



Sex, Repression, and Sanskritization in Sri Lanka?

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*The 1987 Stirling
Award Essay:
Sex, Repression, and
Sanskritization in
Sri Lanka?*

DENNIS B. MCGILVRAY

Since 1952, when the concept of Sanskritization was first utilized by M. N. Srinivas in his study of the Coorgs of western India, the idea has been a useful, if at times ambiguous, tool in the analysis of caste hierarchies and social mobility patterns in South Asia. Briefly stated, Sanskritization is a specific type of Hindu reference-group behavior where the values, beliefs, and rituals of orthodox Brahmanical Hinduism, often (but not always) embodied in Sanskrit texts, are adopted by lower ranking castes in status emulation of those higher ranking castes who already display them. The concept has been applied widely and examined critically (Staal 1963), but only recently has there been an attempt to utilize Sanskritization as part of a psychogenetic explanation of South Asian religious pantheons. I refer to the monumental study by Gananath Obeyesekere,

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The Cult of the Goddess Pattini (1984), which includes as one of its diverse intellectual strands an argument for the key role of Sanskritic Hindu child socialization in transforming the benign Sinhalese Buddhist goddess Pattini into the ferocious Tamil Hindu goddess Kāli. I hasten to add that Obeyesekere's book contains a great deal more than this, including an unparalleled ethnographic and textual documentation of the Pattini cult, a stimulating reinterpretation of Sri Lankan medieval religious history, and a number of provocative psychoanalytic interpretations of Buddhist and Hindu myths, rituals, and cults. I have chosen to discuss only one component of his opus here because of its empirical connections with my own fieldwork in Sri Lanka and its larger relevance to problems of theoretical validation in psychological anthropology.

THE GODDESS PATTINI, ALSO KNOWN AS KANNAKI

Pattini is a goddess whose cult is today increasingly moribund but was once historically widespread among the Sinhalese Buddhists of Sri Lanka. She is still widely worshipped by one group of Hindu Tamils—those living on the east coast of the island, where I have done most of my fieldwork. The name of the goddess means “wife” in Sanskrit, and this reflects her mythological identity as the loyal and chaste wife of a philandering husband in the south Indian Tamil epic, *Cilappatikāram* (Adigal 1965). In this famous poem, the goddess is called Kaṇṇaki and her wayward husband is called Kōvalan, names by which she and her consort are still better known in the Tamil regions of Sri Lanka today.

The gist of the story is that Kōvalan took up with a dancing girl soon after his marriage to Kaṇṇaki. As a perfect embodiment of the faithful wifely ideal, Kaṇṇaki did not complain, and when Kōvalan eventually returned to her, she gave him her precious anklet to pawn for money. They traveled to the south Indian city of Madurai, where a dishonest goldsmith used the precious anklet to incriminate Kōvalan on charges of stealing a similar anklet which he (the goldsmith) had pilfered from the queen. Duped, the king had Kōvalan executed. When Kaṇṇaki, waiting patiently among some suburban cowherds, learned of this injustice, she located Kōvalan's corpse and resurrected him with her divine power. Then she confronted the Pandyan king, who fell dead with shame, and ripping off her left breast, she tossed it toward the city of Madurai, which burned to the ground from the heat of her righteous anger. Later, after her

temper had been soothed and cooled by the cowherds, she ascended to the heavens as a goddess. Today, in both the Sinhalese Buddhist and Tamil Hindu versions of her cult, Pattini/Kaṇṇaki is worshipped annually in order to “cool” the heat of her anger, thereby promoting rainfall and suppressing disease for another year.

One of Obeyesekere’s goals is to trace how the Pattini cult has undergone systematic transformations under different historical and cultural influences and to isolate psychological factors that may have influenced these changes. Starting with roots in various West Asian goddess cults that could have reached south India through Arab and Greek traders around the time of Christ, Obeyesekere traces the “peregrinations of Pattini” (Kemper 1986), contending against received scholarly opinion that her earliest appearance in south India is not as a Hindu goddess, but instead as a Buddhist or Jaina goddess popular with merchants in Kerala. He argues that Pattini was probably carried to Sri Lanka by Kerala Buddhists and Jains who fled the Hindu persecutions of the late medieval period (8th–14th centuries A.D.). Many of these Keralites would have settled among the Sinhalese Buddhists of the western districts, but Obeyesekere surmises that some may also have settled in the Tamil districts of the east coast, and there gradually have become Hinduized.

In a Buddhist cultural environment with many kinship and social patterns similar to those of south India, the Sinhalese goddess Pattini retained an essentially benign supernatural character as the ideal vision of a stoic and suffering wife. Pattini, like another Sinhalese goddess, Kiri Amma (“Milk Mother”), is believed capable of bringing rain and curing illness if her angry “heat” is ritually cooled. But as Obeyesekere takes pains to insist, the Sinhalese Pattini does not cause these problems, she only cures them. Her image is still basically that of the ideal wife: loyal, chaste, rational, capable only of righteous anger. Looking for parallels in the Hindu pantheon, Obeyesekere argues that Pattini is psychologically isomorphic with Pārvati, steadfast wife of Siva, a goddess who is also known to have suffered some perfectly outrageous mythological behavior on the part of her “erotic ascetic” husband (O’Flaherty 1973).

HINDU GODDESSES: SANSKRITIZATION AND PSYCHOGENESIS

Obeyesekere notes that the Sinhalese Buddhist pantheon is predominantly male and that Pattini and Kiri Amma are the only fe-

male deities at the level of full divinity.¹ In contrast, the Hindu pantheon of the Tamils and other groups on the Indian subcontinent is conspicuously stocked with full-fledged goddesses of all kinds. Obeyesekere argues that the Hindu pantheon offers a wider range, even a polarity, of divine female personality types. At one extreme is the sacred cow, a “mother” wholly devoted to giving nourishment and love to everyone (such as Kāma Dhenu, the mythic, ever-lactating, wish-fulfilling cow), although Hindus do not actually worship cows in temples. At the other extreme are the ferocious and terrifying forms of the goddess, such as the bloodthirsty Kāli, who is clearly the focus of an institutionalized temple cult. Obeyesekere’s aim is to compare Buddhist versus Hindu projections of the divine female, so he sets up an experimental field whose poles are defined at one extreme by the “ethical and rational Pattini” of the Sinhalese Buddhist pantheon and, at the other extreme, by the more dangerous Hindu goddesses, such as “the amoral, irrationally destructive Bhagavati [Kāli]” worshipped in Kerala in south India (1984:540).²

What is the crucial difference between the Buddhist and the Hindu cultural systems that produces such discrepant forms of the goddess in the two neighboring religions? There are a number of traits, such as cross-cousin marriage, that are shared by the Sinhalese and their closest Hindu neighbors, the Tamils, but overriding these is the unequal impact of Sanskritization. Obeyesekere constructs what he calls a Weberian “ideal type” characterization of the north Indian Brahmanical Hindu worldview and value system, describing it as an extremely influential culture complex which, in its historical “descent southward” from the Gangetic plain, has exerted a profound effect on thought and behavior throughout South Asia (1984:425, 440). The influence of Sanskritization is now strong in Hindu south India and in the northern Hindu Tamil district of Jaffna in Sri Lanka, says Obeyesekere, but still relatively weak in the southern Buddhist Sinhalese districts of Sri Lanka, presumably because the Buddhist *sangha* already monopolizes the high status religious positions which in Hindu society would be filled by Brahman priests, the primary agents of Sanskritization.

The final step is to explain how Obeyesekere gets from Sanskritization to bipolar Hindu goddesses. His method is to utilize a streamlined version of the projective hypothesis first adumbrated by Freud in his essays on religion, and later utilized by Kardiner

(1945), Whiting and Child (1953), Spiro (1982) and others. In addition to its accreted historical and philosophical aspects, a religious pantheon—according to Obeyesekere—is a projection of important psychological pressures and conflicts engendered during the process of child socialization. Sanskritization, by its repressive impact on female sexual morality and its strict emphasis on wifely submission to the husband, serves to create a child socialization milieu that fosters an ambivalent view of mothers, an ambivalence that is later unconsciously projected onto the Hindu pantheon in the form of bipolar types of “mother” goddesses, for example, the cow versus Kālī. To understand what happens in a family subjected to Sanskritic pressures, we must first understand the sort of relationship between husband and wife that is promoted by north Indian Brahmanical *pativrata* ideals and kinship institutions.

According to Brahmanic ideology, the goals of marriage are *dharma* (“religious duty”), *praja* (“progeny”) and *rati* (“pleasure”); thus sex is last in importance, and only a low caste *sudra* would marry primarily for pleasure. . . . To sum up: according to Brahmanic theory the ideal for woman is *pativrata* [wifely devotion]: its concomitants are virginity at marriage, chastity as the wifely goal, unassertiveness and submissiveness, and unquestioning loyalty to the husband. [1984:430]

There are additional Brahmanical beliefs and practices that serve to reinforce or implement these strong patriarchal values, such as treating marriage as an indissoluble religious sacrament that must be performed by a Brahman priest; expecting the wife to honor her husband as a deity by eating the leftovers from his plate; demanding there be male offspring to perform one’s funeral rites; and strictly prohibiting the remarriage of widows. Obeyesekere assumes that these values must be “taught in very early childhood, as part of the socialization of the female child” (1984:431). In north India and many other parts of the subcontinent where descent is patrilineal and residence is patrilocal, the bride is subjected to further psychological brutality at the hands of her in-laws, particularly her husband’s mother, who demands obedience and servility from the young daughter-in-law and may even regulate the frequency of her sexual relations with her husband. These and other well-known features of north Indian kinship and patrilineal joint family values are vividly summarized by Obeyesekere, who contends that they are all part of a unified package of Sanskritic ideas associated with Brahmanical forms of worship and religious ritual. Furthermore, Obeyesekere proceeds on the assumption that Brahmanical forms of rit-

ual and iconography may be taken as indirect but valid evidence of concomitant Brahmanical marriage patterns that are not actually observed.

Obeyesekere's basic psychogenetic thesis is that in families governed by Sanskritic/Brahmanical values, a proper wife will experience severe repression of her sex and aggression drives as she submits to the asceticism and strict authority of her husband. Her repressed sexuality and aggression will naturally seek an outlet, and given her seclusion within the home, this means that she will redirect these drives toward her children. Because of the conflicting nature of these drives, as well as the alternate ways of coping with them, the mother's behavior toward her young children will tend to be inconsistent and unpredictable: sometimes the mother will be unstintingly warm and nurturant, and at other times she will be irrationally punitive and hostile. As they achieve adulthood, her children (but especially her sons, since Obeyesekere emphasizes the Oedipal factor) will harbor a profoundly ambivalent image of women and mothers that will be unconsciously projected onto the religious pantheon as a "split" between the two contradictory types of goddesses.

PERMUTATIONS OF PATTINI

Thus far, the theory represents an application of basic psychoanalytic concepts to South Asian cultural data that is in the tradition of Morris Carstairs (1957), and is also similar in many respects to the recent work of Sudhir Kakar (1981, 1983). What makes Obeyesekere's study unique and especially valuable, however, is his ingenious attempt to test the theory. Following a methodological precedent first set in kinship studies (Yalman 1967), Obeyesekere seeks to validate his general theory of goddesses by using it to explain a pattern of regional variation within Sri Lanka itself, treating the island as a sort of sociocultural laboratory.

According to Obeyesekere, the Sinhalese Buddhists remain the *least* Sanskritized group in Sri Lanka, a fact reflected in their image of Pattini as a loyal, rational, stoic goddess who expresses a balance between benevolence and righteous anger. Ironically, Pattini has the most restrained "Brahmanical" personality precisely because her Buddhist worshippers have the least Brahmanical family patterns. Looking to the Hindu "north," which for Obeyesekere starts in Jaffna and continues across Palk Strait into south India, he con-

tends that Pattini (Kaṇṇaki) is not worshipped there at all. Her place in Jaffna is taken, says Obeyesekere, by avatars of the cruel, unpredictable goddess Kāli, indicating that the Sanskritic repression of wives has polarized enough children's psyches to make the level-headed Pattini no longer meaningful or attractive as a religious symbol (1984:446). In a Hindu temple in the northeastern Sri Lankan town of Mullaittivu, Obeyesekere discovered a goddess named Pattini who actually displayed the sorts of ferocious personality traits and mythic exploits typically associated with Kāli. As a matter of ethnographic record, however, there is solid evidence of widespread Pattini (Kaṇṇaki) worship in the Jaffna peninsula (Cartman 1957:76–77; Pfaffenberger 1977:194–197, 1982:161–164), indicating that Obeyesekere has not fully appreciated the nature of the inter-regional variation that does exist.³

Finally, on the east coast of the island, Obeyesekere claims to have found the best intermediate case, a mixed constellation of Hindu goddesses that reflects a transitional phase of *partial* Sanskritization and *increasing* repression of wives. The evidence is drawn from Obeyesekere's long-term monitoring of the annual rituals held at three temples on the east coast, details of which I will discuss later.

THE BLACK BOX REVISITED

The main point is that, on the east coast, *both* Kaṇṇaki (Pattini) *and* other Hindu goddesses such as Kāli are popularly worshipped, a situation Obeyesekere wishes to read as evidence that the degree of Sanskritization determines the types of personality traits exhibited by two of the important Hindu goddesses in the local pantheon.⁴ The postulated "causal nexus" (1984:429) still starts with Sanskritic family patterns, which generate the ambivalent expression of repressed sex and aggression urges on the part of the wife/mother toward her small children, which in turn lead to adult projection of ambivalent images of the mother onto the local pantheon. Having found what he believes to be good evidence of Sanskritization in temple ritual, as well as good evidence of a "mixed" type of female pantheon, Obeyesekere presents these data as evidence of the intermediate strength of Brahmanic values: *less* Sanskritization than among the repressed orthodox Hindus of Jaffna (who allegedly ignore Kaṇṇaki), but *more* than among the liberated non-Brahmanical Sinhala Buddhists (who, at least until recently, have ignored Kāli).⁵

Rephrasing this in terms of *family roles*, we might say that the east coast female is less frustrated than her northern [Jaffnese or Indian] counterpart, but more frustrated than her Sinhala counterpart. [Obeyesekere 1984:446, emphasis added]

Having earlier stressed the importance of the female repression and child socialization sequences that generate the projective pattern of goddess formation, Obeyesekere here chooses to leave them out. To be more precise, he treats them as the middle term, the postulated “black box” in Robert LeVine’s words, which is *assumed* by the theory but which is not directly demonstrated by any empirical evidence (LeVine 1973:71). It is surprising to encounter this paucity of data in a book with such a surfeit of information on so many other topics, but fortunately there is an opportunity to fill in the blanks, so to speak, with independent data from the same region of the island. Obeyesekere’s fieldwork on the east coast began in 1966 and my own research in the same region in 1969, but our research has been conducted on quite independent lines. Of course, the “ultimate” black box is the subconscious psyche of the women involved, and neither Obeyesekere nor I have data that directly tap into this level. However, based on my documentation of marriage and family patterns on the east coast, it will be possible to “triangulate” one important aspect of Obeyesekere’s thesis—that is, to cross-check the “family roles” that in his analysis are treated as a purely hypothetical part of the psychogenetic causal nexus. In the section that follows I present some fieldwork data that leads me to reject the empirical adequacy of Obeyesekere’s black box.⁶

OPENING THE BLACK BOX: MATRILocal HOUSEHOLDS IN EASTERN SRI LANKA

The eastern coastal region of Sri Lanka is inhabited not only by Tamil-speaking Saivite Hindus (“Tamils”) but also by Tamil-speaking Sunni Muslims (“Moors”) and Eurasian Burghers (McGilvray 1982a). The economic mainstay of both the Tamils and the Moors is wet-rice cultivation. Among the Hindu Tamils, the two dominant land-owning castes are the *Mukkuvars* and the *Vēlālars*, who jointly share the highest rank in the caste hierarchy along with an unusual category of non-Brahman *Vīracaiya Kurukkal* (Lingāyat) priests (McGilvray 1981, 1982b). Castes in the lower part of the hierarchy include *Karaiyār* fishermen, *Cāntār* climbers, *Tattār* smiths, *Nāvitar* barbers, *Vannār* washermen, and untouchable *Paraiyar* drum-

mers (McGilvray 1983). As Obeyesekere notes, imported Brahman priests are employed at some of the major temples, but there is no Brahman caste that is indigenous to the region. The Mukkuvars, a caste with historical links to Kerala, held the old political chiefships and much of the land in the region during the precolonial and early colonial periods. We should keep in mind the wider caste composition of the east coast region, because Obeyesekere's data come mainly from Vēlālar caste settlements.⁷

MARRIAGE, DOWRY, AND MATRILocal RESIDENCE

East coast kinship conforms perfectly to the bilateral "general structure" of Dravidian categories found among the Kandyan Sinhalese by Yalman (1967) and reconstructed for Proto-Dravidian by Trautmann (1981:229–237). One finds a terminologically coded preference for bilateral cross-cousin marriage, an ideal which is enacted in approximately 17–20 percent of marriages among Moors and high caste Tamils.⁸ Even when marriage is with only a classificatory cousin, the pattern here and throughout Sri Lanka and south India shows a non-Dharmashastric preference for close nuptial alliance (Trautmann 1981:302–309), and people realize that this can help to protect the wife from domestic abuse and exploitation.⁹ A more distinctive feature of east coast social organization is matrilineal descent (*tāy valī*, "mother-way"). Sets of named dispersed exogamous matrilineal clans (called *kuti*, meaning "house" or "hut"), often linked by reciprocal isogamous marriage alliance,¹⁰ are found among both the Tamils and the Moors. Matrilineal membership in a *kuti* serves to regulate marriage, but it also ties everyone into a system of descent-group honors and privileges which, until quite recently, had political ramifications. Among both Tamils and Moors, designated male elders of each *kuti* serve on boards of trustees of the Hindu temples and Muslim mosques.

Everyone—Hindu and Muslim, high caste and low—follows the same basic pattern of marriage and residence: the daughters stay put, the sons marry out, and the parents and unmarried children periodically shift domicile. In the patrilocal/patrilineal regions of South Asia that Obeyesekere identifies as the heartland of Brahmanical ideology, a woman's dowry might consist of cash, jewelry, and moveable objects such as household furniture and utensils. Here in the matrilocal/matrilineal zone of Sri Lanka, however, virtually all of the family wealth, including agricultural land, goes to

the daughters as dowry, which thus functions as the main channel in a system of premortem matrilineal inheritance (Goody and Tambiah 1973; Harrell and Dickey 1985). Sons inherit little or nothing from their parents; instead they enjoy, cultivate, and eventually strive to augment the dowry property of their wives. The absolute minimum dowry a woman must have is a house; without it, or without at least a firm pledge that it will be built, a marriage is usually impossible. Needless to say, this soon becomes a major financial burden to a family with many daughters, so sons often delay their own marriage and divert earnings to enlarge their sister's dowries.

The focus of a wedding for both the Hindus and the Muslims is the same: the tying of a wedding necklace (*tāli*) around the bride's neck and the eating of food from a common plate. Symbolic gestures of hierarchy at the start of the wedding ritual express the idea that the groom is being incorporated as a new high status member of his wife's household. For example, the bride's younger brother worshipfully washes the groom's feet (or, in more Westernized families, polishes his shoes) at the threshold of the bride's house. With the exception of a brief "homecoming" visit by the couple to the groom's natal home approximately a week after the wedding, the bride and groom remain for a period of six months to two years as co-residents of the bride's parents' house. They are allotted one of the scarce private rooms, and in the early stages of the marriage they are treated as honored guests: special foods are prepared for them, and the domestic workload is reduced to encourage sexual intimacy leading to an early pregnancy (McGilvray 1982c). This is a period of marital adjustment for the new husband and wife, since in many cases they will be very shy with one another, even when they are cross-cousins. It is also a period during which the daughter is given her final training in cooking and the domestic arts, while the son-in-law demonstrates his reliability and skill in cultivating his wife's dowry lands.

Every marriage begins matrilocally, but it becomes an independent uxorilocal union over time. When the bride and groom seem well-established and self-reliant, or when there is another nubile daughter who must be wed, the bride's parents, together with some or all of the bride's unmarried brothers and sisters, move out of the dowry house, leaving the married couple in charge of their own independent nuclear household. In effect, the married daughter

“stays put” while everyone else shifts into the next daughter’s dowry house which will have been constructed nearby. If the size of the original maternal compound permits, it will be subdivided and the new dowry houses for the younger daughters will be sequentially constructed adjacent to the original maternal house; otherwise, cheaper land may be purchased for dowry house construction farther away. In congested areas where steep inflation in land prices has occurred, the close clustering of daughters’ houses is becoming more difficult to attain.

Dowry serves multiple purposes, but it is certainly correct to identify one of its dimensions as “bridegroom price” (Tambiah and Goody 1973:62; Caplan 1984). However, it is understood that the “purchased” son-in-law will, in return, reorient his kinship loyalties away from his natal kin and toward his new wife and her sisters, in whose matrilineal estate he has, in effect, become a shareholder.¹¹ The focus of attention is on the son-in-law himself, as he is gradually given more and more responsibility in his wife’s house. Although before the marriage they may have enjoyed an informal joking relationship with him, after the marriage the wife’s brothers must show him respect and deference. Over time he may permit a greater degree of informality from his wife’s brothers, but he is always entitled to deference even if he does not insist upon it.¹²

Local people say they show respect to the son-in-law because he has tacitly agreed to take responsibility for the welfare of his wife, his wife’s sisters, and ultimately his wife’s parents. Another reason is that the wife’s family is vulnerable to desertion by the son-in-law if he becomes dissatisfied with the marriage. Virginity in a bride is highly prized both by the Tamils and by the Moors; it is not easy for a divorced or widowed woman to find a second husband, although both Islamic and local Hindu norms do allow it.¹³ The bride and her family have a strong interest in making a marriage work, since it will be very difficult to attract a second husband the caliber of the first, at least with the same dowry.

A husband’s freedom, however, is strongly limited by the fact that his economic well-being is predominantly vested in his wife’s dowry. By giving him a major economic stake in the marriage, the dowry system produces a balance of interests on *both* sides, and the wife retains significant leverage. During the early matrilineal period of adjustment, the son-in-law is also very politely on trial: if his con-

duct proves unacceptable, he can be asked to leave. Indeed, I witnessed the expulsion of an eccentric and autocratic son-in-law from the house in which I was staying in 1978. Once the bride's parents have moved out, leaving the son-in-law as the head of his own nuclear household, it is more difficult to apply this kind of leverage against him. Still, he will always remain to some degree an "outsider" residing in close proximity to his wife's parents and sisters, and they can affect the tranquility of his home in many ways.

A HOLOCULTURAL VIEW: MALE DOMINANCE AND FEMALE AUTONOMY

Based on a sample of 66 matrilineal societies drawn from Murdock's *Ethnographic Atlas* (1967), Alice Schlegel (1972) has presented holocultural evidence for the hypothesis that, in matrilineal societies where husbands or wives' brothers hold positions of strong unilateral authority in the household, wives enjoy less personal autonomy than they do in matrilineal societies where *neither* the husband *nor* the wife's brother has sole or preminent domestic authority. Following Schlegel's published instructions (1972:145-147) I would code the east coast Tamil/Moorish household authority pattern as "weak husband dominance," even though it displays many of the sociological correlates of her "neither dominant" household type, including matrilocality, wives' sharing in the control of household property, absence of a unilateral cross-cousin marriage preference, and absence of a rule against sororal polygyny, (1972:22, 64-68, 71, 86-87). Schlegel's study does offer cross-cultural evidence suggesting a functional association between matriliney, matrilocality, women's participation in property control, (relatively) high female autonomy, and "weak" or "neither dominant" male authority patterns. All of these ingredients are found in the Tamil and Moorish households of eastern Sri Lanka.

SANSKRITIZATION: A THEORY IN SEARCH OF EVIDENCE

If Obeyesekere's thesis is correct, we must find some evidence at the household level of a repressive "Brahmanical-type" domestic regime, for without it, the causal nexus of child socialization and projection is incomplete. In east coast Tamil and Moorish households what we actually discover is that, while there is a strong value

placed on wifely fidelity, chastity, and loyalty, as well as some androcentric bias in religious and ethnomedical systems (McGilvray 1982c), the matri-uxorilocal residence pattern and the transmission of property as dowry tend to give the wife significant leverage and influence over domestic decisions and to protect her against severe and autocratic behavior by her husband. The matrilocal security and support provided to wives in eastern Sri Lanka contrasts sharply with the wifely suffering depicted in patrilocal regions of south India (see Hobson 1978) not to mention the recent reports of North Indian dowry murders (Bordewich 1986). Obeyesekere acknowledges the existence of matrilineal/matrilocal institutions on the east coast, but he claims that they are rapidly dissolving under the corrosive impact of Sanskritization.

Often going with Sanskritization is another form of social change—a move from matriliney to patriliney. Brahmanic Hinduism in general favors a patriarchal ideology. . . . Thus all over the east coast there is a move toward patriliney, the only exception being the inheritance of temple property and office. . . . [Obeyesekere 1984:591]

However, there is no direct evidence in the *Pattini* book for this profound sociological shift away from matriliney, a powerful trend that is said to encompass “a rise in the conception of the male role, patrilineal inheritance of property rights, and a broad-based patriarchal ideology” (1984:591). Instead, we are offered another “black box”: the growth of patriarchal and patrilineal ideology is *indirectly indexed*, says Obeyesekere, in a growing tendency to apotheosize Kōvalan, the all too mortal husband of the goddess Kāṇṇaki. Kōvalan is becoming a full-fledged god because Sanskritization requires that all wifely goddesses have divine consorts and that male deities be given a respectable place in the pantheon.¹⁴ The string of black boxes stretches even farther, however, when we are told that it is not Kōvalan himself, but the elephant god Pillaiyār (Ganēsh), who is actually ascending into greater iconographic propinquity with Kāṇṇaki. Obeyesekere explains this substitution by arguing that Pillaiyār is a Sanskritically more acceptable, yet psychologically suited (that is, likewise Oedipally fixated and castrated), surrogate for Kōvalan. The full argument has even more curves and twists (and in my view, blind spots),¹⁵ but the bottom line is growing Sanskritization, patriliney, and repression of wives.

Between the “input” (alleged Sanskritization) and the “output” (alleged changes in the pantheon) is there any ethnographic support

for Obeyesekere's hypothesis? Unfortunately for his ingenious theory, there is practically none. We have already seen that in the domain of household roles, east coast wives seem to enjoy more economic security and kinship support than in many other parts of South Asia; but let us also consider the evidence for encroaching Sanskritization and patriliney. Briefly summarized, the actual situation I observed in fieldwork is as follows. First, there is a conspicuous lack of Brahmanical ideology or ritual in marriage, and Hindu priests rarely officiate at weddings. There are none of the standard components found in Tamil Brahman weddings in south India,¹⁶ and furthermore, the wedding does not transfer or transubstantiate the bride to her husband's lineage as it does in patrilineal Jaffna and India (David 1973; Fruzzetti 1982). The bride does eat and drink from the groom's plate and cup in the wedding ceremony (admittedly a mark of ritual subordination), but in other respects the nuptial symbolism is not particularly patriarchal. Some informants even said that the bride should take her husband by the hand and lead him into "her" house after he has tied the *tāli*, although I did not see this occur.

During the negotiations and the first part of the wedding ceremony, the bride's family is ritually inferior to that of the groom, but this temporary inequality soon fades, and bilateral marriage exchange will reverse the coin when bride-givers become bride-takers in the next match.¹⁷ Widow remarriage is not easy, but it does occur and there is no rule against it. The only domain where I actually saw some undeniable Sanskritization taking place was in funeral rituals. The prevailing mortuary practice is burial, followed by food offerings and conch blasts for the liminal soul on the 31st day, but I did encounter one young priest in Akkaraipattu who had begun to introduce orthodox Brahmanical *pintam* (rice-ball) offerings into the funeral rites and who fastidiously had someone else blow the (stigmatically non-Brahmanical) conch.¹⁸ The influence of Brahman ritual and ideology is certainly likely to grow in the east coast region as communal Tamil/Sinhalese fighting promotes greater allegiance to Jaffna as the designated capital of Sri Lankan Tamil independence (Tambiah 1986). But to argue, as Obeyesekere does, that Sanskritization is already widespread puts the cart at least decades ahead of the horse.

Similarly, there is no empirical support for his contention that patriliney is supplanting matriliney throughout the region. Matrilineal clans are found in every caste and community, including the Islamic Moors. Practically every temple and mosque I studied in the region was governed by matrilineal trustees or by boards of matriclan elders, and where administrative change is occurring the switch is to open election, or representation by village, but not to patrilineal succession.¹⁹ De facto premortem matrilineal inheritance via dowry remains the general type of property transmission on the east coast, and judging from the steady inflation in the dowry market most families would have very little postmortem wealth to pass on even if patrilineal inheritance were now to be emphasized. Matri-uxorilocal residence remains the accepted practice in all levels of Tamil and Moorish society, and the idea of *tāy valī* (“mother-way”) continues to be the indigenous principle of descent reckoning. To attempt to infer the nature of the unilineal descent pattern from religious ritual and projective systems, rather than from fieldwork data, proves in this case to have been a courageous, but needless, mistake.

THE DECLINE OF MATRILINY IN KARAITIVU, TAMBILUVIL, AND PANAMA: A CRITIQUE

Most of the specific evidence of east coast Sanskritization and “broad-based patriarchal ideology” cited by Obeyesekere derives from his fieldwork at three Kaṇṇaki temples, two of them in primarily Tamil Vēlālar caste villages (Tambiluvil and Karaitivu), and one in an intermarried Tamil/Sinhalese village (Panama). The evidence from Karaitivu is fascinating: over the past 60 years Obeyesekere is able to trace changes in the architecture of the Kaṇṇaki temple that reflect steadily increasing Brahman priestly influence. In the eyes of their neighbors, however, the villagers of Karaitivu are notorious as a subcaste of highly exclusive Vēlālar who have strong kinship and cultural ties to Jaffna, a fact noted by Obeyesekere himself (1984:595). The Brahmanization of the Karaitivu temple is real, but it cannot be taken as typical even of other Vēlālar caste temples on the east coast, let alone the shrines maintained by other major castes such as the Mukkuvars.

The evidence from the temple in the village of Tambiluvil is even more equivocal (see also Yalman 1967:chapter 15; Hiatt 1973). I can corroborate from my own fieldwork most of Obeyesekere’s account of the annual festival, but on face value it shows very little

“Brahmanical” influence.²⁰ The significant change, according to Obeyesekere, has been the construction and elaboration of a new shrine for the god Pillaiyār (Ganēsh) next to that of the goddess Kānnaki, and the abandonment of a more distant shrine for the goddess’ consort, Kōvalan. Starting in 1942, imported south Indian Brahmans performed puja (worship) for Pillaiyār, but they quit and moved to Jaffna in the early 1950s, and since then the priests have been local non-Brahman Vīracaiya Kurukkals. As outlined earlier, Obeyesekere interprets the rise of Pillaiyār as a psychodynamically equivalent, but Sanskritically more attractive, expression of the ideological need to apotheosize Kānnaki’s weak but martyred husband Kōvalan, and this highly conditional evidence is enough to convince Obeyesekere that Tambiluvil is a village “where Sanskritization is already in full swing” (1984:590).

To illustrate how Sanskritization actually works its effects on religious projective processes, however, Obeyesekere cannot focus upon Tambiluvil; he must shift to his third village, Panama, where he has “the relevant observational data” to make his case (1984:590). As Yalman (1966, 1967) has previously reported, Panama is an intermarried Tamil/Sinhalese village on the southern edge of the east coast matrilineal belt. A number of Tamil men from Tambiluvil have perpetuated marriage alliances with Panama women and have settled there matrilocally. Obeyesekere provides a wonderfully detailed account of Pattini’s annual *an keliya* (“horn play”) rituals in Panama, but the point of his Sanskritization thesis is that things are now changing. As he explains it, the bicultural village of Panama has become an arena within which an intrusive ideology of patrilineal descent, inheritance, and succession has mounted a major challenge to the preexisting matrilineal system. In the early 1960s this was manifested in some awkward, and ultimately abortive, ritual innovations to secure for Pattini’s husband Kōvalan (here called Alut Deviyo) a greater degree of prominence in the annual village processions. Although noting that these innovations have long since been dropped, Obeyesekere contends that their deep psychological motivation remains: namely, “a general wish to affirm the status of the male deity as a vindication of patri-*liny*” (1984:592).

Although the geographical location of this conflict is the village of Panama, the psychological location is really in the minds of people

from Tambiluvil, where a great deal of urgent patrilineal pressure is said to have built up. Remarkably enough, Obeyesekere contends that the *patrilineal* ideology in Panama comes from the *matrilineal* village of Tambiluvil, where the construction of a Pillaiyār temple proves that Sanskritization is “already in full swing,” brought to Panama by Tamil bridegrooms who, one must assume, also carry some of their original matrilineal principles in another compartment of their psyche. Remember, Yalman found no matrilineal system in Panama beyond the natal clan affiliations of the in-marrying first generation Tamil men themselves (1967:315). It is thus difficult to understand how Panama can typify the decline of matriliney on the east coast, when there was no operative matrilineal system there to begin with.²¹ As for the growth of patrilineal/patriarchal ideas, the Sinhalese ethnographic literature itself points to more plausible sources than a subliminal wave of patrilineal thinking carried by matrilineal Tamil bridegrooms.

SINHALESE SANSKRITIZATION AND PATRIARCHY

As if to acknowledge the weakness of Sanskritically induced patrilineal thinking on the east coast, Obeyesekere additionally invokes “the influences stemming from the modern state in recent times and from demographically dominant outside communities that are given to a patriarchal rather than an avuncular ideology, particularly in the realms of authority relations” (1984:591). This can only refer to the Buddhist Sinhalese, 74 percent of the island’s population and strongly in control of the state apparatus, and the very people who elsewhere Obeyesekere contends have projected and preserved the Pattini cult in its “original” form precisely because of their *lack* of Brahmanical-style patriarchy. This may seem to be a minor contradiction, but it is considerably amplified when we examine the ethnographic literature, where we find that some of the strongest evidence in support of Sinhalese patriarchal ideology has been reported by Obeyesekere himself. Describing the marital frictions which generate and give psychological motivation to intense pregnancy cravings (*dola-duka*) among Sinhalese Buddhist wives in the village of Rambadeniya, Obeyesekere has written the following:

The male, particularly the father-husband, is associated with dominance and authority in the family, and the wife with subservience and submissiveness. . . . The

ideal wife according to a village moralist is one who is devoted, faithful, a person who does not question her husband, but merely obeys him. The good wife should not even look her husband in the face, but look aside when addressing him. She should not trample the mat he sleeps on. . . . She should regularly and faithfully cook the family meals, never take offence at the husband even if he is idling, and never hurt him by word or deed. . . . A woman is a creeper trailing where it listeth, feeding on filth, excrement, or dung. She has neither the strength nor the intelligence of the male, nor can she provide for herself, work at arduous tasks or go about alone; she has to suffer the pangs of childbirth and has to be under the domination of the husband for her whole life. [Obeyesekere 1963:326]

The plight of wives in Rambadeniya is further aggravated by the early marriage of girls soon after puberty, by the trauma to which daughters-in-law are subjected in the predominantly virilocal residence pattern, and by universal wife-beating (1963:327–331). With the exception of a lack of marital chastity on the part of both husbands and wives, the picture bears a striking resemblance to the shastric *pativrata* ideal attributed to the north Indian Brahmanical family, which Obeyesekere elsewhere in the book tries to distinguish sharply from the nonrepressive ideal-type Sinhalese Buddhist domestic unit. In fact, the Sinhalese even use the word *pativrata* in their ecstatic religious practices (Obeyesekere 1981:26, 53, 63–64), while this Sanskritic word remains, at best, a dictionary fossil on the Tamil east coast.

ANCIENT TRADITIONS AND MODERN TRENDS

Perhaps Rambadeniya in 1960 did not present a fair cross-section of Sinhalese family life,²² but Obeyesekere has continued to argue in his recent writings that “widespread sexual repression, along with the internalization of aggression, has led to the widespread development of hysterical dispositions in the [Sinhalese] population” (1978:473) and that “in Sinhala society these problems become especially significant for those individuals and families who are more Buddhist than others . . .” (1981:121). These repressive tendencies have been exacerbated, he says, by recent economic and ideological changes in Sinhalese society that have created a large unemployed urban proletariat, delayed the age of marriage, and promoted a more puritanical Buddhist sexual morality (1978:473–475; 1981:121–122). The psychoanalytically predicted outcomes of such repression would be “sexual frigidity, somatization of conflicts, propensity to hysteria, and masochistic tendencies” (1984:431), precisely what Obeyesekere has so vividly documented in *Medusa’s*

Hair, his recent work on Sinhalese female ecstasies (1981). The alleged outcome of similar repression of primary drives among the east coast Tamils, however, is not ecstatic possession but institutionalized temple worship of the goddess Kālī. This illustrates the difficulty of tracing a consistent line of reasoning in Obeyesekere's theory: for example, the repression of sex and aggression drives and the consequent maternal ambivalence is said to be caused by early marriage among Brahmanical Hindus (1984:429–441) and rural Buddhists (1963:327–334), but by late marriage among modern urban Buddhists (1978:473); by Sanskritization among the Tamils (1984:444), but by intensified neocolonial Buddhist puritanism among the Sinhalese (1981:121; 1984:448–490); by the authoritarian presence of the Brahmanical father in north India (1984:429–440), but by “father absence” in the Nayar caste families of Kerala (1984:442), and by the “Jewish mother” in urban Colombo (1984:449).

The rise of Sinhalese devotional cults, particularly the enormous popularity of the god Kataragama (a form of the Hindu god Skanda), has been linked historically by Obeyesekere to significant Tamil Hindu immigration and cultural influence on Sinhalese Buddhist society. Tamil *Pantārams* and mendicant *Ānti* priests, official Tamil Brahmans installed by the Nāyak kings of Kandy, and immigrant Tamil tea pickers and Kataragama pilgrims have all strengthened the Hindu elements of Sinhalese culture (1977:385, 1978:459–460, 1981:5). Obeyesekere stresses the non-Brahmanical, shamanic, *Sudra* caste origins of the *bhakti* devotionism that the Sinhalese have now adopted so enthusiastically (1981:180), although scholarly evidence points to a “Sanskritic” origin for all of these elements (Staal 1963:267–268, 274). In any case, judging from what we know about kinship in Tamilnadu today, the carriers of this tradition would also have been patrilineal and patriarchal.²³

In addition to the “Brahmanic sexual mores” that Obeyesekere admits have become entrenched among middle-class Colombo Buddhists (1984:449), there are also traditional elements of patrilineal, patriarchal, and “Sanskritic” practice among the rural Sinhalese, such as agnatic tendencies in land tenure and inheritance (Tambiah 1958; Obeyesekere 1967:42) and high status patrilineal “pedigrees” (Yalman 1967:138–149). An example of Sanskritic ritual among the Sinhalese is the pouring of water over the hands of the bride and

groom in high status Kandyan weddings (Denham 1912:333; Gombrich 1971:240–241). This is a rite known as *dhāre* in south India where it is an important sacrament in Brahman wedding rituals that emphasize the *kanyā dāna* ideal of the “gift of a virgin” (Thurston 1909, vol. 1:282)²⁴ but that is quite unknown among the Tamils of the east coast. The strength of patrilineal ideology among the Sinhalese seems to vary considerably by locality and social strata (Yalman 1967), but Obeyesekere is certainly correct to identify it as an “outside” cultural influence alien to east coast matrilineal traditions. All in all, the evidence of a “broad-based patriarchal ideology” and “Sanskritic” domestic rituals seems as strong, or stronger, among the Sinhalese than among the east coast Tamils, who remain overwhelmingly matrilineal, matrilocal, and non-Brahmanical. Following Obeyesekere’s theory, this would pose the Sinhalese—not the east coast Tamils—as the more psychologically repressed group as far as wives and mothers are concerned.

CONCLUSIONS: A DIALOGUE BETWEEN THEORY AND DATA

The hypothesis of Sanskritic repression and projection that Obeyesekere has offered to explain regional transformations of the goddess Pattini in Sri Lanka is only a part of his much larger project on the goddess, yet by itself it represents a stimulating contribution both to South Asian studies and to the theory of religions as psychogenetic projective systems. The next step must always be to find some independent validation for the theory, particularly, in this case, some tangible evidence of the causally integral but empirically undocumented “black boxes” of Sanskritization and Brahmanical female repression. I have presented here some ethnographic material that throws the Sanskritization hypothesis into considerable doubt; but what are some of the broader implications of this finding? I will discuss two, and then offer some concluding remarks.

First, if one takes the Popperian view of science as inquiry subject to falsification, the results I have presented here do pose some basic doubts about the theory of religion as a projective system. There are a number of alternative frameworks one might want to consider within the domain of “mother worship” alone (see Preston 1982). However, for the past 50 years the projective hypothesis has proven both resilient and Protean, and for obvious reasons. Recognizing

that religious symbols must connect in some way with individual psychological needs, the theory holds out the promise of a causal explanation of specific variations in religious patterns worldwide. Obeyesekere's recent exploration of private, personal, and public religious symbols among Sri Lankan ecstasies (1981) strongly suggests there remain important "hypnomantic" processes of the psyche that feed into South Asian religious myth and iconography. It will suffice if my critique leads to reformulations of the projective hypothesis, and to additional psychogenetic interpretations of Patini and the Sri Lankan pantheon that are susceptible to independent validation.

A second, and more specific, conclusion I would draw is that Obeyesekere has been seriously misled through his reliance on simplified "ideal type" characterizations of such crucial variables as Sanskritization, Brahmanization, and the Tamil Hindu family. For example, he makes the assumption that Sanskritization or "Brahmanical ideology" is at once a package deal, a Weberian ideal-type summation of beliefs, values, and ritual practices that diffuses pervasively, uniformly, and consistently from the Sanskrit texts into the temple and into the home, and thence into the superego, displacing whatever "non-Sanskritic" culture traits may have preceded it. The most penetrating critique is still that of Frits Staal (1963), who documented the accretive, non-displacing, and regionally rooted aspects of "Sanskritic" ideas even among such ultra-orthodox groups as the Nambūdiri Brahmins.

Even more significantly, Obeyesekere has not taken advantage of the existing ethnographic literature on Tamil society in Jaffna and in south India to build a solid basis of comparison with the Sinhalese society he knows so well.²⁵ Recent research (see Wadley 1980) has richly documented a distinctive Tamil ideology of female power and auspiciousness that is believed to be generated through adherence to an ideal of wifely self-control and self-imposed chastity (*karpu*). This pattern is rooted in an ancient Dravidian tradition of female sacredness quite different from the authoritarian *pativrata* marriage ideology of north India, and it appears to be correlated with significant differences in the domestic esteem and ritual treatment of women between north and south India even today (Hart 1973; Wadley 1980:159–167). Instead of regarding their marital role as one of enforced subordination to the authority of their husbands,

Tamil wives in south India commonly assert that they seek and obtain religious power, nobility, and auspiciousness through self-constraint and voluntary submission to the ideal of wifely chastity (Reynolds 1980), concepts echoed in Jaffna society as well (Pfaffenberger 1982). Subordination in marriage thus becomes a productive religious austerity for the south Indian Tamil wife, and the mystical powers she generates are believed to bring health and prosperity to her kinsmen and to her entire household. Ironically, this pervasive south Indian Tamil ideology of female power through voluntary chastity and circumspection (*karpu*) gains its popular legitimization and “mythic charter” from the *Cilappatikāram*, the epic of the chaste goddess Kaṇṇaki (Pandian 1982). This in effect gives the Kaṇṇaki/Pattini cult a reflexive role in shaping the domestic conditions that, in Obeyesekere’s terms, are causally related to its own psychogenesis. Such interactions may prove to be complex; but to overlook this widely attested south Indian gender ideology in favor of a uniform process of Brahmanical repression of female sex and aggression drives seems a mistake. Once again, closer attention to the ethnographic data is needed to validate Obeyesekere’s projective hypothesis.

Finally, as I mentioned earlier, both Tamil and Moorish informants on the east coast of Sri Lanka do espouse an ideology of male authority roles as well as enunciate familiar South Asian views about male/female hierarchy, “scripts for male power” as Sanday calls them (1981), that are also expressed in the domains of sexuality, ritual, and medicine (McGilvray 1982c).²⁶ Because so many of these androcentric ideas are also part of the doctrinal core of what Obeyesekere calls “Sanskritic Hinduism,” he might point to them as evidence of patrilineal or patriarchal values despite the prevailing matrilineal/matrilocal family patterns of the region. A similar example is posed by the strongly patrilineal/patriarchal textual traditions of Islam, which happens to be the religion of the matrilineal/matrilocal Moors of eastern Sri Lanka. This raises a question for further research: are the cultural ideologies and ritual rules of male/female hierarchy more significant in determining psychological stresses on women than the household interaction patterns of authority and autonomy that they experience and participate in on a day-to-day basis? My view is that this issue could be more effectively settled by examining and comparing the daily lives of women in ac-

tual domestic regimes, rather than by indirectly gauging their degree of Sanskritic (or Islamic) oppression as projected onto the religious pantheon. Here too, Obeyesekere's interpretation of Pattini in eastern Sri Lanka, through its ingenuity and innovation, should prompt a renewed dialogue between theory and data in psychological anthropology.

NOTES

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¹Obeyesekere makes a careful distinction between gods and goddesses, defined as supernaturals who are the focus of an institutionalized temple cult, and lower-ranking classes of demons and spirits, whose worship lacks this sort of bureaucratic routinization. There are a number of malevolent demonesses and female spirits he recognizes in the *lower* levels of the Sinhalese pantheon.

²Obeyesekere says little about the role of popular middle-of-the-road goddesses such as Pārvati or Lakshmi in daily religious life, implying that they are somewhat otiose, a conclusion that deserves much more proof (1984:440). He also classifies them as “Vedic” deities, in contrast to Kāli who is non-Vedic (1984:443). In fact, *all* of these goddesses could better be described as “Purānic,” since the ancient Vedic pantheon was practically devoid of females (O’Flaherty 1980).

³The ferocious Pattini that Obeyesekere found in Mullaitivu resembles village Kaṇṇaki goddesses throughout the Jaffna peninsula, many of whom share the attributes of Muttu Māriyamman, the smallpox goddess. Pfaffenberger reports that “Kaṇṇakiyamman is the most popular of all the virgin goddesses in Tenmaratci [in the Chavakkachcheri district of Jaffna], although she is also said to be the hottest as well as being “the lowest and darkest of them” (1977:195–196, 1982:161). This northern avatar of Kaṇṇaki does appear to be more fearsome and demonic than her east coast manifestations, as shown also by her “pearls” of pox, her mythic association with snakes, and the 1000 eyeballs hidden beneath her hair (Cartman 1957:77, 84; Pfaffenberger 1982:161–164). There is also solid evidence of a recent historical process of Sanskritization of the ritual and architecture of village temples in Jaffna, including some for Kaṇṇaki (Pfaffenberger 1977:201–216; Ryan 1980:chapter 2).

⁴Obeyesekere’s focus on Pattini and Kāli is understandable in light of the theory he wishes to test. However, the Hindu pantheon on the east coast also includes several goddesses who are not discussed in the *Pattini* book, such as Māriyamman, Katanācciyamman, Turōpataiyamman. These other “mother” goddesses are the focus of annual domestic offerings in the home as well as recipients of regular temple pujas and annual festivals.

⁵Obeyesekere has vividly documented some recent cases of Kāli worship among urban Sinhalese Buddhists (1981).

⁶Some words of caution are in order. Obeyesekere candidly admits that he is dealing with a black box: "All I can do here is to relate the inferred ideal typical Hindu and Buddhist deep motivations with the symbolic projective systems" (1984:425). At several points proclaiming the provisional nature of his argument, he even says it is impossible to use predictive models with such polymorphous psychodynamic processes (1984:425, 489). Nonetheless, with over 150 pages of the book devoted to enunciating the theory and presenting it as a controlled comparison, it seems fair to judge his evidence.

⁷The data presented here were gathered primarily in the Tamil and Moorish wards of the coastal town of Akkaraipattu (population 30,000 in 1971, located in Amparai District), which served as my principal fieldwork site on three occasions (1969–71, 1975, 1978). Additional data were collected on shorter visits to villages near Kokkaticcolai (in Manmunai Pattu, Batticaloa District), as well as on numerous trips throughout the east coast region during a cumulative fieldwork period of three years. The households about which I have detailed information are predominantly high caste Tamil (*Mukkuvar*, *Vēlālar*) and Moorish households of middle-income level. Judging from the strong inter-caste similarities I have observed in the cultural domains of religion, ritual, and caste ideology, I have no reason to think that low caste and poor households differ fundamentally from higher caste and wealthier households in terms of the ideal cultural models of kinship, matrilineal descent, and domestic role structure. However, poverty and political subordination could certainly deflect actual household behavior away from the cultural ideal in some poor or lower caste groups. This is a process that I have documented in the domain of Untouchable religion (McGilvray 1983) but for which I currently lack the data to examine adequately in the domain of domestic behavior.

⁸For cross-cousin marriage data from other castes see McGilvray 1974.

⁹There is no consciously stated preference between MBD and FZD marriages, although a sample of marriages did turn up a slightly greater number of MBD marriages (McGilvray 1974). However, the genealogical closeness of cross-cousins who marry does not imply that the bride and groom will have enjoyed an informal face-to-face relationship prior to their marriage. In early childhood this may have been true, but in late childhood and adolescence cross-cousins of the opposite sex are carefully segregated and chaperoned, so that their wedding may be the first occasion in many years for them to speak or even gaze directly at one another. Marriage between closely related cousins tends to have the effect of reducing dowry expectations (corroborated by Miller 1981:156), while upwardly mobile families seeking alliances with high-status strangers must be prepared to offer substantially larger dowries.

¹⁰Fieldwork by McGilvray (1974) and Hiatt (1973) has found no empirical evidence of the pattern of hypergamous marriage between matriclans postulated by Yalman (1967:325–331).

¹¹It is worth noting that the modern urban (Colombo and Jaffna) practice of a new husband appropriating his wife's dowry assets and transferring them into a dowry fund for his own unmarried sisters is strongly condemned among the east coast Tamils and Moors, who cling to the older South Asian idea of *cītanam* (Skt. *strīdhānam*, woman's property) as property intended for the conjugal estate of one's daughters and granddaughters (Tambiah 1973). Accordingly, land and houses are decided solely to the daughter (or now sometimes to the daughter and son-in-law jointly), but never to the son-in-law alone.

¹²Today, in pursuit of a reciprocal and less hierarchical idiom, the more Westernized young men in Akkaraipattu have created a new kin term, *bil*, which is the English acronym for "brother-in-law."

¹³Although polygyny is allowed under Muslim law, it is rare among Moors in the Batticaloa region. The matrilineal residence pattern virtually rules it out except in cases of sororal polygyny (such as two sisters married to one man in the same house). I found a few marriages of the latter type among the Tamils as well as among the Moors. Leviratic and sororate marriage is approved by both groups.

¹⁴This is only a part of Obeyesekere's longer argument concerning the ups and downs of Pattini's male consort: Kōvalan had his earliest roots as an ancient West Asian "dead god" modeled on Attis or Adonis; then he descended to become Pattini's weak and mortal husband in the medieval period; and he is today once again ascending to godly status because of Sanskritic pressure.

¹⁵Pillaiyār is an immensely popular god among the Tamils, not merely in the east coast region but elsewhere in Sri Lanka and south India. As the god of beginnings and remover of obstacles, he is offered puja in Hindu temples even before the main deity (Courtright 1985). Today even Untouchable *Paraiyars* are building temples to Pillaiyār as an expression of their greater wealth and independence from high caste domination (McGilvray 1983:108–112). In explaining the popularity of Pillaiyār by reference to the psychodynamics of Kōvalan's personality, Obeyesekere seems to overlook a multitude of more general considerations.

¹⁶There are no offerings to a *hōma* fire, no taking of the *saptapati* or "seven steps," no *pani-grahanam* rite of joining hands, no *dhāre* or pouring of water over the couple's hands, no treading of the bride's foot on a grindstone, and no gazing at the *Arundathi* star, not to mention many other lesser ritual elements (Thurston 1909 vol. 1:278–298). These sorts of rites are, however, performed by high caste Tamils in Jaffna and Colombo (Denham 1912:334–335; Cartman 1957:151–156).

¹⁷At the beginning, this is the same asymmetrical logic of marriage exchange that is expressed in the Sanskritic ideal of the "gift of a virgin" (*kanyādāna*, Trautmann 1981:288–315; Fruzzetti 1982), although no one I spoke with seemed familiar with this Hindu scriptural term. Buddhist Sinhalese in the Low Country have the same historical wedding symbolism (Denham 1912:332; Yalman 1967:276). In the east coast Tamil wedding, however, the symbolism of isogamy and equality starts to emerge when the mothers of the bride and groom reciprocally decorate and honor each other in the *cantippu* ("meeting") ritual at the bride's gateway.

¹⁸Blowing the conch shell (*caṅku*) is a mark of non-Brahman identity. Brahmans in Tamilnadu will never blow a conch at funerals or death anniversaries (Hornell 1942:123).

¹⁹The only patrilineally constituted groups of which I am aware are Muslim *Maulānā* families who trace descent from the Prophet Mohammed and the now defunct *vaṭa cēri/ten cēri* village teams who once competed in the annual "horn play" (*kompu vilaiyāṭṭu*) rituals for the goddess Kaṇṇaki. Obeyesekere notes that membership on these latter teams was matrilineal in some places, including the village of Tambiluvil which he nevertheless describes as a seedbed of patrilineal Sanskritic ideology (1984:564, 590 ff.).

²⁰In the course of my own fieldwork I have observed the culminating *kulirtti* ("cooling") rituals for the goddess at Karaitivu and at Tambiluvil, as well as at the Kaṇṇaki temples in Kolavil and Pattimedu, both near Akkaraipattu. I have also witnessed one evening of the *aṅ keliya* ("horn play") rituals in Panama.

²¹Yalman reports that the residence pattern in Panama is initially matrilineal and that property is transferred through dowry, as among the Tamils and Moors farther up the coast, but that eventually the couple will establish neolocal residence and "in the later years of marriage, in fact, the pattern of kinship resembles the Sinhalese" (1967:315).

²²Although he argues that *dola-duka* pregnancy cravings are "symptomatic of psychological problems common to most female members of the society" (1963:334), neither Obeyesekere's later ethnographic accounts nor those of Leach (1961), Yalman (1967), Tambiah (1958), or Alexander (1982) seem to document such extreme marital antagonism in Sinhalese households. My own fieldwork did not reveal any strong cultural emphasis or elaboration on the topic of pregnancy cravings in east coast Tamil and Moorish households.

²³Exceptions to the patrilineal rule would include the matrilineal *Maravars* and *Nangudi Vēlālars* of southern Tamilnadu (Dumont 1983).

²⁴In fact, the existence of *dhāre* water-pouring among the Sinhalese supports Obeyesekere's stimulating hypothesis of a strong Sri Lankan historical link with the southwestern coast of India. Thurston (1909 vol. 1:282), Sturrock (1894:143), and Krishna Rao (1898:32–33) all remark on the central importance of the *dhāre* ritual among all of the castes (both Brahman and non-Brahman) of South Kanara District and Tulunadu. A version of this water-pouring ritual has also been reported in Jaffna by David, who interprets it as a "virgin severing rite" to dissolve the bride's bodily link with her natal kin (David 1973:523, 533). In reality, the water-pouring ritual is required to consecrate any sort of gift, including the "gift of a virgin," according to the Dharmashastras (Kane 1941, vol. 2, part 2:854–855; Trautmann 1981:307–308; Richard Gombrich, personal communication). Closely adhering to the Dharmashastras, the most traditional of the Kandyan Sinhalese also conduct a water-pouring rite when property is transferred from one party to another (Steven Kemper, personal communication).

²⁵In discussing religion and gender roles in Jaffna, for example, Obeyesekere (1984:446) makes no reference to the work of Cartman (1957), Banks (1957, 1960), David (1980), Pfaffenberger (1977, 1980, 1982), or Ryan (1980).

²⁶The overwhelming majority of my informants were male, obviously a potential source of bias in my data. In a society with such strong male-female role segregation and deeply held ideas of female modesty, I found it impossible, as a male anthropologist, to explore women's views in depth or privacy. However, on the basis of the remarks and reactions of the women with whom I did interact, I can report no evidence of a female "counter-culture" on issues of ritual or doctrine. I suspect that women's ideology, where it occurs, is enacted at a different level, in pragmatic behavioral contexts closer to the surface of daily life.

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