to recover his rights at Tanjore," f. 3; OI, no. II, pt. 33: "Account of the pretender to Tanjore & the expedition to Devi Cotah in 1749..." f. 452. For extensive descriptions of the British campaign in support of Shahaji, see: BL/AAS, OI, no. I, pt. 17: "Devi Cotah, Lord Clive," ff. 219-25; Hemingway, *Tanjore Gazetteer*, vol. I, 255-6.

¹³⁸ BL/AAS, OI, no. I, pt. 17: "Devi Cotah, Lord Clive," f. 225; no. II, pt. 33: "Account of the pretender to Tanjore & the expedition to Devi Cotah in 1749..." f. 452; OOV, no. 247, pt. 1: "Application to Fort St. David by Sahajee ... for assistance to recover his rights at Tanjore," f. 4; Subramanian, *The Maratha Rajas of*

The last succession discussed here occurred when Pratapasimha passed away on 15 or 16 December 1763, upon which his only son, Tuljaji II (r. 1763-73, 1776-87), took his place at the approximate age of twenty-five. Local chronicles and VOC records offer different versions of the event, with regard to both internal and external factors. The *Bhonsale vaṃśa caritra* and “The history of the Tonjore Rajas” relate that Pratapasimha, when he felt his death was near, appointed his son as successor and advised him, together with his minister or *dabīr*, on the future government of the kingdom. When Tuljaji II ascended the throne, Nawab Muhammad Ali Khan of Arcot sent him letters, clothing, and a large bird “as tall as one and a half man with the legs of a camel’, perhaps an ostrich.”¹³⁹

But the Dutch wrote that as soon as news about Pratapasimha’s death reached Arcot, the Nawab hurried to Tanjavur and intervened in disputes arising at court after the king’s demise. Tuljaji II was apparently Arcot’s preferred successor, but he reportedly behaved like a bully and led a lecherous (*wulps*) life, being dominated by courtiers, in particular *Dabīr* Naro Pandidar.¹⁴⁰ Despite the differences between these sources, this clearly was another succession in which both Tanjavur’s court factions and Arcot played a large or even decisive role, foreshadowing the end of the dynasty’s formal autonomy, which was soon to come. That last phase is discussed in the Epilogue.

From the eight successions under Tanjavur’s Bhonsles until Tuljaji II, one gets the impression of a relatively secure dynasty, which suffered a brief, uncharacteristic period of instability in the late 1730s. Leaving out Tuljaji II’s long but interrupted reign, between 1676 and 1763 eight monarchs sat on the throne, resulting in an average rule of just over a decade. This is much shorter than under Tanjavur’s Nayakas and rather resembles the situation under Ikkeri’s later Nayakas. But whereas Ikkeri—and Madurai and Ramnad, as shown below—saw more than one series of quickly succeeding rulers, this happened only once in Tanjavur. If one therefore considers the reigns of Sujana Bai and Shahaji II unrepresentative and counts only the other six kings, the average rule lasted almost one and a half decades.

Tanjore, 50-2; Srinivasan, *Maratha Rule in the Carnatic*, 262-4; Rajayyan, *A History of British Diplomacy in Tanjore*, 27-30; Hemingway, *Tanjore Gazetteer*, vol. I, 45-6; *Beknopte historie*, 99. For a reference to Shahaji II from 1758, see Orme, *A History of the Military Transactions*, vol. 2 (London, 1778), 318.

¹³⁹ BL/AAS, MT, class III, no. 87: “The historical account of the Tonjore,” ff. 100, 120; class III, no. 32: “The History of the Tonjore Rajas,” ff. 96v-8; MG, no. 4, pt. 9: “History of Tanjore,” f. 221; Subramanian, *The Maratha Rajas of Tanjore*, 57-8, 66; Srinivasan, *Maratha Rule in the Carnatic*, 293-4, 313; Subrahmanyam, *Penumbra Visions*, 151, 183; Bhosale, *Rajah Serfoji – II*, 37-8. See also Utz, “Cultural Exchange, Imperialist Violence, and Pious Missions,” 36.

¹⁴⁰ NA, VOC, no. 3077, ff. 433-3v; no. 3108, ff. 23-4, 29-30, 92: letter from Nagapattinam to Batavia, Dec. 1763, Nagapattinam proceedings (with instructions and report concerning mission to Tanjavur), Feb. 1764.

Table 6: Bhonsles of Tanjavur (until 1780s), regnal dates, relations to predecessors, and further remarks.

	name	accession date	ending date	relation to predecessors	remarks († = natural death at end of reign)
1	Ekoji / Venkaji / Vyamkoji	1676, Mar. 5?	1684, Dec. 25	— (founder)	†, former general of Bijapur
2	Shahaji	1684, Dec. 25	1711, Sept. 28	1st son of 1	†, minor at accession? childless
3	Sarabhoji / Serfoji	1711, c. Sept. 28	1729, Nov. 17	brother of 2 & 2nd son of 1	†, contested by 4
4	Tukkoji / Tuljaji	1729, c. Nov. 17	1735, July 23	brother of 3 & 2, & 3rd son of 1	†, contested by 7
5	Ekoji II / Baba Sahib	1735, Aug. 14	1736, Aug. 1	son of 4	†, childless
6	Sujana Bai	1736, c. Aug. 1	1738, July	widow of 5	female, dethroned by 7
7	(Savai) Shahaji II / Kattu Raja	1738, July	1739, July	alleged adopted son of 3	“usurper,” dethroned for 8
8	Pratapasimha	1739, July	1763, Dec. 15/16	low-born son of 4 & half-brother of 5	†, contested by 7 until late 1750s
9	Tuljaji II	1763, c. Dec. 15/16 & 1776, Apr.	1773, Sept. & 1787, Jan. 31	son of 8	†, interlude of rule by Arcot in 1773-6

For sources, see the references in the preceding section, Chapter 1, and the Epilogue.

During the tumultuous late 1730s, rulers not only lasted briefly, they also fell short of the usual requirements to ascend the throne, being female or lacking full royal blood. The remainder of the kings were all legitimate adult sons or brothers of their predecessors. Yet, as elsewhere, royal brothers could become opponents and such conflicts tended to spill over into subsequent generations. The rivalry between Sarabhoji and Tukkoji in the 1710s-20s led to competition between their (real or alleged) sons Ekoji II, Shahaji II, and Pratapasimha in the 1730s-50s.

In Tanjavur, this pattern was further complicated by the co-existence of official queens and different categories of sword-wives, the latter occupying varying positions between queen and concubine, which gave their sons an ambiguous standing. The *Bhonsale vaṃśa caritra* explicitly mentions the names and castes of all queens and sword-wives, probably to indicate the status of their offspring. The fact that

Pratapasimha's mother was a sword-wife belonging to a Maratha caste is stated to have made him an acceptable king.¹⁴¹ Another sword-wife of Tukkoji was member of a "Nayaka caste," perhaps reflecting an effort of the Bhonsles to forge marital ties with local families remaining from Tanjavur's Nayaka period.¹⁴²

As Dutch accounts in particular make clear, two other factors were instrumental in the outcome of succession struggles: courtiers and external powers. The former group played an essential role in each succession, with powerful figures ranging from women, like Queen-Mother Dipamba Bai, to Muslims, such as town-commander Sayyid. Outside powers are first referred to during Tukkoji's enthronement, which was backed by Arcot. The Nawabs and some of their generals grew increasingly influential in the selection of successors and often exploited their rivalry to extract tribute.¹⁴³ From the late 1730s on, the French and the British also became involved when they supported the pretender Shahaji II. These foreign interventions, eventually contributing to the dynasty's downfall, must have been facilitated by the ongoing fraternal feuds.

Excessive violence was rare, however. Most successions were accompanied by friction, but this was usually resolved relatively peacefully. The opposition between Sarabhoji and Tukkoji, for example, led to bitterness and estrangement, but many efforts were made to accommodate Tukkoji's grievances, thus avoiding large-scale hostilities. After Shahaji II's reign—itself resulting from what probably was the sole episode of real bloodshed—this usurper also adopted a conciliatory or at least practical approach when he advised his successor Pratapasimha to accept the throne, thus sparing both their lives, winning his own freedom, and, of course, gaining new opportunities to dislodge his rival.

Nayakas of Madurai

After Vishvanatha founded the Nayaka house of Madurai around 1530, he was succeeded by approximately fifteen monarchs until the dynasty's fall in about 1739. Then followed one or two more rulers reigning for brief periods until the early 1750s (see table 7 at the end of this section).¹⁴⁴ As with other royal houses, con-

¹⁴¹ It appears that under other Maratha dynasties, too, mothers absolutely had to belong to the appropriate caste for their sons to be able to claim the throne. See Burling, *The Passage of Power*, 60.

¹⁴² BL/AAS, MT, class III, no. 87: "The historycal account of the Tonjore," ff. 94v, 95v-6v; MG, no. 4, pt. 9: "History of Tanjore," f. 220.

¹⁴³ See also Subrahmanyam, *Penumbral Visions*, 154.

¹⁴⁴ For (partly outdated) genealogical trees of the Madurai Nayakas, see: Sathyanatha Aiyar, *History of the Nayaks of Madura*, ix; Bes, "The Ambiguities of Female Rule in Nayaka South India," 214; Venkata Rao, *The Southern School in Telugu Literature*, 37-8; Sewell, *The Historical Inscriptions of Southern India*, 364; idem, *List of Inscriptions*, 200.

temporary works providing guidelines for succession seem virtually non-existent, apart perhaps from one chronicle—in its English translation called “Account of the Rajas who held the government of Madura”—that contains a short remark saying a childless king could be followed by his brother’s son. Therefore, once again, in modern historiography, principles supposedly governing successions in Madurai have been reconstructed on the basis of actual events rather than normative texts. These reconstructions, however, are limited in both number and extent.

In brief, all the king’s sons are said to have been co-heirs, with a certain preference for the eldest son of the chief queen, if he possessed the right qualities. If adult sons were not available, the king might be succeeded by a brother, an uncle, or someone belonging to a collateral branch of the family—or by a queen, as happened twice during the dynasty’s last phase. If the king’s son was still a minor, a temporary regent could be appointed, for example the chief minister or the queen-mother.

Further, some sources state that, especially during the first half of the dynasty’s existence, younger brothers of the king often functioned as co-rulers—sometimes referred to as *cinna turai* (“small lord”) or “second in command”—and held important offices. It appears that from around the 1660s onward this position became hereditary from father to son, thus passing through a collateral line of the Nayaka house.¹⁴⁵ It is not clear what this function exactly entailed, for example what claim its holders could lay to the throne. At any rate, these secondary rulers generally seem to have played a marginal role, except for a few cases discussed below.

Sources on the first few successions are relatively scarce. These comprise the usual inscriptions and literary texts, but also a few sets of dynastic portrait sculptures in and around Madurai town, as well as the local chronicle recorded by the Dutch, mentioned in the previous chapter. For the years until the early 1600s, there is some disagreement between scholars about who exactly sat on this Nayaka throne. From the seventeenth century onward, Jesuit and VOC accounts have much to add to the other source materials, and for this period the consecution of rulers can be more clearly established.

By all available accounts, the dynasty’s founder Vishvanatha Nayaka (r. c. 1530-63) was succeeded by his son Kumara Krishnappa Nayaka (r. c. 1563-72), who was followed by his son Virappa Nayaka (r. c. 1572-95). The latter may have temporarily

¹⁴⁵ BL/AAS, MT, class III, no. 82: “Account of the Rajas who held the government of Madura,” f. 110 (compiled in 1806 by Bangaru Tirumalai of Madurai’s expelled Nayaka line, see ff. 133-4); Aseem Banu, “Polity under the Nayaks of Madurai,” 22-3; C. Chandra, “The Cultural History of the Nayaks of Madurai” (unpublished dissertation, Madurai Kamaraj University, 2006), 59-60; Sathyanatha Aiyar, *History of the Nayaks of Madura*, 77-8, 260-1; Rangachari, “The History of the Naik Kingdom of Madura,” *Indian Antiquary* XLIV, 118, XLV, 81, XLVI, 215. See also: Taylor, *Oriental Historical Manuscripts*, vol. II, 235; Nelson, *The Madura Country*, vol. III, 252-4.

ruled jointly with a brother named Vishvanatha Nayaka II, a statue of whom is included in the dynastic portrait gallery at the Putu Mandapa festival hall near the Minakshi Sundareshvara Temple in Madurai town (see illustration 5). Both successions seem to have proceeded peacefully. According to the Dutch chronicle on the Nayakas, Virappa married a Tanjavur princess, acquiring as dowry the lands of Tiruchirappalli, the dynasty's future capital.¹⁴⁶

With Virappa's death around 1595, the consecution of rulers becomes less clear. This king left three sons: Vishvappa Nayaka, Kumara Krishnappa Nayaka II, and Kasturi Rangappa Nayaka. They may all have ascended the throne, but only the second son is accepted by all historians as a formal ruler. According to the better-known historiography, there is no evidence for Vishvappa's reign, while Kasturi Rangappa was only a very short-lasting usurper.¹⁴⁷

But many literary texts state that after their father's passing, Vishvappa (r. c. 1595) first sat on the throne, albeit briefly, with his (probably younger) brother Kumara Krishnappa II as a secondary ruler. Upon Vishvappa's death, Kumara Krishnappa II became king (r. c. 1595-1601), with the third brother Kasturi Rangappa occupying the second place. When Kumara Krishnappa II passed away a few years later, probably leaving no sons behind, he was also succeeded by his co-ruler, Kasturi Rangappa (r. 1601). This last brother died very soon, whereupon Vishvappa's son Muttu Krishnappa Nayaka was crowned (r. 1601-6).

The texts differ on the question of whether the two latter successions were harmonious events. Some works have it that upon Kumara Krishnappa II's passing, Kasturi Rangappa ascended the throne only because his nephew Muttu Krishnappa was still a minor. He would thus have functioned as a regent and died an untimely but natural death. Other sources say that Kumara Krishnappa II's demise led to a succession struggle between the young Muttu Krishnappa and his uncle Kasturi Rangappa. The latter won, but was considered a usurper by some courtiers and assassinated within a few days, to be replaced by his nephew.

¹⁴⁶ Heras, *The Aravidu Dynasty of Vijayanagara*, vol. I, 165-6, 281-3; Sathyanatha Aiyar, *History of the Nayaks of Madura*, 65-8, 75-80; Rangachari, "The History of the Naik Kingdom of Madura," *Indian Antiquary* XLV, 82, 90-1; Nelson, *The Madura Country*, vol. III, 101, 105; Henry Heras, "The Statues of the Nayaks of Madura in the Pudu Mantapam," *The Quarterly Journal of the Mythic Society* XV, 3 (1925), 210-13; T.G. Aravamuthan, *Portrait Sculpture in South India* (London, 1931), 50; Vink, *Mission to Madurai*, 288, 292, 346-7; *Beknopte historie*, 87; Taylor, *Oriental Historical Manuscripts*, vol. I, 38, 205, vol. II, 23, 111, 117, 119; Mahalingam, *Mackenzie Manuscripts*, vol. I, 192-4. One text says that Vishvanatha and Kumara Krishnappa both died prematurely—the former because of his sins, the latter through suicide out of grief over his father's death—and that Kumara Krishnappa and Virappa were minors, ruling under the regency of Vishvanatha's father Nagama Nayaka (apparently still alive) and the powerful courtier Ariyanatha Mudaliyar. See BL/AAS, MG, no. 4, pt. 4: "Mootiah's chronological & historical account of the modern kings of Madura," ff. 50-3.

¹⁴⁷ See Sathyanatha Aiyar, *History of the Nayaks of Madura*, 83-9.



Illustration 5: Statues of some of the Nayakas of Madurai, including Tirumalai Nayaka on the right, Putu Mandapa, Madurai, c. 1630s (courtesy Crispin Branfoot).

The Dutch chronicle only refers to the reigns of the second and third of the three brothers, stating that the latter, Kasturi Rangappa, died young after ruling just some days, reportedly being poisoned. Additionally, all three brothers are probably portrayed in the dynastic sculpture gallery in Madurai (see illustration 5), which was commissioned by King Tirumalai Nayaka (r. c. 1623-59). Considering all sources, it seems that all three brothers did sit on the throne, however briefly, and were regarded as rightful monarchs, even Kasturi Rangappa. Had he been a usurper, opposing his nephew Muttu Krishnappa, it is unlikely that Tirumalai—who was Muttu Krishnappa's second son—would have included him in the portrait gallery of his predecessors. However, given the rumour concerning Kasturi Rangappa's violent death recorded in the Dutch chronicle, his short rule may have been accompanied by friction.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁸ BL/AAS, MT, class III, no. 25: "History of the former Gentoo Rajahs who ruled over the Pandyan Mandalom," ff. 28-8v; Taylor, *Oriental Historical Manuscripts*, vol. I, 38, 205-6, vol. II, 25, 119; Mahalingam, *Mackenzie Manuscripts*, vol. I, 195; Heras, *The Aravidu Dynasty of Vijayanagara*, vol. I, 343-5, 350-1; Rangachari, "The History of the Naik Kingdom of Madura," *Indian Antiquary* XLV, 100-3; Vink, *Mission to Madurai*, 293-4, 348; *Beknopte historie*, 87; Heras, "The Statues of the Nayaks of Madura," 213-15; Aravamuthan, *Portrait Sculpture in South India*, 49-50; Crispin Branfoot, "Royal Portrait Sculpture in the South Indian Temple," *South Asian Studies* 16, 1 (2000), 22-3; idem, "Dynastic Genealogies," 330-5, fig. 30; Michell, *Architecture and Art of Southern India*, 184; Nelson, *The Madura Country*, vol. III, 106-9.

Muttu Krishnappa reigned only a few years and, as the Jesuit Robert de Nobili reported, passed away in the night of 6 to 7 December 1606. He was succeeded by the eldest of his three sons, Muttu Virappa (r. c. 1606-23), with, as some texts say, the second son Tirumalai functioning as the secondary ruler. During this reign, the capital was shifted north from Madurai town to Tiruchirappalli, possibly because of a war against nearby Tanjavur. At Muttu Virappa's death, or perhaps a few years earlier already, his younger brother Tirumalai became king at the approximate age of forty (r. c. 1623-59), while the third brother, Kumara Muttu, now supposedly assumed the secondary position.

Tirumalai moved the capital back to Madurai, probably again for strategic purposes, although tradition has it that Madurai's deities asked him to do so after curing him of a disease. Even though the court was again transferred to Tiruchirappalli in the 1660s,¹⁴⁹ Madurai town henceforth remained the place where kings were usually installed and received the royal sceptre in the presence of the local goddess Minakshi.¹⁵⁰ As the Dutch reported, Tirumalai died in early February 1659. Some sources say this happened suddenly and according to one tradition he was murdered by a Hindu priest resenting the king's sympathy with Christianity or his

In addition, various texts with short dynastic lists include Vishvappa, Kasturi Rangappa, or both, as fully-fledged rulers. See: BL/AAS, MM, no. 109, pt. 37: "The humble representation of ... Bangaroo Teeroomaly Nack," f. 4; MT, class III, no. 90: "The genelological account of the Madura Vadoka Rajahs," ff. 162-3 (collected in 1809); OI, no. I, pt. 22: "Kings of Tritchanopoly from 1509," ff. 239-40 (related by a Brahmin at Tiruchirappalli); Mahalingam, *Mackenzie Manuscripts*, vol. I, 13; W. Francis, *Madura Gazetteer* (Madras, 1906), 42. A Dutch overview from 1762 (probably based on the Dutch chronicle) mentions Kumara Krishnappa II and Kasturi Rangappa while omitting Vishvappa. See Schreuder, *Memoir of Jan Schreuder*, 34.

¹⁴⁹ Jesuit sources suggest Tiruchirappalli became the capital because Madurai town had suffered badly from an invasion by Mysore. See *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses*, vol. XIII, 131.

¹⁵⁰ Heras, *The Aravidu Dynasty of Vijayanagara*, vol. I, 351, 359; Sathyanatha Aiyar, *History of the Nayakas of Madura*, 89, 97-8, 103, 109-15, 160-1; Rangachari, "The History of the Naik Kingdom of Madura," *Indian Antiquary* XLV, 103-4, 132, 149-50; Nelson, *The Madura Country*, vol. III, 109, 115, 119, 121-4; Mahalingam, *Mackenzie Manuscripts*, vol. I, 195; A. Saulière, "The Date of Accession of Muttu Virappa Nāyaka I of Madurai Settled by Letters of His Contemporary Fr. Robert de Nobili," *Journal of Indian History* XXXII, I (1954), 83-4; K. Rajaram, *History of Thirumalai Nayak* (Madurai, 1982), 8-11; Taylor, *Oriental Historical Manuscripts*, vol. I, 38, 206, vol. II, 25, 29-31, 119, 147; BL/AAS, MT, class III, no. 25: "History of the former Gentoo Rajahs who ruled over the Pandyan Mandalom," f. 30; Vink, *Mission to Madurai*, 294, 296, 348. For textual references to the Nayakas' sceptre and installation at Madurai town, see also: BL/AAS, MG, no. 4, pt. 4: "Mootiah's chronological & historical account of the modern kings of Madura," ff. 48, 51, 57, 70-1, 73; MM, no. 109, pt. 37: "The humble representation of ... Bangaroo Teeroomaly Nack," ff. 3-4; MT, class III, no. 25: "History of the former Gentoo Rajahs who ruled over the Pandyan Mandalom," f. 24v; Taylor, *Oriental Historical Manuscripts*, vol. II, 109, 153, 255; Vink, *Mission to Madurai*, 302-3, 351-2; NA, VOC, no. 1756, f. 1219v; no. 8923, f. 317; no. 11306, ff. 120-2: report of mission to Ramnad, Oct. 1708, letter from Colombo to Batavia, Feb. 1708, description of the Nayakas of Madurai by Holst, 1762.

intimacy with the priest's wife. None of the local chronicles nor Dutch accounts refer to an assassination, however, although the latter records confirm Tirumalai passed away suddenly. Perhaps, this was related to an abscess on his head, mentioned by the Jesuit Antony de Proença in 1656, which was rumoured to be the result of a curse inflicted by some pretender to the throne.¹⁵¹

The succession of Tirumalai's son Muttu Virappa Nayaka II (r. 1659-60) led to a brief struggle. According to VOC documents, shortly before his death Tirumalai had installed Muttu Virappa II, between twenty-five and thirty years old, as his successor. But as the latter was allegedly born of a concubine, a son of Tirumalai's brother called Muttu Allappa Nayaka (spelled "Moutalle Appa Naijccq" by the Dutch) contested this appointment, claiming he was first in the line of succession. Muttu Allappa had long been staying with King Vijayaraghava Nayaka of Tanjavur, to whom he was related, and with the expelled Vijayanagara Emperor Sriranga III. Supported by troops of Tanjavur, Mysore, and unspecified "Moors" (probably Bijapur or Golkonda), he marched to Madurai to take the throne from Muttu Virappa II, who was aided by the Setupati of Ramnad among other rulers. By late February, however, the rivals had solved their differences, and Muttu Virappa II remained king.

This alliance was further cemented by the engagement of two sons of Muttu Virappa II with two daughters of Muttu Allappa's foremost supporter at the Madurai court, a friend or relative called Kati Alakadri Nayaka ("Catiallagatris Naijccquen") in the VOC records. This Dutch account is largely similar to what appears in other sources. Although most of these do not mention Muttu Virappa II's supposed illegitimate descent, many confirm that his instalment was opposed by a close relative, here referred to as Kumara Muttu, who was probably identical to the abovementioned nephew of Tirumalai, Muttu Allappa. In this version of the events, peace was achieved when Kumara Muttu was given control over some lands in the kingdom's south and his son Kumara Rangappa anointed as second ruler beside Muttu Virappa II.¹⁵²

¹⁵¹ NA, VOC, no. 1231, ff. 131, 406, 627: letters from Colombo to Batavia, from Tuticorin to Colombo, Mar., May-June 1659; Vink, *Mission to Madurai*, 297, 349; *Beknopte historie*, 87; Vink, "Encounters on the Opposite Coast," 236; Saulière, "The Revolt of the Southern Nayaks" [pt. 2], 174; Sathyanatha Aiyar, *History of the Nayaks of Madura*, 147-49; Rangachari, "The History of the Naik Kingdom of Madura," *Indian Antiquary* XLVI, 27-8, 36; Rajaram, *History of Thirumalai Nayak*, 18-22; Nelson, *The Madura Country*, vol. III, 139-42; Taylor, *Oriental Historical Manuscripts*, vol. I, 39, vol. II, 33-5, 119, 175, 183; BL/AAS, MT, class III, no. 25: "History of the former Gentoo Rajahs who ruled over the Pandyan Mandalom," f. 32; MG, no. 4, pt. 4: "Mootiah's chronological & historical account of the modern kings of Madura," ff. 62-3.

¹⁵² NA, VOC, no. 1231, ff. 131-IV, 406-9, 413: letters from Colombo to Batavia, from Tuticorin and Kayalpatnam to Colombo, Mar., May 1659; Van Dam, *Beschryvinge van de Oostindische Compagnie*,

Once firmly on the throne, however, Muttu Virappa II reigned only about a year. In July 1660 the Dutch wrote that the recently installed Nayaka had passed away and been succeeded by his eldest son Chokkanatha Nayaka (r. 1660-77, 1680-2), aged about fourteen, with the consent of the most important courtiers. But according to the Dutch chronicle and the literary work titled “A description of the Carnataca Lords,” he was not of pure royal descent. While the latter source has it that Chokkanatha was adopted by his father, the Dutch chronicle says his mother was a concubine rather than a queen, as she belonged to the agricultural Vellala caste. Another text, called “History of the Carnataca Governors who ruled over the Pandya Mandalam,” adds that the position of second in power was now kept by Kumara Tirumalai, son of the abovementioned Kumara Rangappa (who previously held that function), thereby starting some sort of dynasty that provided a line of secondary rulers and lasted into the eighteenth century.¹⁵³

It may have been descendants of this collateral branch—from the 1730s onward claiming the Madurai throne and even briefly occupying it—who commissioned texts declaring that Chokkanatha and his father Muttu Virappa II were illegitimate sons of their predecessors, in order to strengthen their own rights to kingship. It has also been suggested that Chokkanatha’s temporary successor, his brother Muttu Linga Nayaka, downplayed Chokkanatha’s ancestry to legitimise his own rule. The Madurai chronicle recorded by the Dutch was compiled during Muttu Linga’s reign and could have been influenced by the latter’s preferred version of the dynasty’s genealogy.¹⁵⁴

In any case, other sources, in particular Jesuit letters, also state that Chokkanatha was a minor at his accession, whereas the kingdom’s *de facto* rulers comprised a court faction including the *pradhāni* (prime or financial minister), *daḷavāy* (chief general), and *rāyasam* (royal secretary). This situation soon created tensions as the young Chokkanatha objected to the tight control under which he was put. A subsequent plot to replace the king with his younger brother is said to have been revealed to him by a court lady, upon which he gathered his own supporters and in

vol. 2.2, 281; Vink, “Encounters on the Opposite Coast,” 236; Sathyanatha Aiyar, *History of the Nayaks of Madura*, 150-1; Rangachari, “The History of the Naik Kingdom of Madura,” *Indian Antiquary* XLVI, 37-8; Nelson, *The Madura Country*, vol. III, 178; Taylor, *Oriental Historical Manuscripts*, vol. II, 33, 175-7, 183-4.

¹⁵³ See also Rangachari, “The History of the Naik Kingdom of Madura,” *Indian Antiquary* XLVI, 215. According to some local texts, Kumara Tirumalai was a younger brother of Chokkanatha. See: BL/AAS, MT, class III, no. 82: “Account of the Rajas who held the government of Madura,” f. 109v; Taylor, *Oriental Historical Manuscripts*, vol. II, 190.

¹⁵⁴ For this latter suggestion, see: Vink, “Encounters on the Opposite Coast,” 346 (n. 27); idem, *Mission to Madurai*, 63.

mid-1662 had the *rāyasam* murdered and the *pradhāni* blinded, while the *daḷavāy* fled to Tanjavur.¹⁵⁵

This appears to have secured Chokkanatha's place on the throne for quite some time, yet in early 1677 he was forced to abdicate and make place for his younger brother Muttu Linga Nayaka (alias Muttu Alakadri Nayaka, r. 1677-80). The Dutch chronicle relates that the royal sceptre and crown were transported from the Minakshi Sundareshvara Temple in Madurai town to the capital Tiruchirappalli for Muttu Linga's coronation ceremony. This unusual procedure was perhaps organised to prevent Chokkanatha from retaking the throne while his brother would have been absent from the capital.¹⁵⁶

Sources do not agree on the cause of Chokkanatha's dethronement, but all European accounts state he did not function well. His allegedly indolent and capricious conduct estranged courtiers, subordinate chiefs, common subjects, and neighbouring rulers. The Dutch wrote that some close relatives, with their troops, had even shifted allegiance to Tanjavur's King Ekoji Bhonsle. This made Chokkanatha attempt in vain to stab himself to death, after which the throne was transferred to Muttu Linga, supposedly with Chokkanatha's consent. But many local texts entirely ignore Muttu Linga's reign, while one work says that Chokkanatha himself, in his wisdom, crowned his younger brother because he wished to spend all his time studying religious works.

Whatever the exact circumstances, in September 1677 the Dutch noted that Chokkanatha had started opposing this transition and his subsequent house arrest, and, still controlling the royal treasure, was fighting a street war in the capital against his younger brother. Yet, Muttu Linga managed to remain on the throne for a few years, although his reign reportedly was no better than that of Chokkanatha, and the fraternal friction appears to have continued all the while. In mid-1680, however, Muttu Linga was removed in his turn and expelled to Tanjavur by his own General Rustam Khan, who had usurped all power at court and now reinstalled Chokkanatha, with himself as the *de facto* ruler. But Rustam Khan's own fall came soon too, when around February 1682 he was killed, either by his own allegedly

¹⁵⁵ NA, VOC, no. 1233, f. 43v: letter from Pulicat to Batavia, July 1660; Coolhaas *et al.*, *Generale Missiven*, vol. III, 337; Vink, *Mission to Madurai*, 63, 141, 213, 297, 349; A. Saulier (ed.), "Madurai and Tanjore, 1659-1666," *Journal of Indian History* XLIV, III (1966), 779-81; Taylor, *Oriental Historical Manuscripts*, vol. I, 39, vol. II, 33-5, 119; Sathyanatha Aiyar, *History of the Nayaks of Madura*, 153-6; Rangachari, "The History of the Naik Kingdom of Madura," *Indian Antiquary* XLVI, 40-2; Nelson, *The Madura Country*, vol. III, 182-5; Vink, "Encounters on the Opposite Coast," 236-7; *Beknopte historie*, 87; BL/AAS, MT, class III, no. 25: "History of the former Gentoo Rajahs who ruled over the Pandyan Mandalom," f. 32.

¹⁵⁶ One Dutch document however says Muttu Linga did actually travel to Madurai to receive (or at least collect) the royal sceptre. See NA, VOC, no. 1333, f. 24: letter from Galle to Batavia, May 1678.

underpaid men (as the Dutch wrote), a coalition of courtiers and subordinate chiefs (according to local texts), or Chokkanatha himself (as a Jesuit report has it)—three versions that do not necessarily exclude one another.¹⁵⁷

Having finally gotten rid of his rivals, Chokkanatha had little time to enjoy this new phase. A VOC letter from January 1683 declares that Chokkanatha had passed away a few months earlier, after which his twelve-year old son Muttu Virappa Nayaka III (alias Ranga Krishna, r. 1682-91) was proclaimed king. Further, the “History of the Carnataca Governors who ruled over the Pandya Mandalam” states that during this reign, the son of the secondary ruler Kumara Tirumalai, Bangaru Tirumalai, succeeded his father in that position.

Muttu Virappa III himself was initially placed under the regency of *Daḷavāy* Tubaki Anandappa Nayaka, a brother of the king’s mother Mangammal. Like her contemporary Chennammaji, queen of Ikkeri, this widow of Chokkanatha escaped death on her husband’s funeral pyre (*satī*) by claiming that nobody but she could raise the young king. Tubaki Anandappa’s regency lasted until 1686, when Muttu Virappa III discovered the *daḷavāy* was part of a conspiracy to dethrone him and reinstall his father’s brother Muttu Linga. Having fled the kingdom, three years later Tubaki Anandappa became involved in a similar plot, this time resulting in his being caught by Muttu Virappa III and subsequently executed, along with Muttu Linga himself.¹⁵⁸

On 9 March 1691, as the Dutch wrote, Muttu Virappa III passed away and was cremated on the 13th “without any marks of honour,” perhaps because he had

¹⁵⁷ NA, VOC, no. 1316, f. 304; no. 1324, ff. 17-17v, 40v; no. 1333, f. 28v; no. 1373, f. 433v: letters from Tuticorin to Colombo, Jan. 1677, from Colombo and Pulicat to Batavia, Mar., June 1677, June 1678, Feb. 1682; Vink, “Encounters on the Opposite Coast,” 291-2, 346 (n. 27), 372-3; idem, *Mission to Madurai*, 63-4, 301-3, 351-2, 366-7, 373-4; Taylor, *Oriental Historical Manuscripts*, vol. I, 206, vol. II, 35, 119, 203; Mahalingam, *Mackenzie Manuscripts*, vol. I, 13; BL/AAS, MT, class III, no. 90: “The genealogical account of the Madura Vadoka Rajahs,” ff. 162-3; class III, no. 25: “History of the former Gentoo Rajahs who ruled over the Pandyan Mandalom,” ff. 32-2v; MM, no. 109, pt. 37: “The humble representation of ... Bangaroo Teeroomaly Nack,” f. 4; Martin, *India in the 17th Century*, vol. 1, pt. II, 566; Sathyanatha Aiyar, *History of the Nayaks of Madura*, 180-2; Rangachari, “The History of the Naik Kingdom of Madura,” *Indian Antiquary* XLVI, 96-7; Nelson, *The Madura Country*, vol. III, 201-2.

¹⁵⁸ NA, VOC, no. 1373, f. 91; no. 11306, ff. 39-40: letter from Colombo to Gentlemen XVII, Jan. 1683, description of the Nayakas of Madurai by Holst, 1762; Vink, “Encounters on the Opposite Coast,” 374-7; idem, *Mission to Madurai*, 63, 157 (n. 111), 181 (n. 170), 399 (n. 69), 470 (n. 226); Taylor, *Oriental Historical Manuscripts*, vol. I, 39, vol. II, 35, 119; BL/AAS, MG, no. 4, pt. 4: “Mootiah’s chronological & historical account of the modern kings of Madura,” ff. 66-8; MT, class III, no. 25: “History of the former Gentoo Rajahs who ruled over the Pandyan Mandalom,” f. 32v; Sathyanatha Aiyar, *History of the Nayaks of Madura*, 190-3; Rangachari, “The History of the Naik Kingdom of Madura,” *Indian Antiquary* XLVI, 104; Nelson, *The Madura Country*, vol. III, 204, 207. Another literary work mentions one Kumara Muttula as Muttu Virappa III’s secondary ruler. See Taylor, *Oriental Historical Manuscripts*, vol. II, 205.

been poisoned by Brahmins, as some rumours had it, although a letter by the Jesuit Peter Martin of 1700 and other accounts claim he died of smallpox. His mother Mangammal reportedly objected to the installation of a new king and with the help of some courtiers took control of the government. Mangammal was now to rule the kingdom (1691-1707) until the recently born son of the deceased Muttu Virappa III, Vijayaranga Chokkanatha Nayaka, would reach maturity. According to other sources, including the abovementioned Jesuit letter, this child actually ascended the throne when he was three months old, while his grandmother Mangammal served as his guardian, holding the prince “in her lap” (as some local texts put it), while the then *dalavāy* was said to be entrusted with the kingdom’s administration.

However, a mural in the Unjal Mandapa hall at Madurai’s Minakshi Sundareshvara Temple shows the local goddess Minakshi presenting the dynasty’s sceptre to Mangammal through what must have been a Brahmin priest, suggesting she attained or at least claimed fully-fledged regal status herself (see illustration 6, left). Additionally, an adjacent painting (see illustration 6, right) and some statues in other buildings, all portraying Mangammal together with her grandson Vijayaranga Chokkanatha, depict the queen twice as large as the young king, which is thought to indicate her superior powers rather than their age difference.¹⁵⁹

All this suggests she became an influential figure at court. Indeed, it was said that Mangammal—whose beauty was described as “angelic” (in a local text) and “of wondrousness” (*van wonderschoonht.*, in a Dutch report of 1668)—already held considerable power during the rule of her husband Chokkanatha. Nevertheless, during her own reign, Mangammal seems to have shared much of her might with Brahmin courtiers and representatives around the kingdom, or that is at least the complaint found in VOC documents and Jesuit letters dating from the last phase of her rule.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁹ For online images of these murals, see: southindianpaintings.art/monuments/madurai-minakshi-sundareshvara-temple.

¹⁶⁰ NA, VOC, no. 1492, ff. 250-50v; no. 8921, ff. 163-4; no. 11306, f. 40: letter from Tuticorin to Batavia, May 1691, final report of Tuticorin’s chief (*opperhoofd*) Nicolaas Welter, Oct. 1705, description of the Nayakas of Madurai by Holst, 1762; Vink, *Mission to Madurai*, 64, 166 (n. 128), 204, 258, 474 (n. 237); Taylor, *Oriental Historical Manuscripts*, vol. I, 39, vol. II, 35, 119, 216-17; BL/AAS, MG, no. 4, pt. 4: “Mootiah’s chronological & historical account of the modern kings of Madura,” ff. 66, 69-70; MT, class III, no. 25: “History of the former Gentoo Rajahs who ruled over the Pandyan Mandalom,” ff. 32v-3; Crispin Branfoot, “Mangammal of Madurai and South Indian Portraiture,” *East and West* 51, 3-4 (2001), 371-6, figs 1-3, 5, 8; idem, “Royal Portrait Sculpture in the South Indian Temple,” 19-21 (figs 6-7); R. Nagaswamy, *Studies in Ancient Tamil Law and Society* (n.p., 1978), 124-6; Chandra, “The Cultural History of the Nayakas of Madurai,” Appendix, plate II B; Calambur Sivaramamurti, *Vijayanagara Paintings* (New Delhi, 1985), 46-7, 84 (plate XXIV); J. Lockman (ed.), *Travels of the Jesuits into Various Parts of the World*, vol. I (London, 1743), 460-1; Sathyanatha Aiyar, *History of the Nayakas of Madura*, 203-4, 377-8; Rangachari, “The History of the Naik Kingdom of Madura,” *Indian Antiquary* XLVI, 124, 156; Nelson, *The Madura Country*, vol. III, 214-16. See also Bes, “The Ambiguities of Female Rule in Nayaka South India.”



Illustration 6: Details of murals depicting Queen Mangammal of Madurai receiving the royal sceptre from the local goddess Minakshi through a priest (left), and attending a divine wedding with her grandson Vijayaranga Chokkanatha Nayaka (right), Unjal Mandapa (central ceiling), Minakshi Sundareshvara Temple, Madurai, c. 1700? (courtesy *Institut Français de Pondichéry* / British Library EAP 692).

In February 1707, the Dutch wrote that the young Nayaka prince, Muttu Virappa III's son Vijayaranga Chokkanatha, now about seventeen years old, had reached the age to assume the government and many courtiers wished him to do so. Yet, it was thought he was unwilling to ascend the throne before the release of a *daḷavāy* who had been imprisoned by his grandmother, much to the pleasure of “deceitful” Brahmins. But in late July, news came that Mangammal had indeed been dethroned and replaced with Vijayaranga Chokkanatha (r. 1707-32). Some months later, the Dutch heard that the queen was presumably poisoned by order of the new king and the now released *daḷavāy*. This remained a rumour, however, since some years later it was reported she had fled from Madurai to Tanjavur, hoping to find shelter with the VOC at Nagapattinam. But Company documents from that town do not seem to mention her appearance there.¹⁶¹

¹⁶¹ NA, VOC, no. 1756, f. 1193; no. 8595, f. 129; no. 8922, ff. 71, 249; no. 8923, ff. 314-15: letters from Tuticorin to Colombo, Jan. 1708, from Colombo to Batavia and Gentlemen XVII, Feb., Aug., Nov. 1707, Feb. 1708; Coolhaas et al., *Generale Missiven*, vol. VI, 555, 821; J.S. Chandler, *History of the Jesuit Mission in Madura, South India, in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Madras, 1909), 55. For Mangammal's possible escape to Nagapattinam, see also the section on Madurai in Chapter 4.

While some other accounts agree that Mangammal was reluctant to abdicate in favour of her grandson and therefore was deposed and killed by him, most local texts declare that the queen voluntarily vacated the throne before she passed away. But one south Indian work, “Mootiah’s chronological & historical account of the modern kings of Madura,” describes the friction between the two in detail. It relates that towards the end of her reign, Mangammal was charmed by the amorous songs of a musician. Informed about this by *Daḷavāy* Kasturi Ranga Ayyan, Vijayaranga Chokkanatha became furious and had the singer tortured. The queen then imprisoned the prince and the *daḷavāy*, but when they escaped after three years, Vijayaranga Chokkanatha seized the royal sceptre and paraded through the streets on an elephant. Having thus shown he was now the king, he jailed Mangammal, who died soon after.

According to another tradition, the queen had an affair with a courtier, weakening her position among her subjects and necessitating her removal. Additionally, a Telugu text called *Madura mangāpumścalī līlavilāsamu*—perhaps composed by the poet Vikatakavi Gopalakavi, who had fallen out with Mangammal—portrays her reign as cruel and immoral. It is possible that these three sources derive from the same origin and that the musician, the courtier, and the poet were the same person. In any case, these stories may well have stemmed from efforts by Vijayaranga Chokkanatha to discredit his predecessor and legitimise his take-over.¹⁶²

The final succession in Madurai dealt with in this chapter took place on 25 February 1732, when Vijayaranga Chokkanatha passed away. As VOC documents explain, his son and heir apparent had already died in 1721, and so he was succeeded by his first queen, Minakshi (r. c. 1732-9).¹⁶³ She was spared of committing *sati* because she was—or pretended to be—seven months pregnant. Although her unborn child was destined to become king if it was a male, Minakshi herself was allegedly formally recognised as queen by the courtiers and the common people.

¹⁶² Taylor, *Oriental Historical Manuscripts*, vol. I, 39, vol. II, 37, 119, 229; BL/AAS, MG, no. 4, pt. 4: “Mootiah’s chronological & historical account of the modern kings of Madura,” f. 71; MT, class III, no. 25: “History of the former Gentoo Rajahs who ruled over the Pandyan Mandalom,” f. 33v; Timmavajjhala Kodandaramaiah, *The Telugu Poets of Madura and Tanjore* (Hyderabad, n.d. [c. 1975]), 30, Appendix V (no. 4); Venkata Rao, *The Southern School in Telugu Literature*, 143-4; Sathyanatha Aiyar, *History of the Nayaks of Madura*, 220-3; Rangachari, “The History of the Naik Kingdom of Madura,” *Indian Antiquary* XLVI, 184-6; Nelson, *The Madura Country*, vol. III, 237, 239-40; Francis, *Madura Gazetteer*, 55. According to the supplement by G.F. Holst to the Dutch chronicle of the Nayakas of Madurai, dating from 1762, Mangammal had peacefully passed the government to Vijayaranga Chokkanatha just before her death. See NA, VOC, no. 11306, f. 47, and also *Beknopte historie*, 89.

¹⁶³ Minakshi may have belonged to the Tubaki family (like Queen Mangammal and her brother Anandappa, see also Chapter 3), as one local text says she was a daughter of “Toopaukela Ramalingama.” See BL/AAS, MG, no. 4, pt. 4: “Mootiah’s chronological & historical account of the modern kings of Madura,” ff. 71-2.

Yet, as various sources mention, her rule was contested by her distant cousin Bangaru Tirumalai, most probably the aforementioned secondary ruler under Muttu Virappa III in the 1680s. Even though Minakshi is thought to have adopted Bangaru Tirumalai's son Vijayakumara Nayaka as her future successor, Bangaru Tirumalai himself—aided by Madurai's *dalavāy* and seemingly Arcot and Mysore too—attempted to dislodge the queen, claiming the throne since he belonged to the family's collateral line. According to some local texts, Bangaru Tirumalai came to exercise all control, enjoyed the support of most courtiers, and resided in a new palace, whereas the treasure, the regalia, and the old palace were in the possession of Minakshi and her influential brothers. Other literary works have it that the queen not only adopted Bangaru Tirumalai's son Vijayakumara but also installed him as king, whose regent she would be, while Bangaru Tirumalai assumed actual governmental authority.

However, some generals of Arcot became closely involved in this succession struggle, which around 1739 led to Minakshi's death and the demise of the Nayaka dynasty, save for the brief reigns of, perhaps, Bangaru Tirumalai around 1740 and of his son Vijayakumara in the early 1750s.¹⁶⁴ These events are discussed in the Epilogue.

Considering the successions under Madurai's Nayakas until the reign of Minakshi, one gains a picture of a dynasty that frequently suffered instability, yet lasted much longer than the two other Nayaka dynasties in the Tamil region, those of Senji (until 1649) and Tanjavur (until 1673). Not counting the later rulers Bangaru Tirumalai and Vijayakumara, but including all three sons of Virappa, sixteen monarchs occupied the throne between c. 1530 and 1739. Their average rule thus lasted nearly thirteen years, or slightly under fifteen years if we discount the two sons of Virappa whose reigns are doubted by some historians.

In both cases, this period differs little from the average length under most other dynasties. In Madurai, this relatively brief span was partly the result of a few short-lived reigns, occurring throughout the dynasty's existence. Their very brevity indicates that most of these reigns were opposed and ended violently. From

¹⁶⁴ NA, VOC, no. 2318, f. 2646-7; no. 8958, ff. 672-3, 701; no. 11306, ff. 47-8, 53-4: letters from Tuticorin to Colombo, from Nagapattinam to Batavia, Mar., Oct. 1732, Sept. 1734, description of the Nayakas of Madurai by Holst, 1762; Coolhaas *et al.*, *Generale Missiven*, vol. VII, 567, vol. IX (The Hague, 1988), 393; *Beknopte historie*, 89; Taylor, *Oriental Historical Manuscripts*, vol. I, 40, vol. II, 37-43, 232-5; BL/AAS, MG, no. 4, pt. 4: "Mootiah's chronological & historical account of the modern kings of Madura," ff. 72-4; MT, class III, no. 25: "History of the former Gentoo Rajahs who ruled over the Pandyan Mandalom," ff. 33v-6v; class III, no. 82: "Account of the Rajas who held the government of Madura," ff. 109v-14; Sathyanatha Aiyar, *History of the Nayaks of Madura*, 230-4; Rangachari, "The History of the Naik Kingdom of Madura," *Indian Antiquary* XLVI, 189, 213-19, 237-41; Nelson, *The Madura Country*, vol. III, 251-60. See also Bes, "The Ambiguities of Female Rule in Nayaka South India."

Table 7: Nayakas of Madurai, regnal dates, relations to predecessors, and further remarks.

	name	accession date	ending date	relation to predecessors	remarks († = natural death at end of reign)
1	Vishvanatha Nayaka	c. 1530?	c. 1563	— (founder)	†, son of Nagama, Vijayanagara general
2	(Periya) Kumara Krishnappa Nayaka	c. 1563	c. 1572	son of 1	†
3	(Periya) Virappa (Krishnappa) Nayaka	c. 1572	1595	son of 2	†, co-rule with 2 and brother Vishvanatha II?
4	Vishvappa / Bisvama / Vishvanatha Nayaka	1595	c. 1595	1st son of 3	†, co-rule with 3?
5	(Kumara) Krishnappa Nayaka II / Lingama / Lingappa / Lingaya	c. 1595	c. 1601	brother of 4 & 2nd son of 3	†, co-rule with 4? no sons?
6	Kasturi Rangappa Nayaka	c. 1601	c. 1601	brother of 5 & 3rd son of 3	co-rule with 5? contested by 7, killed?
7	Muttu Krishnappa Nayaka	c. 1601	1606, Dec. 6/7	nephew of 6 & son of 4	†
8	Muttu Virappa Nayaka	1606, c. Dec. 6/7	c. 1623	1st son of 7	†
9	Tirumalai Nayaka	c. 1623	1659, early Feb.	brother of 8 & 2nd son of 7	†? co-rule with 8?
10	Muttu Virappa Nayaka II / Muttu Alakadri	1659, early Feb.	c. early 1660	(low-born?) son of 9	†, contested by nephew of 9
11	Chokkanatha Nayaka	c. early 1660 & mid-1680	1677, c. Feb. & mid/late 1682	(low-born?) 1st son of 10	†, minor at accession, temporarily dethroned for 12
12	Muttu Linga Nayaka / Muttu Alakadri	1677, c. Feb.	mid-1680	brother of 11 & 2nd son of 10	contested by and dethroned for 11

	name	accession date	ending date	relation to predecessors	remarks († = natural death at end of reign)
13	(Ranga Krishna) Muttu Virappa Nayaka III	mid/late 1682	1691, Mar. 9	son of 11	minor at accession, contested by 12, poisoned?
14	Mangammal	1691, c. Mar. 9	1707, c. July	mother of 13 & widow of 11	female, maybe regent of 15, poisoned by 15?
15	Vijayaranga Chokkanatha Nayaka	1707, c. July	1732, Feb. 25	grandson of 14 & son of 13	†, minor at possible accession in 1691, no sons
16	Minakshi	1732, c. Feb. 25	c. early 1739	widow of 15	female, contested by 17, dethroned by Arcot
17	Bangaru Tirumalai	c. mid-1739?	c. 1739?	great-grandson of brother of 9	enthroned by Arcot, reign unsure
18	Vijayakumara Nayaka	c. 1750 & c. 1753	c. 1751 & c. 1754	son of 17, adopted by 16	enthroned and dethroned by Arcot defectors, enthroned by Ramnad and Shivangai, dethroned by Arcot defectors

For sources, see the references in the preceding section, Chapter 1, and the Epilogue.

around the mid-seventeenth century, when sources become more diverse, almost every succession appears to have been contested. This suggests that also during the dynasty's earlier phase competition for the throne was common. It can therefore be concluded that about half of the rulers were assassinated or dethroned. Still, until the dynasty's last few decades, virtually all kings were sons or brothers of predecessors. Only from around 1660 do we see two widows, about three minors, and perhaps two low-born sons ascending the throne.

Thus, the number of "unqualified" monarchs was limited, and often it was the traditionally recommended successions by sons or brothers that caused conflicts. An early instance of this is perhaps found with Virappa's three sons, two of whom ruled for only about a year and the third for just six years. Fraternal and filial clashes certainly became prominent later on. One example concerns the career of Muttu Linga, who in the late 1670s temporarily replaced his elder brother Chokkanatha, and in the 1680s attempted twice to usurp the throne from his nephew Muttu Virappa III.

An even longer lasting rivalry commenced when in 1659 Muttu Virappa II's accession was contested by his cousin Kumara Muttu (or Muttu Allappa). He eventually gave up his demands but had his son Kumara Rangappa installed as second in power. From him sprang the collateral, hereditary line of secondary kings, the last of whom, Bangaru Tirumalai, claimed the throne upon Vijayaranga Chokkanatha's death in 1732. As described in the Epilogue, the competition between him and Minakshi contributed in large measure to the dynasty's demise. The latter's gender likely weakened her position and emboldened her opponent, as was probably the case for Mangammal when her grandson Vijayaranga Chokkanatha reached maturity and her reign, under the guise of regency, was no longer accepted. As elsewhere, these rivalries were often instigated or exploited by parties around the royal house: court factions, subordinate chieftaincies, and neighbouring kingdoms.

Setupatis of Ramnad

Originally installed by Muttu Krishnappa Nayaka of Madurai around 1605, the first clearly historical Setupatis were local chiefs of the Ramnad area. During the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, they became ever more assertive and gradually achieved a de facto independent position, in particular after the fall of the Madurai Nayakas around 1739. The Setupatis' fully-fledged royal status lasted until the turn of the nineteenth century, when the British designated the family as *zamīndārs* (revenue-paying landholders) over the Ramnad "Estate." But in 1772 already, the kingdom was conquered by the combined forces of Arcot and the British and was subsequently ruled by the Nawab for nearly a decade.¹⁶⁵ Therefore, this survey only concerns successions until 1763, the year of accession of Muttu Ramalinga Setupati, who was deposed during the Anglo-Arcot invasion. Up to and including his reign, sixteen men ruled Ramnad (see table 8 towards the end of this section).¹⁶⁶

Sources for the successions during this period include inscriptions, literary works (produced at both the Ramnad and Madurai courts), Jesuit letters, and, from the mid-seventeenth century on, Dutch records. In addition, there are sculptural dynastic galleries in several temples. These include the Ramanathasvami Temple on Rameshvaram island, where most statues were executed in the seventeenth and

¹⁶⁵ Seshadri, "The Sētopatis of Ramnad," 127-45; Thiruvēnkatachārī, *The Setupatis of Ramnad*, 53-71; Kādhirvel, *A History of the Maravas*, 159-68, 181-5, 190-3, 202-3; K. Rajayyan, *History of Madurai (1736-1801)* (Madurai, 1974), 258-62, 276-8, 329-33, 402-7.

¹⁶⁶ For (partly outdated) genealogical trees of Ramnad's Setupatis, see: Seshadri, "The Sētopatis of Ramnad," between 182-3; Bes, "Friendship as Long as the Sun and Moon Shine," ix; Sewell, *The Historical Inscriptions of Southern India*, 391; idem, *List of Inscriptions*, 228.



Illustration 7: Statues of the Setupatis of Ramnad, Kalyana Mandapa, Ramanathasvami Temple, Rameshvaram, 18th-19th centuries (courtesy R.K.K. Rajarajan).

eighteenth centuries, but some sculptures portray Setupatis up to the twentieth century (see illustration 7).¹⁶⁷

In contrast to the royal houses considered before, several historians have discussed the principles of succession under the Setupatis in some detail. They state that traditionally the king was to be succeeded by the eldest son born of a wife belonging to the king's Maravar sub-caste, the Sembinaattu. In the absence of such a son, the throne would allegedly fall to a daughter of similar ancestry. Next in line were the king's brothers or else other close paternal relatives. The king could also adopt a successor, and finally, if no heir was available at all, Maravar chiefs had to select a new monarch.¹⁶⁸ It is not entirely clear whether these specific regulations were recorded in contemporary texts, but in any case the rules were often bent, as the following events demonstrate.

All sources agree that the first Setupati of the modern, historical line, Sadaika Tevar (r. c. 1605-22), whose regal name was Udaiyan Setupati, died about 1622 and was succeeded by his eldest son Kuttan Tevar (r. c. 1622-36). But from that point until the 1720s, relations between consecutive Setupatis are largely unclear since sources

¹⁶⁷ Bes and Branfoot, "From All Quarters of the Indian World"; Branfoot, "Heroic Rulers and Devoted Servants," 179-85, 189-91, 196 (n. 48); G. Sethuraman, *Rameswaram Temple (History, Art and Architecture)* (Madurai, 1998), 190-2, 212, 216; Michell, *Architecture and Art of Southern India*, 118, 184; Jas. Burgess, "The Ritual of Rāmēśvaram," *The Indian Antiquary: A Journal of Oriental Research* XII (1883), 316, 326; Vanamamalai Pillai, *Temples of the Setu and Rameswaram*, 75; Burgess and Naṭeśa Śāstri, *Tamil and Sanskrit Inscriptions*, 57; and personal observation (Sept. 1997).

¹⁶⁸ Kadhivrel, *A History of the Maravas*, 34 (n. 4); Seshadri, "The Setupatis of Ramnad," 183-4; Price, *Kingship and Political Practice in Colonial India*, 35-7.

often contradict one another. Kuttan, perhaps dying childless around 1636, was followed by Sadaika Tevar II, also known under his regal name Dalavay Setupati (r. c. 1636-40, 1640-5). Dalavay was his predecessor's younger brother or his son, possibly by adoption. Some local texts say that when Dalavay nominated his sister's son Raghunatha as his future successor, this was contested by his illegitimate half-brother Peddanna Nayaka Tevar, alias Tambi, born of an enslaved woman according to one chronicle. To realise his claims to the throne, Tambi enlisted the support of King Tirumalai Nayaka of Madurai, resulting in hostilities between Dalavay and the Madurai General Ramappaiya.

This conflict is extensively described in the Tamil poem *Rāmappaiyaṇ ammaṇai* (probably dating from the second half of the eighteenth century), which relates that Dalavay fled across the Pamban Channel to Rameshvaram island. As a poetic reference to the episode in the *Rāmāyaṇa* epic of Rama using a monkey-built bridge to cross these same waters to Lanka, the *Rāmappaiyaṇ ammaṇai* says that Madurai's General Ramappaiya now had a causeway constructed across the channel. Soon, Dalavay was defeated, imprisoned in Madurai, and replaced with his rival Tambi (r. c. 1640).

The new, low-born Setupati proved an incapable ruler, however, who was opposed by his courtiers and subjects alike. This was one reason why Madurai's Tirumalai Nayaka soon reinstalled Dalavay, although—as the *Rāmappaiyaṇ ammaṇai* relates—the god Vishnu's personal breaking of the prisoner's chains also prompted the Nayaka to do so. Other literary texts, mostly deriving from Madurai, state that Tirumalai Nayaka's removal of the Setupati was caused by the latter's refusal to pay tribute and his discourteous behaviour towards his overlord's representatives. But when Ramnad subsequently fell into disorder, and pilgrims to Rameshvaram island complained about the lack of safety and demanded the Setupati's return, the Nayaka reappointed Dalavay.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁹ BL/AAS, MG, no. 4, pt. 8: "A general history of the kings of Rama Naad or the Satoo-Putty Samastanum," ff. 179-81; MT, class III, no. 25: "History of the former Gentoo Rajahs who ruled over the Pandyan Mandalom," ff. 29v-31; TV. Mahalingam, "Historical Material in the Ramappayyan Ammanai," *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 10 (1947); K.C. Kamaliah, "Anatomy of *Rāmappaiyaṇ Ammaṇai*," *Journal of Tamil Studies* 7 (1975); Howes, *The Courts of Pre-Colonial South India*, 86; Mahalingam, *Readings in South Indian History*, 186-91; Taylor, *Oriental Historical Manuscripts*, vol. II, 29-31, 175, 180-1, Appendix, 49-51; Mahalingam, *Mackenzie Manuscripts*, vol. I, 60, 180; Price, *Kingship and Political Practice in Colonial India*, 19-25; Seshadri, "The Setupatis of Ramnad," 20, 23-31; Thiruvengkatachari, *The Setupatis of Ramnad*, 20-2; Raja Ram Rao, *Ramnad Manual*, 213-16; Sathyanatha Aiyar, *History of the Nayaks of Madura*, 93, 122-5; Rangachari, "The History of the Naik Kingdom of Madura," *Indian Antiquary* XLV, 106, 169-71, 178-85; Nelson, *The Madura Country*, vol. III, 128-30. One inscription has it that Raghunatha Setupati was the son of Dalavay Setupati. See Sewell, *The Historical Inscriptions of Southern India*, 284.

The VOC archives contain another local account of these developments. The Madurai General Tirumalai Kulantha Pillai presented this version in written form to the Company's official Hendrik Adriaan van Rheede at Tuticorin in 1665, when the Dutch attempted to mediate in a conflict between Madurai and Ramnad about the latter's arrears in tribute. This report, recorded twenty-five years after the events, was clearly meant as Madurai's justification for its grievances. Yet, the account, titled "Origin of the war and rise of the Teuver [Tevvar, the Setupati]," appears to combine parts of all abovementioned texts, including some of the more "epic" elements:

Oerienchedupadij [Udaiyan Setupati or Sadaika Tevar], being the grand uncle of the Raganoeda Teuver [Raghunatha Tevar, the Setupati who reigned when the report was written], ... was by one of the Neijke [Nayakas] of Madure appointed head and supervisor of some lands, whose son named Talavaij Chedupadij Teuver [Dalavay Setupati] in the course of time took control of a few places, of which the rulers were tributaries of the Neijck, and after a while crept across ... some boundaries that even belonged to the Neijck.

Because of this, the Neijck resolved to drive him away and give his office [*bediening*] to someone else, choosing for that end Chedapadij Theuver [Tambi]—being the brother's son of the abovementioned Thalawaija Chedupadij Theuver—sending him to wage war against his uncle with a large army under a general named Ramapajen, who, closing the channel of Outiaer [Pamban] with a dam, crossed it to Ramanocoi] [Rameshvaram] where Thalawaij Chedupadij Tevar (and ... 3 nephews named Tauwcatta Teuver, Araiyanatwer, and this Ranganoeda Tevar, being three brothers) had fled with their families, all of whom were taken prisoner to Madure ... while Chedepadie Tevar [Tambi] remained, ruling as governor of the conquered lands under firm promises of tribute.

Seeing himself established in this government, he revolted against the Najck and refused to pay the tribute, for which reasons the Najck set free the imprisoned Talavaij Chedupadij Thever, under the condition that he, being in the government, would pay one lack or 100,000 ditto [currency unclear] and regular tribute to the Neijck of Madure, keeping as hostages for this promise this Setupati [Raghunatha, ruling in 1665] with his brothers and family ...¹⁷⁰

Thus, in the view of the Madurai court, the cause for Dalavay's temporary removal from the Ramnad throne was his encroachment upon lands of the Nayaka and his subordinates. Nothing is said about Tambi objecting to Dalavay's supposed nomination of his sister's son Raghunatha, and Tambi is here Dalavay's brother's son instead of his illegitimate half-brother—perhaps giving him a better claim to the throne than Raghunatha. Further, Tambi was soon re-exchanged with Dalavay

¹⁷⁰ NA, VOC, no. 1251, ff. 743-4: report of mission to Travancore, Madurai, and Ramnad, Mar.-Oct. 1665 (translation mine). See also Vink, "Encounters on the Opposite Coast," 227 (n. 13).

again, simply because the former proved as disobedient as the latter, unwilling to deliver the agreed tribute. Moreover, the mention of a bridge to Rameshvaram in the poem *Rāmappaiyaṇ ammaṇai* may not have merely been a lyrical effort to liken Madurai's General Ramappaia to the *Rāmāyaṇa*'s Rama, but a reference to an actual crossing of the Pamban Channel by way of a constructed dam.

All in all, it seems that while in Madurai the developments were seen as a partially successful suppression of two consecutive disloyal Ramnad chieftains, texts from Ramnad itself mostly attempted to portray Dalavay as an obedient ruler, whose low-born rival dethroned him, but who was soon reinstalled when the Nayaka realised he was the rightful monarch. This version of the events was probably propagated by the later Setupatis, who descended from Dalavay's nominee Raghunatha. In this respect, it is perhaps telling that in at least one of the sculptural portrait galleries of Ramnad's house—located at the Kalyana Mandapa hall of Rameshvaram's Ramanathasvami Temple and including name labels (see illustration 7)—Tambi is one of only two Setupatis who appear to have been left out.¹⁷¹ Even though these labels may have been added as late as the twentieth century, they seem to reflect a tradition that did not acknowledge Tambi as a Setupati.

In any case, the next succession in Ramnad is also dealt with in Madurai's account recorded by the Dutch:

Some time later, Thalavaij Chedupadij Teuver was treacherously killed by his brother's son ... Chedupadij Teuver [Tambi], whereupon the Naijck set free all the deceased's imprisoned friends as revenge for the treason, moreover sending an army that, by the violence of arms, forced the rebel to hand over everything. The Neijck then took his lands ..., distributing the remainder among the Teuver [Raghunatha Setupati] and his two brothers, with the order to pay tribute as obedient subjects ...¹⁷²

This description of Dalavay's demise after a few more years on the throne and the kingdom's subsequent partition agrees fairly well with most other sources. According to some accounts, Dalavay died a natural death rather than a violent one at Tambi's hands, but almost all texts say or at least suggest that his passing led to a succession struggle. For Tirumalai Nayaka of Madurai interfered again and divided Ramnad into three, the central part to be governed by Dalavay's nominee Raghunatha (Tirumalai) Setupati (r. c. 1645-73) and the other parts by Tambi and Raghunatha's two brothers respectively. This does not seem to have made all these rulers more willing to pay tribute, since the pages of the Dutch-recorded Madurai report are full of complaints in this regard. Indeed, VOC sources indicate that the chiefs of Ramnad's

¹⁷¹ Personal observation (Sept. 1997).

¹⁷² NA, VOC, no. 1251, f. 744 (translation mine).

seceded portions were courted by the Nayaka of Tanjavur and the Portuguese as part of their animosity against Madurai. But after some time, these chiefs passed away or perhaps were dethroned and the Ramnad kingdom was reunited under Raghunatha's allegedly loyal reign, probably around 1658 as Dutch records suggest.¹⁷³

By almost all local accounts, Raghunatha Setupati died peacefully and was succeeded by Surya Tevar (r. 1673), although sources differ on the date of this transition and the question of whether the latter was the former's son or nephew. The Dutch wrote in April 1673 that the Setupati was recently deceased and had been succeeded by his brother's son. Another VOC letter mentions that this new ruler had imprisoned one of his brothers, perhaps indicating a succession struggle. In any case, Surya's reign was short-lived. As reported by the Dutch, during the then growing tension between the Madurai and Tanjavur Nayakas—leading to the fall of the latter in September 1673—the Setupati supported Tanjavur. He was subsequently caught by Madurai troops and drawn and quartered at Tiruchirappalli around October.¹⁷⁴

His successor was Athana Tevar (r. 1673), whose relationship with Surya is not quite agreed upon by local sources. These accounts variously designate Athana as his predecessor's brother, adopted cousin, uncle, or distant relative, or even as a wholly unrelated, elected ruler. VOC reports declare that upon Surya's death, Maravar chiefs chose his ten-year old brother (Athana) as Setupati, for want of a more suitable relative, since Surya had killed three other brothers some months earlier. The young Athana spent even less time on the throne than Surya. As Dutch records state, within weeks the minor ruler was also captured and killed by Madurai.

A VOC document of January 1674 mentions as the kingdom's next ruler a certain Raghunatha, probably the earliest Dutch reference to the Setupati better known under his nickname Kilavan ("old man") Tevar (r. 1673-1710). Remarkably, in a letter written to the VOC soon after, Kilavan explained in some detail how his predecessors

¹⁷³ BL/AAS, MG, no. 4, pt. 8: "A general history of the kings of Rama Naad or the Satoo-Putty Samastanum," ff. 181, 191; MT, class III, no. 25: "History of the former Gentoo Rajahs who ruled over the Pandyan Mandalom," f. 31; NA, HRB, no. 542 (unpaginated, 1st document, c. halfway, section "Teuverslant"): description of Ceylon, Madurai, south Coromandel, Malabar, and Kanara by Rijcklof van Goens, Sept. 1675; Taylor, *Oriental Historical Manuscripts*, vol. II, 31-3, Appendix, 51; Mahalingam, *Mackenzie Manuscripts*, vol. I, 180; Seshadri, "The Sētopatis of Ramnad," 31-3, 37; Thiruvengkatachari, *The Setupatis of Ramnad*, 23-4; Raja Ram Rao, *Ramnad Manual*, 216-18; Sathyanatha Aiyar, *History of the Nayaks of Madura*, 125; Nelson, *The Madura Country*, vol. III, 130-1.

¹⁷⁴ It may well be the execution of Surya Tevar that the Venetian traveller Niccolao Manucci mentions in his account of a clash between Madurai's Nayaka and the Setupati. This is also logical considering Manucci's reference to Madurai's General Chinna Tambi Mudaliyar (prominent in the late 1660s–early 1670s), whom the modern-day editor of Manucci's work probably erroneously has identified as Tambi, Ramnad's pretender to the throne around 1640. See Manucci, *Storia do Mogor*, vol. III, 100-2. For what is likely another description of Surya Tevar's death, see Jeyaraj and Young, *Hindu-Christian Epistolary Self-Disclosures*, 263-4.

Surya and Athana had met their end, but was silent about how he had become king or was related to the previous Setupatis. This unusual omission of the ruler's credentials can well be linked to two factors appearing from other accounts: Kilavan's alleged illegitimate descent and the bloodshed that accompanied his accession to the throne.

Again, sources do not agree on the kinship between Kilavan and his predecessors. Some suggest he was a relative of Surya and Athana, although, as the Jesuit John de Britto wrote, he had a low status because his mother did not belong to the appropriate Maravar sub-caste. In contrast, the Telugu text called "A chronicle of the acts of the Sethupathis" declares that Kilavan was elected by Maravar chiefs since neither Surya nor Athana nor any of their siblings had left children. According to a Tamil work translated as "A general history of the Kings of Rama Naad or the Satoo-Putty Samastanum," he was a cousin of Surya, had gone into hiding for some time, and was recognised as the rightful new Setupati once he reappeared at court.

Despite their differences, all these accounts have in common that upon Athana's death, Kilavan's coming to power was not a foregone conclusion and had to be negotiated and acknowledged. Dutch records seem entirely silent on Kilavan's ancestry, but they extensively relate the violence with which he eliminated all possible opposition. In the first years of his reign he killed his General Chandra Servaikkarar and several other courtiers, while members of the royal family—including relatives of the deceased Raghunatha Setupati—were quietened through marital alliances or by force.

Further, as reported by De Britto again, Kilavan married a woman of the Sembinnattu sub-caste, thereby strengthening his legitimacy. He is also thought to have moved the kingdom's capital from Pogalur to Ramanathapuram, which he fortified with stone walls.¹⁷⁵ Despite several endeavours to dislodge him in the 1670s and 1680s—variously involving subordinate chiefs, Madurai, Tanjavur, and Pudukkottai—Kilavan achieved practical autonomy from Madurai and became one of Ramnad's most powerful rulers, and in any case he was the longest reigning Setupati until the twentieth century.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁵ For Pogalur, see one of the footnotes in the section on Sivakumara Muttu Vijaya Raghunatha Setupati (r. 1735-48) below.

¹⁷⁶ NA, VOC, no. 1291, ff. 515v, 594v; no. 1292, ff. 180-80v; no. 1295, ff. 82, 127-7v, 144-4v, 707v; no. 1298, ff. 292v-3, 325v; no. 1302, ff. 613-13v, 618; no. 1316, ff. 331v-2: letters from superintendent Rijcklof van Goens to Surya Tevar (in proceedings of the Dutch fleet and Colombo), from Cochin to Gentlemen XVII, from Pulicat, Nagapattinam, and Colombo to Batavia, from Nagapattinam to Van Goens, Apr.-May, Aug., Oct.-Nov. 1673, Jan. 1674, Dec. 1676 (letter of Oct. 1673 partly translated in Narayana Rao, Shulman, and Subrahmanyam, *Symbols of Substance*, 310), correspondence between Kilavan Tevar and Van Goens, June 1674; Vink, "Encounters on the Opposite Coast," 289-90, 292-3, 377; idem, *Mission to Madurai*, 73-4; BL/AAS, MG, no. 4, pt. 8: "A general history of the kings of Rama Naad or the Satoo-Putty Samastanum," ff. 183-7; Taylor, *Oriental Historical Manuscripts*, vol. II, Appendix, 51; Seshadri, "The

Kilavan's demise on 12 October 1710, at the approximate age of seventy, gave rise to a series of succession disputes that lasted into the 1730s and eventually caused another partition of the kingdom, this time for good. According to "A chronicle of the acts of the Sethupathis" and other sources, Kilavan's son Bhavani Shankara Tevar could not succeed him since his mother's caste was not appropriate. Yet, as "A general history of the Kings of Rama Naad or the Satoo-Putty Samastanum" adds, several relatives, courtiers, and chiefs wanted him to ascend the throne and he supposedly sat on it for a few days while Kilavan was deathly ill.

This proved unacceptable to other parties, and the Dutch wrote that on the day Kilavan died, he had his daughter married to the man who now succeeded him: Tiru Udaya Tevar, also known under his regal name Muttu Vijaya Raghunatha Setupati (r. 1710-25). Besides son-in-law, the new Setupati was probably also a nephew of his predecessor. Further, as he claimed in a letter to the VOC, he was a grandson of Raghunatha Setupati (r. c. 1645-73). Passed over, Bhavani Shankara left Ramnad and in the subsequent years tried to dislodge Muttu Vijaya Raghunatha with the aid of Tanjavur and others on several occasions. But his attempts remained unsuccessful until Muttu Vijaya Raghunatha passed away—on 8 April 1725, at 4 o'clock in the afternoon, as Dutch records specify—at the northern town of Arantangi, where he was defending Ramnad against yet another attack by his rival Bhavani Shankara.

Sources differ on what happened afterwards. According to several texts, Muttu Vijaya Raghunatha left no legitimate children and was succeeded by Tanda Tevar alias Sundareshvara (r. 1725), either his sister's son, son-in-law, or distant cousin. "A general history of the Kings of Rama Naad or the Satoo-Putty Samastanum" says that Muttu Vijaya Raghunatha had formally nominated Tanda as his successor. When the Setupati lay dying, however, his favourite concubine, whose niece was married to Bhavani Shankara, secretly mixed a drug through his medicine, making him forget this nomination. Thus, Bhavani Shankara became the new ruler, but he was dislodged within a month by Tanda—himself dethroned by Bhavani Shankara again after a few more months. While the latter was thus victorious in the end, this work suggests that Tanda was the rightful successor.

Dutch records give another account of the events. While upon Muttu Vijaya Raghunatha's death Tanda probably ascended the throne in the capital Ramanathapuram, Bhavani Shankara straightaway attacked Arantangi, where the deceased king's retinue and troops were still gathered. Assisted by Tanjavur,

Sētopatis of Ramnad," 43-4, 50-4, 74; Kadhivel, *A History of the Maravas*, 33-5; Thiruvengkatachari, *The Setupatis of Ramnad*, 27-30, 37; Raja Ram Rao, *Ramnad Manual*, 221-3; Shulman and Subrahmanyam, "Prince of Poets and Ports," 506-7; Sathyanatha Aiyar, *History of the Nayaks of Madura*, 184, 214; Rangachari, "The History of the Naik Kingdom of Madura," *Indian Antiquary* XLVI, 45; Nelson, *The Madura Country*, vol. III, 205-6, 217.

Bhavani Shankara conquered the town in a matter of days and most of Ramnad's officials there recognised him as the new Setupati (r. 1725-9) by raising both their hands and worshipping him. But other courtiers refused to acknowledge him and some members of the royal family even feared his rule and fled the kingdom or entrenched themselves at the capital. Although backed by Madurai, Tanda was defeated by Bhavani Shankara in August.

Next—as Bhavani Shankara wrote in detail to the VOC in October—while marching with Tanjavur's troops to Ramanathapuram, he caught some hostile chiefs in possession of Ramnad's regalia, including the royal elephant, golden palanquin, throne (*periyapērikai*), umbrella (*kuṭai*), and drum (*mēlsalli*).¹⁷⁷ Having confiscated these which the Dutch called “stately things,” Bhavani Shankara took the capital from another opponent in September. In early October, as he again informed the VOC, he performed the “water-bathing” ceremony, probably a reference to the Navaratri festival. Some accounts say that in the meantime he had married the niece or daughter of what was probably Kilavan Setupati's chief concubine. No doubt, the regalia, the festival, and the wedding were all meant to consolidate his royal aspirations. Nevertheless, Bhavani Shankara seems to have been considered a usurper by most, and besides Tambi (ruling in the 1640s) he is the only Setupati appearing to be lacking in at least one of the dynasty's sculpture galleries, the aforementioned statues with name labels at the Kalyana Mandapa in Rameshvaram's Ramanathasvami Temple (see illustration 7).¹⁷⁸

Among the courtiers who escaped from Ramnad upon Bhavani Shankara's accession to the throne was Kattaya Tevar, chief at Arantangi, maternal uncle of the murdered Tanda Tevar, and married to a daughter of the late Muttu Vijaya Raghunatha Setupati. Perhaps surprisingly, Kattaya fled to Tanjavur, whose ruler Sarabhoji Bhonsle had just assisted this fugitive's opponent Bhavani Shankara. Kattaya was nonetheless welcomed at Tanjavur and later joined by another refugee from Ramnad, Sasivarna Tevar. The latter was related to the royal family through his marriage with another of Muttu Vijaya Raghunatha's daughters, albeit a low-born one, as some sources have it. One text suggests that Sasivarna's father was a milk-brother of the Setupati Kilavan, as both had been breastfed by the former's mother. Like his ancestors, Sasivarna was the chief of the town of Nalkottai in north-west Ramnad, but he had now been dislodged by Bhavani Shankara. Kattaya and Sasivarna thus proved useful allies to one another.

¹⁷⁷ I thank A. Govindankutty Menon for making sense of the Dutch renderings of these Tamil words. The original VOC corruptions are “perieperigij,” “koede,” and “meelsjalli.”

¹⁷⁸ Personal observation (Sept. 1997).

At the Tanjavur court, both men, particularly Sasivarna, stood out for their valour.¹⁷⁹ Literary works relate that a dangerous tiger was killed, combat duels were won, and an assassination attempt on King Sarabhoji was thwarted by either one of them. Impressed, the king decided to help them attack their rival Bhavani Shankara, who had not fulfilled his promise to Sarabhoji that, once on the throne, he would return some land taken from Tanjavur by Kilavan Tevar. Sarabhoji now attached the same condition to his support of Kattaya and Sasivarna, and in 1729 they invaded Ramnad with Tanjavur's troops. Dutch records however explain that after the kingdom's north was conquered, Sarabhoji literally tried to divide and rule. Similarly to Madurai's strategy a century before, he made Bhavani Shankara a proposal that Ramnad be partitioned and distributed among the three contenders, obviously excluding the lands claimed by Tanjavur. Bhavani Sankara refused and was soon defeated and deported to Tanjavur, whereupon Kattaya was installed as Setupati on 17 September (r. 1729-35).

According to virtually all sources, including accounts of the Tanjavur court and the British of several decades later, Ramnad was now divided into five parts, two of which were given to Sasivarna in gratitude for his assistance, while the remainder went to Kattaya. But Dutch reports state that matters did not actually proceed in such an amicable way. They claim that, once Bhavani Shankara was dethroned, Tanjavur's Sarabhoji handed Ramnad over as a land grant to Kattaya and Sasivarna—except the Setupati seat Ramanathapuram, which was assigned to the former—with the instruction to divide it equally between them.

Like the Tanjavur king may have expected, his ambiguous order caused friction between Kattaya and Sasivarna, and the latter was discontented with the arrangement, seemingly aspiring to the Ramnad throne himself. He settled near a town called “Pativenalur” by the Dutch,¹⁸⁰ important for its weekly market, and started opposing Kattaya until Sarabhoji would specify the areas granted to each of them, which never happened. Both men tried to enlist the support of what the VOC termed “Marrua robber-leaders,” local chieftains and commanders of roaming bands belonging to the Maravar caste. The two rivals were apparently so dependent on these chiefs and warriors for the consolidation of their power, that Kattaya invited some of the most important among them to his capital to pardon them for certain crimes and thus win them over.

¹⁷⁹ For an origin myth about Sasivarna Tevar's rise to power, mentioning his heroic deeds in Tanjavur, see Price, *Kingship and Political Practice in Colonial India*, 108. See also J.L.W., “Chronicles of the Marava Country,” *Calcutta Review* 75, 149 (1882), 126.

¹⁸⁰ “Pativenalur” is perhaps modern-day Partibanur, roughly halfway between Ramnad and Madurai. For more information on this place, see Bes, “The Setupatis, the Dutch, and Other Bandits,” 551 (including n. 20).

But in the course of time, many chiefs, courtiers, and common subjects sided with Sasivarna, who took possession of the “Pativenalur” market town and grew increasingly powerful. While Kattaya still relied on Tanjavur, Sasivarna allied himself with Madurai. Luckily for the former, disagreements arose among the Maravar chiefs and some went back to Kattaya. Besides, he begot a son “from the direct Marrua [Maravar] line,” which according to the Dutch was of great importance in securing his position. Thus, two kingdoms gradually emerged from the tumult after Bhavani Shankara’s defeat: Shivagangai, centred on the eponymous town and its environs, including “Pativenalur,” ruled by Sasivarna Tevar, who assumed the title Udaya Raja; and a much shrunken Ramnad, with the old capital Ramanathapuram and the sacred Rameshvaram island, ruled by Kattaya Tevar, the Setupati, who took as his regal name Kumara Muttu Vijaya Raghunatha.¹⁸¹ Nevertheless, Sasivarna, who died in 1739, and his dynasty maintained their claim to the Setupati throne for decades and waged many a war against Ramnad.¹⁸²

¹⁸¹ NA, VOC, no. 1771, f. 1499; no. 1788, f. 1493; no. 1805, ff. 1039v-40; no. 1865, ff. 869v-70; no. 2026, ff. 834v-5; no. 2044, ff. 94v-5; no. 2046, ff. 762-2v; no. 2158, ff. 945-57v: report of mission to Ramnad, letters from Kilakkarai to Tuticorin, from Muttu Vijaya Raghunatha to Nagapattinam, from Tuticorin and Bhavani Shankara to Colombo, from Colombo to Batavia, report on mission of envoys from Ramnad to Colombo, May 1709, Oct. 1710, Feb. 1711, July 1715, Apr., Oct. 1725, Apr. 1726, Sept. 1729-May 1730; BL/AAS, MG, no. 4, pt. 8: “A general history of the kings of Rama Naad or the Satoo-Putty Samastanum,” ff. 187-93; no. 49, pt. 2: “Abstract history of the Marawar,” ff. 27-9 (compiled by the British official S. Lushington in 1800, see f. 5); MT, class III, no. 77: “Regarding the Zemindars of Ramnad,” ff. 73-3v (translated from Tamil in 1817 by one Mr Wheatby, see f. 72); OOV, no. 10, pt. 19: letter from General Joseph Smith at Madras to Brigadier-General Richard Smith concerning Tanjavur’s expedition against Ramnad, Mar. 1771, ff. 225-6; no. 33, pt. 11 (1): extract diary and proceedings, Fort St. George, 1771, “concerning the state of affairs and quarrel between the Nawab and the king of Tanjore,” ff. 162-5 (containing a somewhat confused letter of King Tuljaji II of Tanjavur, c. 1771); no. 33, pt. 11 (2): extract consultations, Fort St. George, 1771, “concerning the origin and state of the Maravars ...,” ff. 169-75; Taylor, *Oriental Historical Manuscripts*, vol. II, Appendix, 51; Mahalingam, *Mackenzie Manuscripts*, vol. I, 180, 226, 243-4; Bes, “The Setupatis, the Dutch, and Other Bandits,” 552-6; Price, *Kingship and Political Practice in Colonial India*, 27-8; K.V.S. Maruthumohan, “Sasivarna Thevar and Formation of Sivagangai Seemai,” *The Quarterly Journal of the Mythic Society* XCVII, 3 (2006), 14-18; Subrahmanyam, *Penumbral Visions*, 160-1; Seshadri, “The Sêtipatis of Ramnad,” 72, 77-82, 84, 87-92, 94; Kadhirlvel, *A History of the Maravas*, 50-61; Thiruvengkatachari, *The Setupatis of Ramnad*, 45-50; Raja Ram Rao, *Ramnad Manual*, 230-1, 233-6; Sathyanatha Aiyar, *History of the Nayaks of Madura*, 224-9; Rangachari, “The History of the Naik Kingdom of Madura,” *Indian Antiquary* XLVI, 209-13; Nelson, *The Madura Country*, vol. III, 247-50.

¹⁸² NA, VOC, no. 2337, ff. 1543v-7v; no. 2403, ff. 1938-8v; no. 2456, f. 217; no. 2459, f. 1599v; no. 2523, ff. 1425-5v; no. 2599, ff. 2310v-1; no. 2666, ff. 2321-3: letter from the king of Shivagangai to Tuticorin, June 1746, correspondence between Tuticorin, Colombo, and Batavia, Aug.-Sept. 1735, May 1737, Mar., May 1739, July 1741, Apr. 1743; DNA, DCGCC, no. 2691, f. 11: final report of Tuticorin’s chief Noël Anthony Lebeck, June 1745. Around 1800, the British official S. Lushington remarked that disagreements on the use of water from the Vaigai River had also caused frequent violent clashes between Ramnad and Shivagangai. See BL/AAS, MG, no. 49, pt. 2: “Abstract history of the Marawar,” f. 29.

It is perhaps not surprising that sources from Ramnad itself portray this partition as a peaceful affair. With the accession of Kattaya, the kingdom lost a considerable part of its territory and power, and in literary works commissioned by him or his successors it may have been tempting to present Shivagangai's secession as a mutual agreement instead of the unwanted outcome of a succession struggle. In any case, Kattaya's kingship remained precarious during the subsequent years. In 1732, he was attacked twice by Tanjavur for not paying the 50,000 *pardaos* promised in return for military assistance against Bhavani Shankara. Indeed, Tanjavur now supported Bhavani Shankara again, who made another effort to gain the Setupati throne.

But Kattaya stayed in power until he died on 12 August 1735, as VOC records say, from a cold, a fever, and a lump on one of his thighs. Two days later, his five- or six-year old son Sivakumara Muttu Vijaya Raghunatha was installed as Setupati (r. 1735-48) and recognised by all courtiers and present Maravar chiefs. During his minority his regent would be the *Daḷavāy* (general) Vairavanatha (or Vairavar) Servaikkarar, although the Dutch would occasionally also report that the regency was in the hands of the boy's mother, probably named Chalabara Nachiar.

Upon Kattaya's passing, Sasivarna, still ruling Shivagangai, sent envoys to Ramnad with the message that he would approve of this succession under the condition that the most important jewels and the golden palanquin of the deceased ruler—together with two elephants, 10,000 *pardaos*, and a fortress—be handed over to him. Although this demand would obviously never be complied with, it demonstrated Sasivarna's continuing claim to Setupati kingship. For, as the Ramnad court wrote to the VOC, at his accession the young Sivakumara Muttu Vijaya Raghunatha received this golden palanquin himself, as well as the red umbrella ("quizepo"),¹⁸³ both signifying Setupati status. His kingship was further consolidated when he celebrated Vijayadasami ("wesiji desemi," as the Dutch spelled it), the tenth and final day of the Navaratri festival.

In late 1741, when Sivakumara Muttu Vijaya Raghunatha was about twelve years old, he performed another ceremony at the Ramanathasvami Temple in Rameshvaram. As he informed the VOC, on this occasion the temple deity bestowed on him great power, a sceptre, various titles, and a palanquin with "curved bamboo." Indian Company employees explained to their superiors that hitherto the young Setupati had been considered a reigning king only in name, whereas now, "following

¹⁸³ I thank Herman Tieken for identifying this term. See also: Herman Tieken (ed.), *Between Colombo and the Cape: Letters in Tamil, Dutch and Sinhala, Sent to Nicolaas Ondaatje from Ceylon, Exile at the Cape of Good Hope (1728-1737)* (New Delhi, 2015), 148-9; Lodewijk Wagenaar, *Galle, VOC-vestiging in Ceylon: Beschrijving van een koloniale samenleving aan de vooravond van de Singalese opstand tegen het Nederlandse gezag, 1760* (Amsterdam, 1994), 222. One Setupati title also calls them "holders of the red umbrella." See: Seshadri, "The Sēṭupatis of Ramnad," 233; Burgess and Naṭeśa Śāstrī, *Tamil and Sanskrit Inscriptions*, 102.

the old custom,” he was inaugurated as a real monarch and then publicly recognised by the people.¹⁸⁴ Earlier Setupatis had usually also been installed at Rameshvaram, and apparently Sivakumara Muttu Vijaya Raghunatha had to reach a certain stage of maturity before he could undergo this procedure and receive all regalia and titles.¹⁸⁵

On 24 December 1748, Sivakumara Muttu Vijaya Raghunatha passed away childless at the approximate age of eighteen. Dutch records do not give the cause of his demise and just mention it happened very unexpectedly, making one wonder whether he died a natural death. The new Setupati, Rakka Tevar (r. 1748-9), one of his predecessor's cousins, was appointed two days later, on the orders of Ramnad's powerful *Daḷavāy* Vellaiyan Servaikkarar and the mother of the deceased ruler, as some local sources say. Nevertheless, VOC documents state that Rakka's accession was soon opposed by a court faction favouring another pretender to the throne, the twelve-year old Sella Tevar, probably a more distant cousin of the previous ruler.

Although Sella was initially forced to flee to Tanjavur, by early December 1749 Rakka had been “kicked out of the throne” by the *daḷavāy*, as the Dutch put it. Thereupon the young Sella was installed as Setupati under his regal name Vijaya Raghunatha (r. 1749-63), with consent of the community. Both “A chronicle of the acts of the Sethupathis” and “A general history of the Kings of Rama Naad or the Satoo-Putty Samastanum” have it that Rakka was dislodged precisely because he did not enjoy this popular consent. Those texts may however have exaggerated this concern with the common people in an effort to conceal another account saying Rakka was simply dethroned because he had turned against the dominating *daḷavāy*.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁴ NA, VOC, no. 2185, ff. 1167-7v; no. 2224, ff. 1611v-19; no. 2290, f. 254; no. 2291, ff. 497-8; no. 2337, ff. 1543-4, 1546v-7v, 1579-80v; no. 2523, f. 1426; no. 2559, f. 1472; no. 8958, ff. 752, 754: report of mission to Ramnad, Feb. 1731, letters from the Ramnad court to Tuticorin and Colombo, Aug. 1735, Jan. 1742, letters from Kilakkarai to Tuticorin, from Tuticorin to Colombo, May-Nov. 1732, Jan., Mar. 1733, Aug.-Sept. 1735, Nov. 1741; BL/AAS, MG, no. 4, pt. 8: “A general history of the kings of Rama Naad or the Satoo-Putty Samastanum,” f. 193; MT, class III, no. 77: “Regarding the Zemindars of Ramnad,” f. 73v; Mahalingam, *Mackenzie Manuscripts*, vol. I, 164 (note *); Bes, “Friendship as Long as the Sun and Moon Shine,” 46, 54-5; Seshadri, “The Sētipatis of Ramnad,” 97-8, 100; Thiruvēnkatachārī, *The Sētipatis of Ramnad*, 50; Raja Ram Rao, *Ramnad Manual*, 236.

¹⁸⁵ According to some traditions, the Setupatis were also installed or received the royal sceptre in Pogalur, about ten miles west of Ramanathapuram, thought to have been Ramnad's initial capital and the place where the first Setupatis originated. See, for example: “Account of the Province of Rámnád, Southern Peninsula of India,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 3, 5 (1836), 174; Boyle, “Chronicles of Southern India,” 45; J.L.W., “The Chronicles of the Marava Country,” 449. Dutch sources however never seem to refer to Pogalur.

¹⁸⁶ NA, VOC, no. 2733, ff. 18-18v, 33v; no. 2735, ff. 1052v-3v; no. 2757, f. 1474: letters from Tuticorin to Colombo, from Colombo to Batavia, Feb., May 1749, Jan. 1750; BL/AAS, MG, no. 4, pt. 8: “A general history of the kings of Rama Naad or the Satoo-Putty Samastanum,” ff. 193-4; *Beknopte historie*, 94; Taylor, *Oriental Historical Manuscripts*, vol. II, Appendix, 52; Bes, “Friendship as Long as the Sun and Moon Shine,” 83-4; idem, “The Setupatis, the Dutch, and Other Bandits,” 560; Seshadri, “The Sētipatis

The years 1763-4 saw the last succession discussed here. As extensively described in VOC documents, Sella died on 30 January 1763, which led to a succession struggle between three court factions, each with its own figurehead. One party consisted of the former *Pradhāni* (prime or financial minister) Damodaram Pillai and the son of the now deceased *Daḷavāy* Vellaiyan Servaikkarakar, the second group of the current *pradhāni* and his supporters, and the third faction of yet other courtiers. At some point, Damodaram managed to place the two-month old Muttu Ramalinga Tevar on the throne (r. 1763-72, 1781-95), who was the sister's son of the previous Setupati. After this infant had been acknowledged by the leading Maravars, Damodaram himself was reinstalled in his former office of *pradhāni*, while Muttu Ramalinga's father, Mappillai Tevar, was to act as his son's regent. To end all competition at court, the other pretenders to the throne and several of their followers were beheaded.

But, still according to the Dutch, animosity immediately arose between Damodaram and Mappillai too. While leading Ramnad's troops in a war against Tanjavur, the former scented a plot hatched by the latter to have him killed on the battlefield. Damodaram then made peace with Tanjavur, enlisted the support of Madurai—now annexed by Arcot—and several Maravar chiefs, and marched towards Ramanathapuram to oust his opponent. In fear, Mappillai had some more competitors decapitated and jailed Damodaram's family. The Nawab of Arcot attempted to mediate between the two rivals, but after Mappillai proved unwilling to cooperate, Damodaram returned to him the signet ring and sword received in his capacity as *pradhāni*, thus entirely withdrawing himself from the court's service. When he subsequently laid siege to the royal fort, Mappillai asked the Dutch for military assistance, but in December 1763 he suddenly died of chicken pox or poison. With no serious competition left, Damodaram now took control of the kingdom. The minor Muttu Ramalinga (Mappillai's son) remained Setupati, however, since Damodaram did not belong to the Maravar caste and therefore could not become king, while his own favourite for the throne was unacceptable to Arcot and the increasingly influential British.¹⁸⁷

Most local texts and secondary literature present slightly different versions of the events. For example, some works state that Muttu Ramalinga's regent was his mother Muttu Tiruvayi Nachiar, sister of the former ruler, whereas other accounts

of Ramnad," 100-2, 104; Kadhivel, *A History of the Maravas*, 84; Thiruvengkatachari, *The Setupatis of Ramnad*, 51; Raja Ram Rao, *Ramnad Manual*, 237; Nelson, *The Madura Country*, vol. III, 293-4.

¹⁸⁷ DNA, DCGCC, no. 2705, ff. 12-14v: final report of Tuticorin's chief Godfried Sweepe, Feb. 1765; NA, VOC, no. 3082, ff. 1157-62, 1453-6: letters from Tuticorin to Colombo, from Colombo to Batavia, Feb.-Mar., Sept.-Oct. 1763, Jan. 1764; Bes, "The Setupatis, the Dutch, and Other Bandits," 561. The accounts in the various Dutch documents differ slightly from each other. Muttu Ramalinga may have been two years old, instead of two months, when he ascended the throne, while Mappillai Tevar perhaps died in Dec. 1764 rather than 1763.

Table 8: Setupatis of Ramnad (until 1790s), regnal dates, relations to predecessors, and further remarks.

	name (regal / personal)	accession date	ending date	relation to predecessors	remarks († = natural death at end of reign)
1	Udaiyan Setupati / Sadaika Tevar	c. 1605	c. 1622	descendant of mythical line	†, installed by Madurai Nayakas
2	Kuttan Setupati	c. 1622	c. 1636	1st son of 1	†, childless?
3	Dalavay Setupati / Sadaika Tevar II	c. 1636 & c. 1640	c. 1640 & c. 1645	brother of 2 & 2nd son of 1, or adopted son of 2	his nomination of 5 contested by 4, dethroned and re-installed by Madurai, murdered by 4?
4	Peddanna Nayaka Tevar alias Tambi	c. 1640	c. 1640	low-born half-brother of 3 & son of 1 or 2, or brother's son of 3	installed and dethroned by Madurai
5	Raghunatha (Tirumalai) Setupati	c. 1645	1673, c. Apr.	sister's son or son-in-law of 3	†, parts of Ramnad first ruled by 4 and brothers of 5
6	Surya Tevar	1673, c. Apr.	1673, c. Oct.	(half-)brother's son or 1st son of 5	childless, killed by Madurai
7	Athana Tevar	1673, c. Oct.	late 1673	brother of 6 & son of 5, uncle or cousin of 6, distant relative, or unrelated	minor, killed by Madurai
8	Raghunatha Setupati / Kilavan Tevar	late 1673	1710, Oct. 12	low-born son or cousin of 6, or uncle's grandson of 7, or unrelated	†, elected? contested by several
9	Muttu Vijaya Raghunatha Setupati / Tiru Udaya Tevar	1710, Oct. 12	1725, Apr. 8 (4 pm)	sister's son & son-in-law of 8, & adopted by 8? grandson of 5?	†, contested by 11, childless?
10	Sundareshvara Setupati / Tanda Tevar	1725, Apr.	1725, Aug.	sister's son or son-in-law of 9, or great-grandson of 8's father	killed by 11 and Tanjavur

	name (regal / personal)	accession date	ending date	relation to predecessors	remarks († = natural death at end of reign)
11	Bhavani Shankara Tevār	1725, Apr./ Aug.	1729, Sept.	low-born son of 8, “in-law” of 9 through concubine?	dethroned by 12 and Tanjavur
12	Kumara Muttu Vijaya Raghunatha Setupati / Kattaya Tevār	1729, Sept. 17	1735, Aug. 12	maternal uncle of 10 & son-in-law of 9	†, contested, leading to secession of Shivagangai at accession
13	Sivakumara Muttu Vijaya Raghunatha Setupati	1735, Aug. 14	1748, Dec. 24	son of 12	†? minor at accession, childless
14	Rakka Tevār	1748, Dec. 26	1749, c. Dec.	cousin of 13 or 12	dethroned for 15
15	Vijaya Raghunatha Setupati / Sella Tevār	1749, c. Dec.	1763, Jan. 30	aunt's grandson of 13	†? minor at accession, no sons
16	Muttu Ramalinga Setupati	1763, c. Feb. & 1781, Apr.	1772, June & 1795, Mar.	sister's son of 15	minor at accession, contested, dethroned twice by Arcot and British, interlude of Arcot rule in 1772-80

For sources, see the references in the preceding section, Chapter 1, and the Epilogue.

say this position fell to the young king's uncle, who wished to become Setupati himself and imprisoned the boy. Despite such differences, nearly all sources, including even most local chronicles, refer to the rivalry and brutalities accompanying this succession. The violence was apparently so excessive that only one or two texts, among which “A chronicle of the acts of the Sethupathis,” chose to fully ignore it.¹⁸⁸ The further fortunes of Muttu Ramalinga—in 1772 temporarily deposed by a coalition of Arcot and the British—and his successors are briefly considered in the Epilogue.

¹⁸⁸ BL/AAS, MG, no. 4, pt. 8: “A general history of the kings of Rama Naad or the Satoo-Putty Samastanum,” ff. 194-6; MT, class III, no. 77: “Regarding the Zemindars of Ramnad,” f. 74; Taylor, *Oriental Historical Manuscripts*, vol. II, Appendix, 52; Mahalingam, *Mackenzie Manuscripts*, vol. I, 180; Seshadri, “The Sētopatis of Ramnad,” 116-17, 120-3; Kadhivel, *A History of the Maravas*, 142-6, 160; Thiruvēkatachārī, *The Sētopatis of Ramnad*, 52; Raja Ram Rao, *Ramnad Manual*, 239-40; Nelson, *The Madura Country*, vol. III, 294.

Looking at successions in Ramnad until the 1760s, one gets the impression of a dynasty characterised by almost continuous instability that nevertheless held its own against many internal and external threats for over one and a half centuries. Leaving out Muttu Ramalinga's interrupted rule but including the brief take-over by Tambi, fifteen Setupatis sat on the throne between approximately 1605 and 1763. The average reign thus covered slightly over a decade, placing these men among the shortest ruling kings discussed here.

This low average is not merely the result of the five reigns that lasted no longer than a year. It appears that virtually every succession was opposed and only about six rulers died a natural death. The few uncontested transitions nearly always resulted in a minor (and once even a suckling) becoming king, under the regency of the most powerful courtier. But besides these four infants, there were only a few other dynasts who did not fully qualify for the throne. These were the two or three men regarded as low-born sons of previous Setupatis. As for women rulers, despite the alleged succession rule that in the absence of a king's son, a king's daughter was the first heir, no queen ever reigned over Ramnad during the period under study, while there was just one possible case of female regency.

Thus, the dynasty's volatile nature did not wholly stem from ignoring the recommendations in political discourses not to crown women or illegitimate children. Rather, other succession patterns were prominent in Ramnad, apart from the usual role of courtiers. First, successions from father to son or from brother to brother were relatively rare, especially in the eighteenth century. Instead, quite a number of rulers were followed by cousins or nephews (four of these probably being sister's sons), various in-laws, or more distant relatives. The pool of candidates for the throne was apparently larger in Ramnad than in the other kingdoms, and therefore the potential for clashes was probably higher.

Second, various sources state that subjects from beyond court circles, like local Maravar chiefs, had some say in the installation of new kings, or were even entitled to choose them. Dutch records in particular refer to this. They mention kings who needed "permission of the community" (*toestemming der gemeente*), were "publicly introduced to the people" in the capital (*den volke aldaar publicq voorgesteld*), or were "recognised and accepted as their legitimate monarch" (*voor haaren wettigen vorst erkent en aangenomen*) by Maravar leaders from around the kingdom. The documents also speak of a ceremony where courtiers and warrior chiefs publicly acknowledged the new ruler by raising both hands and worshipping him. VOC documents on the other kingdoms never refer to anything comparable. Admittedly, these occasions could have been orchestrated, but it was apparently important to

engage the wider public when a Setupati ascended the throne.¹⁸⁹ The prominent role of Maravar commanders in Shivagangai's secession from Ramnad is likely an indication of this involvement as well.

Third, the great influence of neighbouring kingdoms stands out. Initially, the Nayakas of Madurai played a decisive part in many successions, first installing the Setupati dynasty, then appointing and dethroning several rulers, next temporarily dividing the kingdom into three, and finally assassinating two kings. When Ramnad had largely broken away from Madurai at the turn of the eighteenth century, the Tanjavur Bhonsles came to interfere in succession struggles, shifting their support between whichever contender promised them land and tribute in return, and managing to partition the kingdom permanently. In the course of the eighteenth century, as Tanjavur's power diminished, Arcot took over this role and even removed the Setupati house for some time.

Altogether, an exceptionally wide range of parties was involved in Ramnad's successions: the extended royal family, local leaders, neighbouring kingdoms, and of course courtiers. This seems to have accounted for the instability of the Setupati dynasty and the often violent transitions between its consecutive rulers.

Conclusions

After discussing around ninety successions under nine dynasties in five states, this chapter concludes with a general analysis of these events by making three comparisons: between sources, between rules and reality, and between dynasties.

Starting with the various kinds of sources, we have seen that events as they are described in European documents differ from how they are portrayed in south Indian accounts, like literary and epigraphic texts. It has also become clear that significant variations exist within these two sets of sources, particularly among those deriving from courts. Chronicles, inscriptions, and visual materials all reflect the views of the rulers patronising those sources. Therefore, these materials may label earlier kings as unlawful usurpers and even leave them out, or, on the contrary, depict usurpers as peacefully installed rulers. Monarchs portrayed as legitimate heirs in one text can be presented as low-born violators in another. That becomes manifest, for instance, when two collateral dynastic lines competed with one another, as happened with almost all royal houses under consideration. Often, however, sources created by individuals or family branches who lost succession

¹⁸⁹ NA, VOC, no. 2026, f. 834v; no. 2158, f. 950v; no. 2337, f. 1543v; no. 2757, f. 1474. But see also Scharfe, *The State in Indian Tradition*, 65-6.

struggles appear not to have survived. As a consequence, many remaining dynastic chronicles, usually created under the last few rulers, give versions of past successions favouring those later kings and the lines of their direct ancestors.

But at the same time, these works thereby show how rulers attempted to legitimise their own and their forefathers' positions and how they downplayed opponents. The main elements employed here are legitimate descent and nomination by predecessors, ascribed rather than achieved characteristics. These qualities were apparently considered most important to justify one's place on the throne—despite the emphasis in political treatises on a combination of ancestry and ability. Whereas references to achieved attributes like valour, wisdom, and physical strength are common in dynastic foundation stories, those motifs rarely figure in textual passages claiming right of succession. It seems that once a dynasty was established, personal capacities were no longer considered as significant as ancestry. Of course, in reality these aspects were often essential, as European accounts attest.

The previous sections demonstrate how Dutch and other European accounts contribute to our knowledge of successions. Those “foreign” sources obviously had their own limitations: their authors may have misunderstood certain court machinations, been misinformed by local rumours, or intentionally exaggerated political upheavals to explain lulls in trade or cover up corruption. Still, these documents make sufficiently clear that more often than not, transitions described as peaceful in south Indian texts were in fact violent conflicts. According to European records, the outcomes of succession struggles were not principally determined by descent and nomination, but equally by ambitions, strategies, networks, and plain fate. Thus, external sources do not merely show that south Indian texts were constructions endorsed by their patrons, but also which events local works chose to ignore, and by consequence, what purposes these texts served.

With regard to the discrepancy between formal succession principles and the actual unfolding of succession struggles, two matters stand out. First, under all dynasties of Vijayanagara and its heirs, notions on succession rights appear to have been rather unspecific and flexible, and also were not clearly documented, at least not in surviving texts. Based on both pre-modern Indian works on statecraft and modern reconstructions by historians, it seems there was a general preference for adult sons or brothers, born of official queens, as successors. If these were unavailable, other legitimate male family members were acceptable, often without much further prioritising.¹⁹⁰ Ramnad may have been somewhat exceptional, but it is unclear whether its alleged succession rules were actually recorded somewhere.

¹⁹⁰ See also Burling, *The Passage of Power*, 58.

By and large, however, the courts appear not to have been deeply concerned with principles of succession. Extensive discourses on politics by some of the kings themselves—such as the *Āmuktamālyada* by Vijayanagara's Krishna Raya and the *Śivatattva ratnākara* by Ikkeri's Basavappa Nayaka I—largely ignore the subject. It is of course possible that this vagueness was deliberate, allowing the most capable member of the royal family to ascend the throne, thereby aiming at dynastic continuation.

Second, insofar as preferences did exist, they were frequently disregarded. Under the last two Vijayanagara houses (for which substantial information is available) and all but one of the successor dynasties, only about one-fifth to one-third of the successions involved fathers and mature legitimate sons. Transitions between mature legitimate brothers occurred even less often. In many other instances, successions went against all supposed principles. Together, the imperial Tuluva and Aravidu houses and the succeeding dynasties included around fifteen minors, five women, and six low-born relatives on the throne, accounting for about one-third of all rulers. The remainder mostly comprised paternal and maternal cousins, nephews, uncles, and grandsons—successions not discouraged, but not recommended either, in political treatises.

The relative paucity of successions by sons or brothers under these houses is surprising when compared with the alleged high frequency of such transitions among other dynasties throughout India's past. Modern-day surveys of relationships between consecutive rulers from antiquity until the early modern period show an overwhelming majority of filial and fraternal successors. In the same vein, much secondary literature on individual dynasties preceding Vijayanagara claims that successions were largely peaceful.¹⁹¹

Therefore, either Vijayanagara and its heirs were exceptional in this regard, or the south Indian sources on which those surveys are based portray successions in subjective ways, aiming at legitimising the rulers who commissioned these sources through supposedly direct descent from predecessors. The latter option seems more likely, considering the differences between local and external sources discussed

¹⁹¹ For surveys of large numbers of dynasties, see: C.H. Philips (ed.), *Handbook of Oriental History* (London, 1963), 82-94; S.B. Bhattacharje, *Encyclopaedia of Indian Events and Dates* (New Delhi, 1995), C7-51; David Henige, *Princely States of India: A Guide to Chronology and Rulers* (Bangkok, 2004), passim, especially 3-4. For individual pre-Vijayanagara dynasties, see, for instance: K.R. Basava Raja, "The Central Government under the Chālukyas of Kalyāṇa," in M.S. Nagaraja Rao (ed.), *The Chālukyas of Kalyāṇa (Seminar Papers)* (Bangalore, 1983), 91-3; K.A. Nilakanta Sastri, "The Chālukyas of Kalyāṇi," in G. Yazdani (ed.), *The Early History of the Deccan* (London, 1960), pts I-VI, 382; A.S. Altekar, "The Yādavas of Seunadeśa," in idem, pts VII-XI, 557; N. Venkataramanayya and M. Somasekhara Sarma, "The Kākatīyas of Warangal," in idem, 670-1; Y. Subbarayalu, *South India under the Cholas* (New Delhi, 2012), 212.

above. In that case, successions under dynasties before Vijayanagara did not generally proceed differently from those investigated in the present study—and thus also regularly witnessed rulers not favoured by political treatises, likely installed after violent competition—in spite of what the only available, local sources may claim.

If one succession principle can be deduced from the events described in the previous sections, it simply is the condition that a new ruler be part of the royal family.¹⁹² All dynasts, including those two dozen minors, widows, and bastards, were somehow related to previous kings. But even this guideline was interpreted in different ways, as appears from instances where in-laws ascended the throne. While in Vijayanagara succession through the female line was reason to speak of a new dynasty—demonstrated by the transition from the Tuluvas to the Aravidus—in Ramnad this was not considered a change of dynasty, as several cases there illustrate.

Anyhow, each and every succession could be contested, including those following the rules set by discourses on statecraft. Thus, mature legitimate sons of former rulers were dethroned, brothers succeeded even when sons fitting all requirements were available, and long-reigning family branches were deposed by collateral lines. On the whole, principles of succession appear to have been neither elaborate nor effective under any of the imperial and successor dynasties.¹⁹³

The last comparison discussed here is that between the royal houses. In general, some dynasties were more secure than others, for example with regard to the length of reigns, the frequency and intensity of successions struggles, and kinship relations between consecutive rulers. Under the rather stable Tanjavur Nayakas, the average king ruled for nearly thirty years, competition was of a limited scale, and successors—and even their rivals—were all sons of previous rulers. The dynasty that came next in Tanjavur, the Bhonsle house, was more volatile but still relatively stable. Apart from a short, atypical interlude of some violent successions and brief reigns by a widow and a putative son, the Bhonsles ruled for about fifteen years on an average, accessions to the throne were contested only in some cases and without much impact beyond the royal family, and all kings were sons or brothers of their predecessors. Besides, almost all Bhonsle rulers died a natural death.

At the other end of the spectrum were the Setupatis of Ramnad, whose average reign lasted about a decade, whose consecutive rulers were often distant relatives, and under whom nearly every succession was opposed—often leading to widespread confusion and twice even to the kingdom's division. Further, about half of

¹⁹² See also Burling, *The Passage of Power*, 58.

¹⁹³ For a somewhat different view, see Narayana Rao and Subrahmanyam, "Ideologies of State Building," 231.

the Setupatis were killed or otherwise dislodged, and with four infants and two low-born sons this house numbered comparatively many “unqualified” kings.

Between these extremes, one can place the houses of Vijayanagara, Ikkeri, and Madurai, each for different reasons. In the two latter kingdoms, monarchs occupied the throne for relatively long periods, close to fifteen years on an average. But of the approximately seventeen rulers under both Nayaka dynasties, just around ten died a natural death while seven faced opposition when ascending the throne. Under both houses, about half of the successors were their predecessors’ sons or brothers, while in each kingdom “unqualified” monarchs included two females and three or four minors. An additional complication, especially in Ikkeri, was long-lasting competition between dynastic branches.

Vijayanagara’s dynasties all witnessed substantially shorter average reigns, hovering around a decade, and accessions to the throne were often contested, frequently leading to dethronements and assassinations. Successions from father to son or from brother to brother were about as common as in Ikkeri and Madurai, however, while under the four imperial houses together there were only about five cases of minors or illegitimate relatives on the throne and queens never reigned at all. The number of “unqualified” emperors was therefore very low.

In sum: it appears that with regard to succession practices and dynastic stability, Vijayanagara, Ikkeri, and Madurai were positioned more or less in the middle, whereas Tanjavur and Ramnad occupied opposite ends of the scale. There may be several reasons why these two kingdoms stood out. In Ramnad, an unusually large number of parties were involved in court politics: a very extended royal family, various kinds of courtiers, local Maravar chieftains, and several neighbouring kingdoms. Therefore, the potential for competition between pretenders and for the exploitation of this rivalry by others was high. With large pools of both candidates for the throne and external parties, conflicts could easily arise and then quickly expand. Both groups appear to have been smaller in the other kingdoms—especially Tanjavur—generally seeing fewer royal contenders, interfering neighbours, or independent-minded local chiefs. These chiefs were however an important factor in the vast Vijayanagara empire, where many a pretender could build up a local power base far away from the capital, either to seize the throne or assume regional autonomy.

Ramnad’s and Tanjavur’s exceptional positions might be related to their geography and demography. Located in a zone of dry wasteland and forests, Ramnad was thinly inhabited and roving groups of warriors and herders were common. Such mobile, autonomous bands were instrumental in the kingdom’s final partition. Its political structure seems to have been relatively open and flexible, making access to the court comparatively easy. Tanjavur, by contrast, was based in the fertile Kaveri delta, dominated by farmland and sedentary communities, resulting in a

high population density. Thus, its society was highly stratified, preventing social mobility, and had long been controlled by an elite of kings and priests solidly institutionalised and religiously sanctioned. This could have curtailed the influence of outsiders on dormant tensions at court and kept succession struggles limited in terms of both participants and impact.¹⁹⁴

We now return to the discussion on the ambiguity of succession struggles, mentioned in this chapter's introduction. Did such clashes actually threaten dynasties or did they serve as necessary periods of transition, testing the court's balance of power and reshuffling the political landscape? As this chapter demonstrates, succession struggles did both. They provided opportunities for capable people—on and around the throne—to increase their influence, do away with incapable rivals, reset internal and external relations, and thereby secure the continuity of the dynasty, the court, and the state. The lack of specific and forceful succession principles may therefore have had some positive consequences, allowing for flexibility and progress.

However, opposition between pretenders could also lead to political fragmentation and even dynastic demise. Further, although brothers were generally considered to be among the most preferred successors, hostilities were often the result of fraternal friction. Indeed, rivalry between brothers—regularly spilling over into subsequent generations and causing long-lasting, potentially dangerous collateral lines—seems to have been the most common and significant form of competition under all royal houses. These conflicts would usually come to involve courtiers, local chiefs, and neighbouring kingdoms, sometimes with fatal consequences for the dynasties.

It appears that the various royal families adopted different strategies to deal with opposing relatives and collateral branches. Madurai's Nayakas chose an incorporative approach by recognising a hereditary line of secondary rulers, which however eventually contributed to the dynasty's fall. Ikkeri's Nayakas, by contrast, seem to have left this issue unaddressed for a long time, until one branch almost entirely annihilated the other. While most houses resorted to bloody confrontations only intermittently, Tanjavur's Nayakas appear to have dealt with the problem most effectively—if most violently—by killing, imprisoning, or blinding rivaling brothers on a seemingly regular basis. All in all, both succession principles and succession struggles remained ambivalent phenomena,¹⁹⁵ for which Vijayanagara and its heirs apparently never managed to develop satisfactory solutions.

¹⁹⁴ For discussions on geographic, demographic, and societal zones in Ramnad and Tanjavur, see for instance: Price, *Kingship and Political Practice in Colonial India*, 9-10; Bes, "The Setupatis, the Dutch, and Other Bandits," 545-6, 563-6; Shulman, "On South Indian Bandits and Kings," 288-90, 301-6; Subrahmanyam, *Penumbral Visions*, 226. See also Chapter 1.

¹⁹⁵ See also Burling, *The Passage of Power*, 67. For a Eurasia-wide perspective, see Duindam, "The Court as a Meeting Point," 34-5.

One more question has remained unanswered in this chapter: what became of Sadashiva Nayaka, the wandering prince who possessed so many qualifications to sit on Ikkeri's throne and yet was outsmarted by Queen Chennammaji? His request for military assistance was politely turned down by the Dutch, as it was by the Portuguese and the Maratha King Sambhaji, although a representative of the latter provided him with a guard of twenty men. Pointing to his succession rights, Sadashiva even contacted the Ikkeri court itself, including Chennammaji. She was courteous enough to send him a handsome sum of money, 2,000 *pagodas*, to enable him to support himself. All the Dutch did was lend him 25 *pagodas*, present him with a small gift of spices, and allow him to camp on the grounds of their factory in Vengurla for a few days.

Thus, Sadashiva had no choice but to continue moving around south India, looking for allies and devising strategies to become king.¹⁹⁶ He would never be one, however, lacking a healthy dose of luck and, especially, the right connections. The people forming the bulk of such connections, courtiers of all ranks and kinds, are investigated in the next chapter.

¹⁹⁶ NA, VOC, no. 1463, ff. 439v-40; no. 1474, ff. 210v-13, 329v-32; no. 1593, ff. 7-7v: letters from "Sadaasjiwe Neijke king of Carnatica" at Vengurla to the Dutch commissioner-general, from the *commandeur* at Quilon to Commissioner Van Rheede, from Cochin to Batavia, report on Vengurla and "Canara," Feb.-Mar., June 1689, Dec. 1697. See also Shastry, *Goa-Kanara Portuguese Relations*, 216. A VOC document from 1703 mentions a son of Shivappa II's brother (Sadashiva?), Kasiyya Bhadrappa, whom the Dutch considered the rightful heir to Ikkeri's throne. Backed by Mughal troops, he invaded Ikkeri and nearly besieged Bednur. In spite of this and efforts to win Ikkeri's subjects over, the pretender was defeated by King Basavappa, as the Mughal troops were withdrawn to fight the Maratha King Shivaji. See NA, VOC, no. 1694, ff. 75-6: report on trade in Ikkeri, Mar. 1703. For a Dutch reference from 1697 to what probably was the same person, then supported by Mysore, see NA, VOC, no. 1593, f. 7v: letter from Cochin to Batavia, Dec. 1697.

