

*The Car and the Palanquin: Rival Accounts
of the 1895 Riot in Kalugumalai,
South India*

ANTHONY GOOD

University of Edinburgh

The 1895 riot at Kalugumalai in the Tirunelveli District of Madras Presidency, South India, pitted the local Nadar community, then newly-converted to Roman Catholicism, against the main Hindu castes of Kalugumalai, particularly those associated with its Hindu temple and the Ettaiyapuram zamindari estate within which the town lay. It was the violent climax to a long-running dispute over the Nadars' right to take processions through the main streets, and one of the bloodiest episodes in a conflict which posed a severe threat to public order throughout South India in the late nineteenth century.

The first and most straightforward purpose of the present article is to provide a more balanced description of what actually happened in Kalugumalai on that occasion, for the 'official' accounts of these events,¹ the only documentary sources cited by historians hitherto, are markedly one-sided and seem to result from an attempt to play down the complicity or, at the very least, incompetence of the police and local judiciary. Its second purpose is to re-examine this riot in the light of recent writing on the history of 'communal'—that is, collective and religiously inspired—violence in South Asia.

Unlike other writers on the Kalugumalai riot, such as Hardgrave (1969) and Susan Bayly (1989), I have done extensive fieldwork in Kalugumalai. It is not that this yielded ethno-historical information

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¹ Drawn mainly from *Madras Judicial Proceedings (MJP)*, especially *Kalugumalai Riot ...* (1895) and *Disturbances ...* (1899), consulted at IOL; and *Court of Wards Proceedings (CWP)* for 1897–99, consulted at TNA.

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absent from official sources, since the knowledge of present-day inhabitants derives more from published accounts (Paktavatsalam 1972) than oral testimonies by eye-witnesses; rather, familiarity with the geographical and social lay-out of the town, and observation of temple practices, especially car festivals, allows me to contextualize more fully the events surrounding the riot. Despite these advantages, I was initially conscious of serious gaps in my knowledge. Because my work was based in the local temple, the perspective gained was almost exclusively that of high-caste Hindus. Not only were some factual points left unclear by my temple and documentary sources, but neither provided much insight into the motives of local Nadars.

Such limitations are not crucial to the argument in a related paper (Good n.d.) focusing on the sacred character of Kalugumalai's car streets. The dispute and subsequent riot are introduced there mainly to illustrate that the sacredness of this urban space was no mere theological abstraction, but a focus of interests and emotions intense enough to generate an expensive court case, and culminate in substantial loss of life.² However, any proper evaluation of the riot itself must clearly incorporate not only the Nadar interpretation, but even—for many basic facts about events in Kalugumalai during April 1895 were hotly disputed—the Nadar *description* of the riot and its aftermath. Eye-witness statements³ raise the possibility that caste privileges and religious rivalry, the factors emphasized by the official descriptions, were only part of the story. Before dealing with these issues, however, I shall describe the layout of Kalugumalai town, summarize the dispute over the car streets, and show how it led to the mass conversion of local Nadars and ultimately to the 1895 riot.

Kalugumalai and its Temple

Kalugumalai lies in the Tirunelveli District of Tamil Nadu.⁴ Until 1954 it formed part of the 'little kingdom' of Ettaiyapuram, one of

² Catholic writers tend mistakenly to reduce this sacredness to a Hindu ruse to obstruct Christians. 'The pagans say that a chapel in the town poses a danger for them ... [S]o as not to lose the right to object at every opportunity to religious encroachments by low castes and Nadars, they regard all streets in the town as temple land.' (Baumal n.d.). (All translations from French sources are mine.)

³ Original documents in *Papers Connected with the Kalugumalai Riot* (henceforth, *Papers Connected*) and transcripts in Caussanel (n.d.), *The Tragedy of Kalugumalai*, both held at JM.

⁴ Tirunelveli, usually spelled 'Tinnevely' in British days, was the southernmost district of Madras Presidency, later Tamil Nadu state. The district was sub-divided in the mid-1980s.

the largest zamindari estates in Madras Presidency (Baker 1984: 427). The town lies immediately to the south of a sheer, rocky hill. A cave in this hill forms the main shrine of a temple to Kalukacalamurti, a form of Lord Murukan. The Ettaiyapuram Raja granted Kalugumalai village to this temple in 1849, so all its land revenue and property rent went into temple coffers rather than to the estate proper. He also built the 'car streets' and granted house sites around them to temple servants.

Car streets, forming a rectangle oriented to the cardinal points, are a common feature of South Indian temple towns. In Kalugumalai this rectangle is bisected by Middle Street, home of the temple priests and other Brahmans. These streets contain eight altars dedicated to the divine regents of the cardinal points, as well as a central altar in Middle Street dedicated to Lord Brahma (see Figure 1). Offerings are made at these altars during festivals, when the streets become in effect an extension of the temple precinct. The five streets are also used by temple processions, which are essential elements of many kinds of worship. In fact, North Car Street, also called Palace Street because it contains the Raja's local residence, was formerly closed off by gates opened only for religious processions. The procession routes depend on whether the gods are riding bronze or silver 'vehicles', being more elaborate in the latter case, but in any case they involve most or all of the car streets. Some important processions go right round the hill, thereby circling the main shrine itself.

Conflict in Nineteenth-Century Tirunelveli

In the 1890s Kalugumalai had a population of about 3,800, including 500 Nadars and 475 Maravars (*Kalugumalai Riot*, p. 73). Houses were grouped together roughly on the basis of caste, and all the Nadar houses lay in three adjoining streets at the north-eastern edge of town, outside the car streets but inside the procession route around the hill.

The colonial authorities saw the hostility between Nadars and other Kalugumalai residents as a manifestation of the general situation in southern Madras Presidency during the late nineteenth century. According to this analysis, social unrest in the region reflected the continued potency of primordial identities such as caste and religion, though sometimes in new guises. Thus, whereas conflict between Nadars and Maravars was regarded as endemic, Hammick,

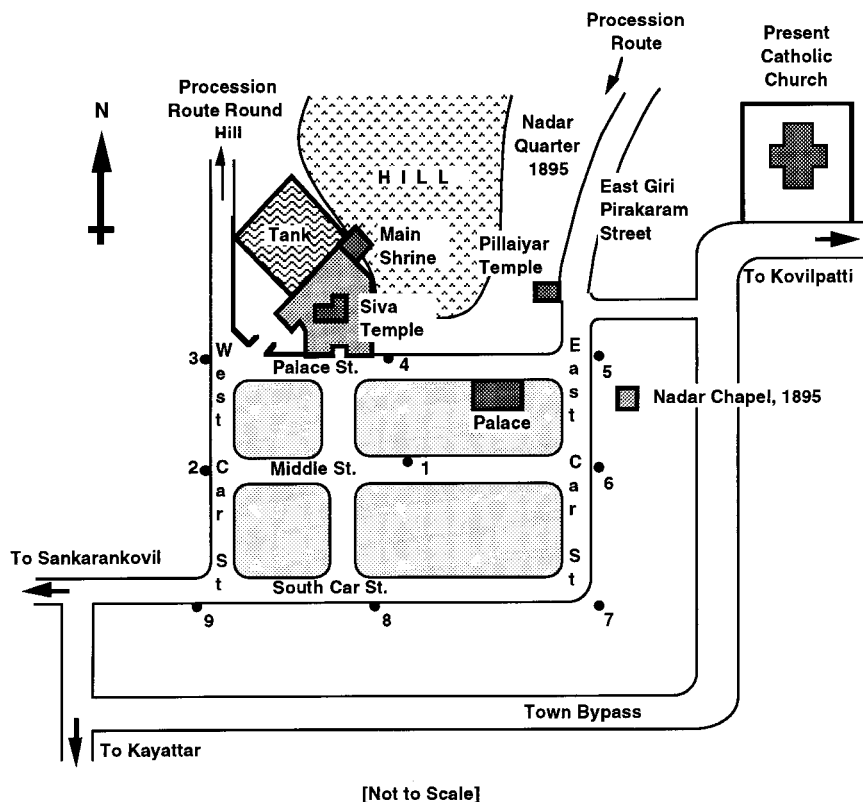


Fig 1. Town Plan of Kalugumalai

Key: The altars in the car streets belong to the following deities: 1. Brahma; 2. Varuna; 3. Vayu; 4. Kuberan; 5. Isana; 6. Indra; 7. Agni; 8. Yama; 9. Nirutti (anglicised spellings)

the Special Commissioner appointed by the Madras Government to inquire into the widespread riots in southern districts during 1899, attributed the intensification of this struggle to the impact of Christianity. Previously, Shanars

accepted their social position as just above the Pallas and Paraiyas, and they were always considered one of the polluting castes. When however Christianity began to spread in Tinnevely and with it education, the Shanars, becoming discontented with their lot, began to put forward the claim to be considered Kshatriyas (*Disturbances*, p. 3).

Though other castes denied them even Sudra status, increasing numbers of Nadars pursued this claim to be Ksatriyas by adopting the caste title 'Nadar' (lord) in preference to the demeaning 'Shanar',

which alluded to their hereditary occupation of toddy-tapping (Hardgrave 1969: 84).⁵

It is certainly true that Nadars showed far greater willingness than other castes to become Christians, especially where avenues of upward mobility within Hindu society were blocked by rival castes or the law courts. Moreover, the Jesuits of the Madurai Mission were especially attracted to these 'simple, hardworking and robust' people (Fr. Duranquet, in S. Bayly 1989: 357n) and directed particular efforts towards them. By 1891 as many as 150,000 of the 410,000 Nadars had become Christians, and when considering events in Kalugumalai it should be remembered that the Jesuit Mission was well used to conversions among Nadars, and eager to encourage more. Despite this, a strong case can be made that religious conversion was generally a consequence, rather than the cause, of other radical changes affecting the region. This period saw a great expansion of trade in agricultural commodities with urban, and even foreign, markets, thanks to the Pax Britannica and developing transport infrastructure (Hardgrave 1969: 96; Baker 1984: 524). The pre-existing rural élite, who strove to translate their local political dominance into control of these trading opportunities, increasingly found themselves in competition with the growing mercantile interests among lower-ranking castes. Nadars were easily the most successful among this latter group, and came to dominate the cotton trade by the end of the nineteenth century (*ibid.*: 255). Not surprisingly, then, their struggle for upward social mobility brought them into conflict with higher castes such as Vellalars, as well as their perennial rivals, the war-like Maravars (Besse 1914: 664; *Disturbances*, p. 91).⁶ When the Tirunelveli Police Superintendent warned in 1888 that the stability of the district was seriously threatened by lower-caste claims to greater rights and higher statuses, he also noted that Nadar aspirations were those most strongly contested by other Hindus (*ibid.*, p. 6).

Nadar social status was already anomalous, because although many of their customs were suggestive of a fairly high caste position, they were seen as scarcely higher than Untouchables and forbidden to enter Brahmanic temples (Caldwell 1857: 44–5). They became far wealthier during the nineteenth century through trade and

⁵ 'Nadar' is now employed universally; I use 'Shanar' here only when the context requires it.

⁶ Maravars provided most police in the region, calling into question police impartiality in handling disturbances involving Nadars.

business, which further intensified the ambiguity of their position and doubtless encouraged their single-minded quest for enhanced rights and privileges. At this stage these claims were still directed towards traditional forms of status recognition, though sometimes pursued by novel methods; thus, from the 1870s onwards Nadars tried unsuccessfully to use the newly-revamped system of law courts to gain entry into Hindu temples at Tiruthangal, Madurai, and Tiruchendur (Besse 1914: 664; Pate 1917: 126; Hardgrave 1969: 110; Ludden 1989: 194).⁷ They did manage to gain procession rights through the streets of Tiruthangal, but even this lesser privilege could generate conflict. In 1885, for example, Nadars tried to process along the streets of Gollapatti near Ettaiyapuram, and in the resulting unrest four Maravars and three Nadars were murdered. Processions connected with temple festivals or weddings increasingly became occasions on which status disputes were fought out, and needed ever more careful policing (*Disturbances*, p. 6).

The Kalugumalai Dispute

Given this general context, it is understandable why, from the moment the Kalugumalai car streets were built, Nadars began trying to make marriage processions along them. After their first attempt in 1851 had been blocked by other villagers, the Zamindar ruled that Nadar bridal couples could only go as far as the Pillaiyar temple in East Giri Pirakaram street (see Figure 1). His order was obeyed until 1866, when a Nadar attempt to process further was opposed by other villagers. The District Collector negotiated a compromise whereby couples could go in palanquins to the Pillaiyar temple, then walk to break a coconut at the northeast altar in the car streets. Nadars were still not satisfied, however, and in 1885 tried to process right into those streets. The ensuing brawl decided the Zamindar to seek an injunction against them.

In the first of the court cases which followed,⁸ the Zamindar was plaintiff in his capacity as temple Trustee. The defendants were

⁷ The Presidency's legal system was significantly modernized through the replacement of the Court of Sadr Adalat by the Madras High Court in 1862 (Paul 1991: 47).

⁸ The legal arguments are discussed more fully in Good (n.d.). The case began as Original Suit No. 421 of 1886 in Tuticorin Munsif's Court, but was transferred to Srivilliputtur as O.S. 284 of 1889. This was followed by Appeal Suit No. 39 of

eighteen leading Kalugumalai Nadars, joined at first by Srivilliputtur and Tuticorin Taluk Boards, the bodies responsible for public roads.⁹ The cases hung on the status and ownership of the car streets. The Trustee's position was that they belonged to the temple, which could therefore regulate religious activities within them. Accordingly, while anyone could use the streets for secular purposes, only castes allowed into the temple could process through them. Nadar processions had never been permitted, and their attempts to defy this ban had adversely affected temple purity. The plaintiff flatly denied Nadar claims that their weddings involved no fewer than four processions through the car streets, and even non-Nadar defence witnesses agreed that Nadar processions never went beyond the northeast altar in the past.

The Nadars argued that the car streets were public roads which people of all castes could use for any purpose whatever. They were therefore within their rights to process along them even if they had not done so before. They claimed that the main Kovilpatti–Sankarankovil road had run through East and South Car Streets until completion of the town bypass a few years earlier, though other witnesses said the bypass simply involved paving the previous through road. The temple claimed to collect rent from Nadar stall-holders in the car streets at festival times. The defence denied this, and produced evidence that Nadars owned premises in these streets. In 1880, Kalimuttu Nadan had bought a site described as 'house ground . . . east of the East Car Street'. Nadars claimed he had built a house there, but other witnesses testified that there were no houses at all in that street, from which Kalimuttu's premises were separated by vacant land.¹⁰ Moreover, Kalimuttu had been required to sign a bond promising the Trustee that he would not 'dwell in [the property] or build an upper story, as it was close to the palace and to the place by which the idol would be carried'.

1890 in Tinnevely Subordinate Court, and Second Appeal No. 1624 of 1893 in Madras High Court. Unless otherwise stated, my account of the history of the dispute prior to the High Court judgment comes from documents in these cases.

⁹ Srivilliputtur withdrew on discovering that Kalugumalai was not actually within its jurisdiction except for revenue matters (*Kalugumalai Riot*, p. 72), while Tuticorin did not pursue the case after receiving the Zamindar's written assurance that he would not interfere with secular traffic. The case was presumably transferred out of the jurisdiction of the interested Board.

¹⁰ The street certainly contains only lock-up shops nowadays, but its layout may have changed in the interim; it was 50 yards wide in 1895 (Anon., 'The Kalugumalai Tragedy and the Tinnevely Police', in Caussanel n.d.), but is now much narrower.

In December 1889 the Munsif declared himself fully convinced that the streets belonged to the temple. The Trustee therefore had the right to prevent their public use for purposes endangering the sanctity of the temple; thus, he did not seek to ban Nadars from the streets altogether, merely their wedding processions. The Munsif wholly disbelieved Nadar accounts of their marriage practices, noting that as their processions had always been opposed they had not even acquired customary rights to use the car streets. The claim that Nadar processions would pollute the temple was correct according to 'Orthodox Hindu religious feelings which . . . must be legally supported'. He therefore issued a permanent injunction banning Nadar processions from the car streets.

Soon afterwards, the Raja died leaving a juvenile heir, and the Court of Wards began administering his estate.¹¹ Although the respondents named in the Nadars' appeal were the young Zamindar and the District Collector, the active party in the ensuing litigation was in practice the Court's manager, V. Venkata Aiyar. The main grounds for appeal were that religious issues were beyond the jurisdiction of civil courts; that the Munsif had wrongly assessed the evidence on Nadar caste status; and that the documents showing temple ownership of the car streets were forgeries. The appeal judge agreed with the Munsif that the key question was whether the streets were private property; British administration was based on equality before the law and the religious neutrality of the state, so if the car streets *were* public roads the temple could not object to Nadar processions unless they interfered directly with the worship of others. In his view, however, the evidence clearly showed that the car streets were private property not fully dedicated to public use, for no private individual would have been allowed to place gates across a public highway or collect fees from street traders. Kalimuttu's 'house' in East Car Street was actually only a godown in a nearby lane, and the bond he signed showed that Nadars recognized the temple's rights. He dismissed the appeal.

This appeal judge had explicitly avoided ruling on the issues of pollution and sacrilege, which is no doubt why, in their subsequent appeal to the High Court, the Nadars asserted that these were actually the key points at issue. The Chief Justice's judgment on 7 August 1894 was brief and decisive, however. Nadar processions had always

¹¹ Ettaiyapuram was managed by the Court of Wards from 30 April 1890 until 29 December 1899.

been resisted. This fully justified the Appeal Judge's inference that the temple had not dedicated the streets as full public highways, and so was within its rights in refusing to allow Nadar processions through them. Judgment went entirely in favour of the temple, with costs.

The Nadars' Conversion

All legal avenues having been exhausted, local Nadars gave up seeking high-caste ritual privileges and instead contemplated becoming Catholics. Their conversion has generally been portrayed as motivated by status concerns rather than religious conviction, and even Jesuit historians do not dissent from this view:

[Nadars] want at all costs to raise themselves in the social hierarchy. The numerous conversions achieved among them . . . have been ascribed to this motive . . . One once said to a Father: 'It is not rice we seek, sir but the palanquin.' (Besse 1914: 663)¹²

Fr. Verdier, Father Superior of the Jesuit Mission, portrayed the Kalugumalai conversion as a perfectly straightforward matter; a Nadar delegation told Fr. Baupal in August 1894 that they wished to convert, so he visited Kalugumalai to teach them, and later bought the plot where the chapel was built (Besse 1914: 664). There is reason to think, however, that the church hesitated about accepting these would-be converts, because local clergy were well aware of the fraught situation in Kalugumalai. Moreover, most versions say that Fr. Caussanel, Father Superior of Palaiyankottai, was responsible for the conversions and purchase of the chapel site:

The Kalugumalai Shanars . . . sought Fr. Trincal's opinion. Whether because he was too busy, or felt little taste for the risk, he declined. Fr. Caussanel accepted the challenge . . . His apostolic vision showed him that a splendid harvest of souls could be gathered among the large populations of Nadars and low castes (Bazou n.d.: 513).¹³

¹² Though couched in general terms, this passage comes from Besse's discussion of Kalugumalai. 'Another Correspondent' claimed in the *Madras Mail* of 5–6–1895 that local Nadars had contemplated conversion for a long time; they 'previously intended to become Protestants, but for some reason they did not . . . and from that date they have been in a state of indecision till they became Roman Catholic converts'. There is no independent confirmation of this, however.

¹³ Fr. Trincal was a long-serving priest responsible for many conversions (Besse 1914: 663).

The French missionary Caussanel was a gung-ho, combative character with a predilection for high-profile litigation. When, on 22 November 1894, he purchased a site near East Car Street to build a church—the very site figuring in the court cases, in respect of which the bond had been signed—he was well aware of the scope this afforded to renew the Nadar claim for procession rights:

The struggle in prospect did not deter him . . . Being familiar with the complexities of Indian law, he resolved to build a chapel on the very street used by pagan processions and then establish a right of passage based upon de facto occupation. (*Ibid.*: 513:–14)

When work on the foundations began next day, a mob of protesting Hindus had to be dispersed by police. Some days later there was a riot in which the houses of the village Munsif and several Nadars were set ablaze. After more arson on subsequent days, local Hindus petitioned the District Magistrate. His officials predicted trouble if the Mission went ahead with a proposed pandal (ceremonial porch) facing East Car Street, which might impede the temple car. Seven Nadars and seven Hindus were charged with intent to commit breach of the peace, and the Tai Pusam festival passed off peacefully in January 1895 while these cases were pending (*Kalugumalai Riot*, pp. 73–9). Caussanel claimed later that he would have forbidden the baptism of any Nadars found guilty,¹⁴ but in the event the Deputy Magistrate ruled that Hindus were the aggressors, bound over two Maravars, and discharged the Nadars. In recognition of the catechumens' good behaviour Caussanel thereupon authorized the local priest to baptize all who were ready, and about 300 received baptism once the church was finished in March (Besse 1914: 664). On 29 March, the estate Manager learned that a pandal had indeed been erected in front of the church on what was allegedly temple land, so he began drafting a charge of trespass. He also took steps to recover legal costs from the earlier cases and the Nadar headman Arunachella Nadan handed over Rs 1,000 in Tuticorin on 6 April (*Kalugumalai Riot*, p. 74).

The 1895 Riot: Rival Narratives

The legal papers on the procession cases, summarized above, naturally presented both sides of the argument in full. In stark contrast,

¹⁴ Caussanel to Collector of Tinnevely, 13–5–1895. I follow the usage of the time in labelling the protagonists 'Nadars' and 'Hindus', though I show later that this rather begs the question.

the official report on the riot (*MJP 1895, Kalugumalai Riot*) merely reproduced verbatim the findings of the District Magistrate. The Madras Government did not fully accept local officials' accounts and criticized aspects of their conduct, but although the Magistrate's main findings had already been scornfully rejected by the High Court, no official weight whatever was given to the Nadar version of events. Yet there are in fact two radically different versions of what happened in Kalugumalai on 7 April 1895. They differ on many key points, and there is no *a priori* justification for privileging either of them, even though one received official endorsement and the other did not. I shall summarize matters of public record (undisputed, unless noted), before turning to the rival testimonies of local Hindus and the magistracy on one hand, and the Nadars backed by Fr. Causanel on the other.

At the climax of Pankuni Uttiram festival, huge wooden temple cars are dragged round the car streets by hundreds of devotees. When the 1895 procession reached East Car Street it halted at the chapel.¹⁵ The car-pullers claimed the pandal was blocking their path and demanded its removal, though even some witnesses on the Hindu side admitted that this claim was spurious, and there was ample space for the car to pass. The estate Manager was called and tried unsuccessfully to persuade the Nadars to remove the pandal just long enough for the car to pass. The situation began to deteriorate and stones were thrown, though it is not clear who started this. As the Manager tried to restore order he was stabbed to death. Others in his party were then wounded and two, including the Munsif of nearby Duraisamipuram village, later died. Eight Nadars barricaded themselves in the church for protection against the crowd; it is unclear whether they did so before or after the stabbings. Hindus set the church roof alight, and as the Nadars escaped they were arrested. More Nadars were arrested later, but the timing of this was controversial. That afternoon Hindus mounted a concerted attack on the Nadar quarter. Houses were burned and business premises looted, Nadar women were stripped and abused, and several people, including children, were horribly burned. Initial press reports put the Nadar death toll at twenty, but the actual number proved to be seven (*Kalugumalai Riot*, p. 75; Besse 1914: 665). The police were

¹⁵ Both Kalugumalai's temple cars are used at Pankuni Uttiram; the small car goes round first, led by a small bullock cart holding another image (Good 1989: 181). It is curious that descriptions of the riot only mention one car, without specifying which. In the Appendix, I describe what happens nowadays, especially at the northeast corner.

unable or unwilling to control the mob, and order was not restored until evening.

So much for the bare facts. Now for the rival accounts of the riot, starting with the statements of Hindus as recorded over the next few days by the Sub-Magistrate. Ironically, my source is Fr. Caussanel's own handwritten, annotated copy of the depositions of prosecution witnesses.¹⁶ His comments on these are dealt with later; the aim here is simply to report what witnesses had to say.

First, the reports on 7 April by the acting Kalugumalai Munsif to the Sub-Magistrate (1) and police (2), are important because they are the earliest written accounts of the riot:

(1) It has been informed by the Tahsildar of Etty that the following persons committed the said rioting: 1st. Aroonachella nadan (19 persons sont énumérées). After having sent a memo of these particulars to the Police Station I am going to make an enquiry. (all *sic*; Caussanel's interpolation)

(2) When the car turned to the East street Aroonachella and others who were keeping themselves ready in front of the Cath church armed with instruments, came in a crowd and prevented the turning of the ropes and chains and with knives cut the Manager, his Hd Clerk Pantcha Natha Iyer, Alvarswami of Doraiswamipuram and others, pelted stones, stabbed with hand spears and they themselves put fire to their church.

So the Munsif blamed Nadars for starting the riot, committing the murders, and even burning down their own church! Specific culprits were named too, but this information was all second-hand, a point returned to below. The key eye-witness was Alvarsami Nayakkar, the Munsif of Duraisamipuram. According to his death-bed statement,

some 100 Shanars were standing under the pandal. They prevented the people from coming near the Pandal. People told them gently to remove the Pandal for the present and put it afterwards. The Shanars raised a quarrel saying: 'What, you to dictate and we are to obey?' Aroonachella Nadan had an instrument under covert [*sic*] and gave a stab with it. I declare his name is not Aroonachella nadan but Mahalinga Nadan . . . He stabbed with a knife (the Manager). Another Shanan name unknown who was standing by gave me another stab. He was one of those who stood under the pandal. He belongs to Kalugumalai. I was stabbed all on a sudden. I fell down with my eyes a little hazy; I could not recognize the person. He stabbed and cut through. I found also Aroonachella Nadan in the mob near

¹⁶ Despite its provenance there is no reason to doubt this document's accuracy, as it was copied for Caussanel's private use in preparing the defence case (*Papers Connected*).

me. I know the name of Mahayalingha also. I do not know the names of others. (original gloss)

Several points are worth noting. He was sure that a Nadar stabbed the Manager, but confused about who it was. He said his own assailant was a Nadar, too, though he did not recognize the man. In fact he did not know the names of any Nadars except the two he mentioned.

The deposition of the Manager's chief clerk Sundaram Aiyar, who was wounded in the affray, read as follows:

the Manager entered the Pandal and asked the people not to commit riot. While he was saying these words a Shanar came by the right side of the Manager and stabbed him in his belly with a knife . . . The Manager fell down. I who was standing by him held him; and I received a cut a little down to my right eye. When I saw the mob first I did not find any instrument . . . Karuthu Nadan had on a black coat and was instigating the Shanars inside the pandal to commit a riot. The Manager then went to him and asked him to be quiet.

So according to Sundaram both he and the Manager were stabbed while inside the pandal. He had not noticed any armed Nadars prior to the murder. Both statements were contradicted by other witnesses. For example, Panchanatha Aiyar, another clerk, stated that

The Manager went near the Pandal . . . I stretched out my hand in order to pull him when a Shanar rushing towards me from on the North side of the Pandal gave a cut to my stretched out right hand with a [sickle]. The Manager turned and looked when a certain person stabbed him with an instrument . . . The Shanars who were standing under the Pandal might be 70 or 80. I observed that one or two among them had knives stuck in their laps.

Two other witnesses, Maruthu Konar and Karuppu Cettiya, testified that a Nadar stabbed the Manager, but that this took place outside the pandal. Maruthu was himself stabbed, allegedly by another Nadar, but could not identify his attacker among those arrested. None of these last three witnesses saw the attack on Alvar-sami, though it supposedly happened right beside them.

The accuracy of much of this testimony is highly questionable, as we shall see, yet it formed the basis not only of the verdicts in the Sessions Court but also, via the District Magistrate, of the official report on the riot. The key paragraphs of this report read as follows:

8. The Hindus in the procession considered or chose to consider it necessary that one of the chains of the car should be taken through the pandal which had been erected in front of the church . . . There was a crowd of Shanars in the pandal and church. They objected to the approach of the chain and

threw stones, which made the chain-pullers drop the chain. Then the manager went forward almost alone and said (I am quoting from the Sessions Court judgment in Sessions Case No. 41 of 1895):

‘Don’t make any riot. You should remove the pandal and re-erect it.’ Third defendant Karuthana Nadan replied impudently and the manager turned to direct the chain to be taken outside the pandal when the fourth defendant, Mahalinga Nadan, suddenly stabbed him in the abdomen, causing almost immediate death.

‘The manager’s head clerk, Sundram Aiyar, . . . was hit on the face with stones thrown by some Shanar. Panchanada Aiyar . . . held out his hand to help the manager and was slashed on the arm by third defendant Karuthana Nadan. Alwarsami Naik, the Village Munsiff of Doraisamipuram, was also stabbed by third defendant, Karuthana Nadan, in the abdomen and died early next morning. Marudakone, an old man, was also stabbed in the back by someone and died twelve days later . . . [R]ioting went on in the pandal between the Hindus and Shanars, and sticks and stones were freely used. This was the time when defendants received their injuries, consisting chiefly of abrasions and contusions.

‘The head constable, Kolundavelu Pillai . . . got information at 11.15 a.m. He took a carbine and hurried to the chapel, receiving on the way a yadast from the acting Village Munsiff . . . By this time the thatched roof of the chapel was on fire . . . The head constable . . . then pushed open the south door of the side terraced building forming an annexe to the chapel and arrested eight defendants. No weapons were found on these defendants . . . Meanwhile . . . other Shanars attempted to escape by the lane on the north, and thirty of them, including all the other defendants, were arrested by two constables . . . assisted by the Hindu crowd . . .’

9. The retaliation by the other Hindus for the murder of the manager and others began immediately. The church was set on fire, and, not content with this, the crowd invaded the Shanar quarters to the north-east portion of the village and burned the houses there. Their actual proceedings are still a mystery notwithstanding the inquiry into a number of cases brought against them, but in some way or other some seventy buildings were destroyed . . . The police were engaged in guarding the arrested Shanars and were not available to stop the proceedings of the mob, and, indeed, considering the number, they could have done practically nothing (*Kalugumalai Riot*, pp. 74–5; original gloss).

This account is basically the same as that of local Hindus. It blames Nadars for engineering a confrontation by erecting a pandal in the car street, accuses them of initiating the riot, and admits to absolutely no doubt that the murders were committed by Nadars as

charged.¹⁷ Matters became even more cut and dried when précised in later official writing. In the *District Gazetteer*, for example, Pate says categorically that the car could not get past the pandal; blames the instigation of stone-throwing on 'defiant Shānāns' and implies that Nadars were killed during the initial riot rather than the looting of their houses (1917: 126).

The Nadar version of events was quite different. It was based on a statement supplied to Caussanel by a sympathizer named M. S. Muttaya, and signed by seven *Hindu* eye-witnesses (though none were Kalugumalai residents). According to this, the car pullers

went to the church and called out to the inmates 'Hallow who is there? This pandal is a hindrance to the passing of the car, you must pull down the pandal.' The shanars came out and said 'We can not pull it down without the permission of the Revd. Father.' Then, those that questioned them threw down the cords, went in search of the manager with angry words. The manager . . . placed himself in front of the church and asked the shanars to pull down the pandal & promised to put it up again as soon as the car had passed. The Shanars replied politely 'Sir it is not proper that we pull it down without the permission of the Father, if your honour wishes it, you may pull it down with your own hands.'

Thereupon the Manager turned to the people who were to pull the car and holding the pillar of the pandal by one hand, he told them in a loud and angry tone 'what hindrance is there by this pandal, you may pull the car straight by the road.' Then stones were seen thrown from the North of the pandal upon the pandal and the Shanars who were standing there. The Manager told them not to make any riot and turned from the pandal towards the west. The Shanars at once ran into the church and shut themselves up into the church. In a short time, one of the people who were standing in front and rear of the car came forward and stabbed the Manager. Fire was set to the church on the southern corner. A nayaker in order to prevent the mischief seized the person who stabbed by the hand. He also in his turn was stabbed. The man escaped through the crowd. The bystanders were talking among themselves that one belonging to the set of Valasai Appavoo Tevan stabbed . . .

The Police and other people surrounded the church and arrested the Shanars as they escaped from the church from fire. In two hours time a person called 'The Sinna Maharaja of Etyapuram (*sic*), Sarkarai Sawmy and the Police came in a crowd to the Shanars' houses and told the people to plunder the houses. They beat the bystanders for remaining quiet and forced them to plunder the Shanars' houses. They beat women and children

¹⁷ Government attributed their eventual acquittals to legal incompetence rather than the weakness of the case (see below).

indiscriminately and plundered their jewels; stripped women of their cloth and ill treated them . . .

The Police and the two above-mentioned people would not leave people be quiet, they beat them and abused them for standing quiet and forced them again and again to set fire to plunder this and that house . . . The Police hunted after those Shanars who escaped the fire and ran out of the village, beat them and burnt them with burning wood and then shut them up in custody. The Sinna Maharajah himself beat the Maravars for not putting fire to the church and it was mainly through his instigation that fire was set to the church.¹⁸

According to these witnesses, then, Hindus began the stone-throwing; the Nadars locked themselves in the church *before* the murders; there was only one murderer, who came from and melted back into the Hindu crowd; specific relatives of the Zamindar instigated the attack on the Nadar houses, and the police actively encouraged it; and most Nadars were arrested during this attack, not right after the murders.¹⁹ In other words they exonerate Nadars of nearly all charges against them, and even suggest specific Hindu culprits for the main crimes. It is unlikely that these witnesses appeared in court, however. Muttaya had warned Caussanel of their understandable reluctance to testify on the Christian side, and they are not mentioned in the High Court judgment.

Muttaya had already sent Caussanel his own detailed report on the riot. It was consistent with the above statement—not surprising as his information came mostly from the same people—but far more accusatory. Enclosing a note from local catechist Michael Pillai, which alleged that the Zamindar's uncle Cinna Maharaja had described the Manager as 'a hindrance to their device', he suggested an entirely different motive for the Manager's murder:

'Sinna Maharaja' and 'Sackari Sawmy' were on bad terms with the manager Ettiapuram and consequently had a grudge against him. Many villains among the dependants of the Ettiapuram Zemindar were also discontented with the manager and were very glad to get rid of him from Ettiapuram. The native Hindus of Kalugumalai who have had for a long time an enmity against the christians and desired to revenge them, are at the bottom of the manager's murder and the murder and loss among the Xtians also [*all sic*].²⁰

¹⁸ Statement by four Vellalars and three Tevars, 18-4-1895 (*Papers Connected*).

¹⁹ This casts doubt on the police claim that they could not prevent the arson because they were fully occupied with a large crowd of Nadar prisoners.

²⁰ M. S. Muttaya to Fr. Caussanel, 9-4-1895 (*Papers Connected*). Like most Catholic writers (Verdier 1895: 372-3; Besse 1914: 665), he included harrowing

The suggestion, then, was that some of these enemies summoned the Manager into the crowd, fully intending to pick a quarrel with the Nadars and cause his death during the confusion.²¹ Only nicknames are given for the Zamindar's two relatives, but if 'Sinna Maharaja' refers to Cinna Nayakkar, maternal uncle of the Zamindar, a possible reason can be suggested for his hostility towards the Manager. The Zamindar's paternal uncle had proposed to grant Cinna 125 acres of rent-free land for his duties looking after palace jewelry, but the Collector and Manager had thought this excessive and the Manager had granted Cinna a cash allowance instead, at the low rate of Rs 30 per month.²²

The Sessions Court Case

Two Nadars registered immediate complaints about the attacks on their houses, but the police and Sub-Magistrate decided there was not enough evidence to charge anyone. Twelve more complaints were made later, but 46 of the 70 Hindus named never faced trial, and the rest were all freed by the Sessions Court, including the head constable whom Nadars accused of leading the mob (*Kalugumalai Riot*, pp. 75–7). By contrast, 34 of the 42 arrested Nadars were committed for trial at Tirunelveli Sessions Court, charged with murder and rioting.

Their committal, coupled with the failure to make charges stick against any of the arsonists, caused outrage among Nadars throughout the district. Donations in aid of their defence poured in; this was more an expression of caste solidarity than spiritual community, for Hindu Nadars supported the cause too (Bayly 1989: 446–7). Causanel wrote to the Collector asking why no-one was being tried for

accounts of atrocities against women and children; it was these which caused the widespread public outrage over police failure to charge the culprits.

²¹ This is taken for granted in Catholic sources; Bazou (n.d.: 511–12) calls the Kalugumalai affair a caste dispute, 'complicated by a palace quarrel involving the ... Zamindar's relatives'.

²² *CWP No. 2125, 10–8–1891*. In comparison, the Zamindar's mother and grandmother each got Rs 100 pocket-money. Managers often had to defend minor Zamindars against greedy relatives. When administering Ettaiyapuram in the 1870s, the Court appointed the then-Zamindar's uncle as Manager, but was forced to remove him for maladministration. The uncle later sued the Zamindar in an unsuccessful attempt to have the estate partitioned (*CWP No. 250, 2–2–1872, & No. 3442, 20–12–1878*; Pillai 1890: 143–5; Ludden 1989: 123–4).

the attack on the Nadars, and no-one else was being sought for the Manager's murder when even 'high caste Hindus' (the eye-witnesses quoted above) agreed that the culprit was not a Nadar. He gave assurances that his own sole aim was to redress injustice: he would never prejudice Christianity by defending people he knew were guilty. The Collector replied blandly, 'You may rest assured that if (the Magistrate) could have found any satisfactory evidence against the people who burnt the Shanars' houses he would have taken up that matter quite as vigorously as the other'.²³

Caussanel played a large part in planning the Nadars' defence and coordinating the lawyers' efforts²⁴ (Bazou n.d.: 516; Verdier 1895: 374). His copy of depositions by prosecution witnesses is annotated with his comments, from which it is possible to gain an idea of the defence strategy. The earliest statements were the Munsif's *yadasts* (memos) quoted above, which accused Nadars of starting the trouble, and named their headman Arunachella as a leading rioter. At that stage, though, the Munsif was relying entirely on information from the Tahsildar, who was not an eye-witness either; his own statement says that he got the Nadar names from 'a servant of the Hindu temple', and the fact that a temple employee was first to blame the Nadars made Caussanel deeply suspicious. Moreover, Arunachella claimed plausibly to have been in Tuticorin on 7 April, and was certainly not among those arrested in Kalugumalai.²⁵ A warrant was issued for his arrest next day, but his role was later played down. The Tahsildar's testimony has some other distinctly odd features:

[The Manager went to] the pandal at about 15 or 20 yards toward the south. In the meantime some-one came to me and desired me go towards the north. I looked towards the place where the Manager was standing to ascertain the cause. I saw the people crowded together under the pandal

²³ Caussanel to District Collector, 13-5-1895; Collector to Caussanel, 16-5-1895. The press was sympathetic to the Nadars, and sceptical of the police version: cf., reports on the riot in the *Bombay Catholic Examiner*, 26-4-1895; the *Madras Mail* the following week; *The Catholic Watchman*, 4-5-1895; and *The Hindu*, 17-5-1895. Much correspondence was generated, and few defended the police. 'A Correspondent' (*Madras Mail*, 28-5-1895) did argue that 'The Police force was an absurdly small one [which] could do little except try and save the Shanars from the Hindus', but 'Fiat justitia' reflected the majority view by asking sardonically, 'these gallant guardians of the peace who captured 40 Shanars, could they not capture even one Hindu?' (5-6-1895).

²⁴ These were R. Thomson, a European; Arokiasami, a Catholic; and Kuppusamy Aiyar, a Brahman.

²⁵ As mentioned earlier, he was in Tuticorin paying legal fees the day before the riot; cf. his petition to the Secretary of State for India, 1-4-1896 (Caussanel n.d.).

and I asked 'Why I should go North. The same man took me to a short distance saying 'that we might see all about it afterwards and asking me to advance a little further, and asked me to see the stones falling from above'. Immediately I hastened towards the North where a man named Muthuswamy Pillai, who came with me told me that there was a rumour that the Manager was stabbed. I withdrew a little towards the South to see them and guard myself and went to see the church. I saw the Manager being carried by some 2 or 3 persons towards the palace, his intestines coming out, and all his clothes tinged with blood . . . The man who asked me 'not to stay there' and to go towards the north' was Vaidga Naick. His name and residence not known to me . . . I did not see whether the people were standing in front of the Cathc. church . . . I did not know who stood or what cast of people stood (all *sic*).

Michael Pillai's note, mentioned earlier, supported the Tahsildar's account of his movements but suggested that the latter knew or guessed what was afoot: 'The Tahsildar understanding that they wanted to kill the Manager in the crowd tried to prevent him from going there, he himself refused to go in the crowd.' Whether this was so or not, the Tahsildar had clearly gone or been decoyed well away from the scene of the murder. Caussanel drew the obvious conclusion:

clearly people other than Shanars knew that these crimes, even the Manager's assassination, were going to take place. The murder and arson was thus wholly premeditated on the Hindus' part. It was not an unknown person but a man of Vaduga Nayakkar caste who warned the Tahsildar and undertook to keep him away.

As for Alvarsami Nayakkar's dying declaration, Caussanel asked with rhetorical scorn what credibility attached to a witness who named the murderer, retracted and named someone else, then admitted these were the only Kalugumalai Nadars whose names he knew? With hindsight this scepticism seems fully justified. Not only was Arunachella Nadan almost certainly 50 miles away at the time, but the High Court later ruled that Alvarsami's statement had been improperly obtained.

The initial hearings made Fr. Verdier pessimistic about the outcome; the judge seemed convinced by the Hindu story, and untroubled by the fact that only Christians had been charged (1895: 373). His spirits were raised by reading Thomson's speech for the defence, however, which convinced him that the defendants could not possibly be found guilty; 'To impose any sentence whatever would be an act of bad faith!' (*ibid.*: 374). This confidence proved misplaced, however. Although one of the Court Assessors recommended

acquittal, Mahalinga and Karutana were sentenced to death for murder on 17 August 1895, and the others received 3–6 month sentences for rioting.

The High Court Appeal and its Aftermath

Caussanel immediately got to work devising a new strategy for the High Court hearing.²⁶ His Jesuit colleagues were convinced that his latest arguments were irrefutable (Bazou n.d.: 516), and the prosecution certainly made little attempt to sustain the convictions. Even the Government Pleader (prosecutor) E. B. Powell agreed that the Sessions Judge had not discussed defence evidence properly, and should have acquitted many of the prisoners. He suggested a retrial, but this was ruled out as some had already completed their sentences.²⁷ Letters to Caussanel from lawyers and Mission officials give a vivid description of the scene in court, explaining how defence counsel Wedderburn sought to expose the prosecution evidence as ‘cooked up’:

The most difficult . . . task was to disprove the genuineness of the yadast of the Village Munsiff which purports to have been receipted by the Sub Magistrate at 4 p.m. that day and in which the name of Mahalingha Nadan is specifically mentioned as murderer of Manager . . . [T]his yadast can be called in question only by showing the submagistrate’s collusion with the police. In carefully sifting the records I found . . . such abundant proofs of his collusion with & connivance at the misdeeds of the police, that there was not much difficulty in establishing this fact also . . . Mr Powell . . . seems to despair of this ‘rotten case’ as he calls it.²⁸

[T]he Judges greatly suspect the Prosecution story and seem to be in favour of the defendants. They go into every detail and . . . make strong remarks on the Police and the Magistrate . . . We have full hope for Karuthana Nadan, we have some doubts for Maghalingam. Judges declined to believe the famous dying declaration. It is entirely gone. Judges themselves have found out some tricks played by the Police and Sub Magistrate in the early records which are very favourable to the defendants . . . The Govt. Pleaders . . . don’t raise their heads, but busily engaged (*sic*) in picking up the broken pieces of their story.²⁹

²⁶ The initial trial was Calendar Case No. 41 of 1895. The High Court cases were Referred Trial No. 74 of 1895, to confirm the sentences on Karuthana and Mahalinga; and Criminal Appeal No. 474 of 1895 by 31 Nadars plus catechist Michael Pillai, against convictions for rioting.

²⁷ ‘Legal Intelligence’; unattributed press cutting, 29–11–1895 (*Papers Connected*).

²⁸ Arokiasami to Fr. Caussanel, 29–11–1895 (Caussanel 1895–98).

²⁹ A. Sooseymariam Pillai to Fr. Caussanel, 29–11–1895 (Caussanel 1895–98).

On 4 December, the High Court overturned all the convictions, set the Nadars free, and strongly criticized the Sessions Court proceedings. The acquittals were warmly welcomed in the press, and the *Madras Mail* called for immediate measures to show government disapproval of the actions of the police and native magistrates.³⁰ Instead the government blamed the pleader for what it saw as a fiasco. He had not even tried to rebut 'incorrect' defence statements that the police aided the Hindu mob, that the accused were not properly identified by witnesses, etc. (*G.O. No. 1189 (Judicial)*, 16-7-1896).

Nadars everywhere greeted the verdict as a great victory over higher castes, and Hindus and Christians alike felt far better disposed towards the Catholic church. Caussanel was an overnight celebrity and was paraded through the streets in triumph when he visited Sivakasi and Srivilliputtur soon afterwards; in the former town 2,000 people declared their desire to become Catholics. Small wonder that a pronounced triumphalism crept into his letters to his Superior:

God has allowed it so as to open the eyes of all and produce fruits of salvation. It confounds the Hindus, and redresses a miscarriage of justice; but chiefly it gives hope to the weak, encourages the oppressed, and shows them the Catholic Church as a true refuge. The news has spread at once over the district; the authorities are dumbfounded and the police afraid.³¹

The coming year seems to promise . . . a fine harvest of souls. Everywhere there is talk of conversion and of turning temples into churches . . . Events in Kalugumalai . . . open a new era for the Catholic church in Tinnevely . . . Pagans still attached to idolatry out of fear . . . now hope soon to break free from such slavery [and] there is reason to hope . . . that a great breach will be made in the ranks of paganism (Caussanel 1895: 374-9).

He credited some of these developments to the two condemned men. While in jail they converted several fellow-prisoners, one of whom confessed to a crime for which his brother had been convicted and went to the gallows a Catholic. Once released these two 'apostles' toured the villages preaching, and drew huge crowds (*ibid.*: 378-9; Baomal n.d.).

³⁰ Date unknown: French translations in Caussanel (1895: 376); Bazou (n.d.: 517). *Tirāviṭa Pānu* carried an editorial on 14-9-1895, highlighting the High Court's criticisms of the Sessions Judge.

³¹ Caussanel to Verdier, 5-12-1895 (Caussanel 1895-98); trans. in Houpert (1937: 128).

The High Court had been so critical of the Sessions hearing that Caussanel saw excellent grounds for pressing the authorities to punish the officials and witnesses responsible (1895: 376). He also sought advice on whether to appeal against the Hindus' acquittals, in the light of the government's unrepentant comments. A written opinion advised him to continue, arguing that

Government are bound by ties of self-interest to defend as far as possible the acts of their own servants. To admit corruption and mismanagement and blundering on the large scale in which they appear in the Tinnevely Dt. in this case would be to admit a serious blot in their only [*sic*] administration . . . But perhaps the most striking and obvious flaw in the whole argument is [that] no attempt worth the name has been made . . . to show what the Police and magistracy did to arrest the wholesale murder and arson that went on for 5 hours . . . The Secretary of State . . . may be expected to take a more unprejudiced view . . . if we fail there we must go to parliament and I am much mistaken if some astute member of the opposition cannot be found . . . for attacking successfully the Indian administration of the Government.³²

Thereafter, Caussanel was prime mover behind a series of petitions by acquitted Nadars addressed to the authorities in Madras and London. In February 1896 they petitioned the Governor, asking the government to appeal against the Sessions Court's acquittal of Hindus charged with murder, dacoity, and arson, and seeking compensation for their destroyed property.³³ They argued that it was absurd to suppose an experienced man like the Manager would have demanded the pandal's demolition when it clearly caused no obstruction; the incident was really part of a pre-conceived plan to demolish the church. They mentioned the Manager's enemies among local Maravars and Nayakkars, suggesting that they 'perpetrated the deed in this general disturbance'. Lastly, they pointed out that their complaints against local police had been referred by the Magistrate to those same police for investigation.

The authorities seem to have done all in their power to subject this petition to bureaucratic delay. It was first returned because it had been drafted by counsel; government could only be addressed by principals, not their agents. An almost identical petition was then

³² Opinion of Fr. J. D. W. Sewell, S.J., in Caussanel (1895): provenance and date unspecified, but circumstantial evidence suggests he was writing from Britain.

³³ 'C. Arunachella Nadan and others of the Shanar Caste, late prisoners in Session Case No. 41 of 1895' to the Governor of Fort St George, February 1896 (Caussanel n.d.). In *G.O. No. 572 (Judl.) of 19-3-1896*, the Government ruled out compensation.

sent directly to the Secretary of State for India in London.³⁴ The covering letter also requested that, as the Nadars had lost everything and were innocent of rioting, they should be exempt from the tax to support the punitive police force which had been billeted locally. This petition was not accepted either, on the grounds that it should have been sent via Madras, but when Arunachella submitted a (slightly amended) version to Madras, it too was returned because he had not signed every page. After yet another delay when Madras demanded three more copies, his petition was finally forwarded to the Secretary of State in December 1896. In the curtest of replies a few months later, the Secretary of State 'declined to intervene': no reason was given.³⁵

So the campaign masterminded by Caussanel failed to get the cases reopened, failed to obtain compensation for the Nadars; and failed even to win them tax exemption regarding the punitive police force (Houpert 1937: 129). Yet oddly enough these challenges to the Madras and British governments are what Caussanel is chiefly remembered for nowadays. Several priests to whom I have spoken even seem to think that he was successful in some of these objectives. Presumably it was the sheer audacity and resourcefulness of his tactics that gave him his status in the folk-history of South Indian clergy.

The Exchange of Land Between Temple and Church

To complete the story, this section summarizes how the Catholic church came to be established on its present site.³⁶ The replacement Court of Wards manager, P. Sivarama Aiyar, persuaded Caussanel to accept an alternative plot of land near the Nadar quarter, in exchange for the East Car Street site. The proposed new site lay within the procession route round the hill, but Caussanel agreed to build a high wall between church and road and guaranteed that

³⁴ Aroonachella Nadan to the Secretary of State for India, 1-4-1896. Their lawyer Thomson contributed to the publicity barrage by writing to the Catholic Archbishop of Westminster, and sending an article to the *Catholic Herald*.

³⁵ Memorial from Aroonachella Nadan to Governor of Madras, 31-8-1896; *MJP*, *Current No.* 4220, 2-10-1896, & *G.O. No.* 1899, 14-12-1896; *Judicial Dept. Memo No.* 2701, 19-12-96. Arunachella Nadan to Madras Govt., 27-12-1896; Secretary of State for India to Madras Govt., Despatch No. 1 (Judicial), 11-2-1897; *MJP*, *G.O. No.* 366, 15-3-1897 (Caussanel n.d.).

³⁶ For more details, and a full list of archival sources, see Good (n.d.).

Hindu processions would be allowed to play music as they passed.³⁷ The Court doubted whether local Nadars would abide by these conditions in practice, but it finally approved the idea and the exchange occurred on 25 May 1897.

Several temple priests and worshippers immediately filed a civil case to get this exchange nullified.³⁸ They claimed the new plot was temple land which the estate could not dispose of, and indeed the Manager subsequently admitted that it had been treated as temple land in recent years, though he continued to assert that it was in fact ordinary estate land. The plaintiffs also claimed that processions were acts of worship towards the hill itself; as the entire hill was sacred, it would violate the principles of Hindu religion to construct a church upon it. The Manager categorically denied this, claiming that processions were merely circling the main shrine of the temple by the shortest possible route. He pointed out that they had always encircled the Nadar quarter, which had never been seen as detracting from their sanctity. Caussanel concurred with this in his separate defence statement, stressing that Catholic worship was already conducted in the Nadar quarter without objection. He claimed that the suit was motivated by malice against the Mission, which had spent large sums on the exchange and subsequent construction work. Court of Wards Members were angry to learn about the doubtful tenurial status of the site, and complained that they would never have approved the exchange if they had known; by this stage there was little option but to fight the case, so they advised playing down the ownership issue, and stressing the reduced risk of bloodshed.

The case was heard against the backdrop of the 1899 riots in Ramnad and Tirunelveli.³⁹ The Judge found the new site acceptable on religious grounds, but unexpectedly ruled that the exchange

³⁷ On religious music as a source of conflict see Roberts (1990), though I am not sure of the applicability to India of his argument that it only became an issue in Sri Lanka once its use had been restricted in accordance with British notions of 'peace and quiet'. The main consideration in the present case was aural invasion of others' sacred space, rather than violation of their repose.

³⁸ Filed in Tuticorin, but eventually heard as O.S. No. 74 of 1897 in Tirunelveli Sub-Court.

³⁹ There were hundreds of clashes between Nadars and others, including one in Kalugumalai on 15 June, when a Hindu crowd bent on looting the Nadar quarter was dispersed by the Magistrate. The case also coincided with the early stages of the celebrated 'Kamudi case', in which Nadars sought unsuccessfully to gain entry to a temple in Kamudi town (Hardgrave 1969: 122; Ludden 1989: 195).

involved financial loss to the temple; and that the imposed conditions were not strict enough. He therefore granted a temporary injunction until Caussanel agreed to pay Rs 20 annual rent, and undertook never to obstruct the road. The Manager wanted to appeal but the Court of Wards refused to sanction this, concluding that the judgment was favourable in making it almost impossible for Caussanel to return to the old site.

The resulting stalemate satisfied neither the estate nor the Mission, however, so they found a new site to the east, well away from the hill. It was already partly owned by Christian Nadars, so its use could not plausibly be said to threaten the temple's interests.⁴⁰ The Pallars who occupied the rest of the site agreed to move in return for compensation payable by the Mission, and Caussanel also bought 2 acres of adjoining Christian-owned land to make the new site a more usable size.⁴¹ The exchange took place on 18 October 1904, and construction of the church began almost at once. Kalugumalai became a full parish in 1906, so a convent, girls' school, and other facilities were added (Besse 1914: 663–6). Even so, Fr. Baupal, the priest at that time, admitted that local Nadars were hugely disappointed at the outcome, and that 'the palanquin' still dominated their ambitions. They

sought and still seek to take their processions into the village streets, especially at weddings. They can run shops, pass through, and trade there, but cannot go in procession. This is their great regret: some ask, 'What good has it done to become a Christian?' (Baupal, n.d.)

What 'Really' Happened?

Returning to the riot, we might again expect to find the most balanced assessment coming from the courts, where both sides have the chance to present their argument systematically, yet proceedings in the Sessions Court were attacked by all parties. Nadars complained

⁴⁰ The estate Dewan broached the subject to Cinna Maharaja (presumably the Zamindar's uncle and the man allegedly involved in the plot against the Manager), explaining to Caussanel the need 'to conciliate him so far, at least, as to prevent him from doing mischief afterwards . . . As I expected he threw all sorts of obstacles in the way.' The Dewan talked him out of his objections, however.

⁴¹ Caussanel attempted to secure Nadar procession rights by pressing the Zamindar—who had now attained his majority, ending the period of Court management—to define 'the circuit they may make around their locality without objections', but the Zamindar evaded the question.

that the Judge ignored the Assessor who recommended a not guilty verdict;⁴² the High Court identified at least one 'serious mistake'; and government thought he failed to act 'with proper thoroughness and care' (*G.O. No. 1189 (Judicial), 16-7-1896*). It is true that the government took an equally jaundiced view of the High Court proceedings; nonetheless, the High Court judges, Shephard and Davies, gave the evidence its most thorough and least partisan examination, and at this late stage we can do no better than consider their assessment.

Alvarsami's dying statement was ruled inadmissible because the Sub-Magistrate had not been present when it was recorded, which the Judges found 'extraordinary' in the circumstances. They strongly criticized the Sessions Judge for not differentiating between witnesses according to the dates of their statements, even though some were not given until 30 April or later. This was crucial because:

where feelings undoubtedly ran high and where counter charges were being made . . . of murder, rioting and arson, we do not think it safe to trust the evidence of any of the witnesses who did not make their statements immediately . . . It does not seem to have occurred to [the Judge] how great the risk was that spectators at the riot might after some interval . . . be led to believe that they could point out among the prisoners the men who did particular acts most especially if rumour had already fixed itself on certain names.

They assessed the evidence of individual witnesses with this general point in mind. Police witnesses had not seen the murders, but claimed to have heard shouts naming Mahalinga; the Court rejected this evidence. Several witnesses had given blatantly false testimony, the most important being the village Munsiff, Subba Nayadu. His *yadast* on the 7th and statement on 13 April made clear he was not an eye-witness, yet at the Sessions Court he had given elaborate descriptions of both murders: 'The falsity of an important witness like the village Munsiff necessarily throws some suspicion on the whole case.'

The evidence of Karuppan Cettiyyar, Sundaram Aiyar, and Panchanada Aiyar needed more careful scrutiny. They had given different accounts of the knifings even though they were standing virtually side-by-side. The Court felt they were honest witnesses who had simply been confused and frightened, especially as two of them were

⁴² Petition from C. Arunachella Nadan and others to Madras Governor, Feb. 1896 (Caussanel n.d.).

wounded in the incident. It was highly critical of how the authorities treated these witnesses, however. All gave statements on 7 or 8 April, yet no identification parades were held even though the alleged murderers were already in custody. This omission was never explained. On 9 April each witness was finally confronted with fifty prisoners and asked to point out those who had been in the pandal. In all three cases Mahalinga, the alleged assassin, was the very last person identified, a coincidence which the Court understandably found 'singular'. Moreover, the actions of the police and Magistrate on 7 and 8 April were inconsistent with knowledge on their part that Mahalinga and Karuthana were likely murderers: they had not been arrested on the spot; the knives they allegedly used were never found; and they were treated no differently from other arrested Nadars at first.

In these circumstances the evidence did not justify Mahalinga's conviction. The murder case against Karuthana was weaker still. He was never accused by anyone until 9 April, and the 'only three witnesses whom we consider in any measure trustworthy' never mentioned him. The charge of causing grievous hurt to Panchanada was also dismissed. As none of the other reliable witnesses had seen the incident, it boiled down to Panchanada's word against Karuthana's. The case against the remaining prisoners was so weak that the Court dismissed it out-of-hand: 'The Judge makes no attempt whatever to deal with their cases individually . . . The fact of their standing in the Pandal and remonstrating by mere word to the passage of the car is no evidence of any offence.'

As well as identifying procedural defects involving the Sub-Magistrate and Judge, the Court rejected the police account of the arrests, according to which the accused were all arrested at the church and had been in custody by 11.30:

We altogether disbelieve the story of their wholesale arrest at the church and prefer to credit the account which they and their numerous witnesses give of their being arrested in different places and at different hours of the day. The case for the prosecution does not account for the wounds some of them severe which were found on the persons of all the prisoners except two . . . It is remarkable that although the hour of the arrest is now given about 11.30 o'clock for all the prisoners, yet in the first report of the police the hour of arrest is stated to about 1.30 p.m. (*sic*) This . . . supports the account of the defendants.

It also supports circumstantially the defendants' account of police behaviour during the plundering and burning of their houses, of

course, though that episode fell outwith the remit of the hearing. Moreover, despite its acquittal of Mahalinga and Karuthana, the High Court could not of course express a view on the identities of the actual murderers, and as no-one else was ever tried for these crimes, the rival Nadar explanation was never tested in court.

Despite that, we now have a substantial body of material against which to assess the rival versions of events. Before the riot both sides were spoiling for a confrontation, but it seems most likely that Hindus were the aggressors. They could have got the car past the pandal easily enough had they wished, while the Nadars were so out-numbered that it would have been foolhardy in the extreme to initiate any fighting. There was clearly violence on both sides once the riot started, and many Nadar prisoners, like many discharged Hindus, were indeed probably guilty of rioting, no matter when and where they were arrested; the fact that they were ultimately cleared was a result of the unsavoury stew of bias, perjury, and incompetence exposed by the High Court. It also seems probable that Nadars committed at least some murders and woundings, though far from certain that Mahalinga or Karuthana carried out any of them. They would probably have succeeded in the High Court even if the case against them had been stronger, such was the Sub-Magistrate's ineptitude; as it was, they seem almost to have been picked at random, in Karuthana's case because of gossip days afterwards. Even if Karuthana did wound Panchanada once the riot was under way, that does not mean he committed either of the murders.

The crucial event was the Manager's murder, which led to the general fighting: Nadars could have committed all the other stabblings, yet not have been responsible for this. It is hard to know how much credence to attach to the Hindu eye-witnesses on the Nadar side, especially as they never testified in court. There is, however, the curious incident of the Tahsildar's removal from the scene. There seem only two possible reasons why he never testified in court, an omission which the High Court found worthy of comment: either it was decided that his evidence was irrelevant, as he was not an eye-witness; or, more plausibly, there were matters which the temple side did not wish to emerge in cross-examination. All in all, it still seems possible that a Nadar committed this murder, but more likely that a disgruntled estate employee or distant relative of the Zamin-dar was responsible.

There is obviously no doubt that Hindus carried out the attack on the Nadar quarter. The High Court findings are consistent with

police connivance in this, but one effect—intended or not—of government unwillingness to investigate too closely was to conceal the extent of inadequacy or even complicity of the local magistracy and police. The role of the Zamindar's relatives is not fully clear—why were they so eager to participate in, or even instigate, the attack on the Nadar quarter?—but it does seem plausible that the Manager's murder was the outcome of a power struggle within Ettaiyapuram zamindari, carried out under cover of the procession dispute rather than its accidental by-product. In short, the suggestion is that local tension was utilized opportunistically by people whose power-base was threatened by Court of Wards management of Ettaiyapuram estate. In reality, though, one Manager was simply replaced by another, equally bound to carry out Court of Wards policy, so if there was indeed a plot against the unfortunate Venkata Aiyar, it was based on an already out-dated, over-personalized conception of the state and its functionaries. The destruction of Nadar houses and property was to prove equally futile. Kalugumalai still has a prosperous Nadar community and an imposing Catholic church, though Nadar dissatisfaction over its location lingers to this day. In all other respects, however, history was on the Nadars' side. Barely fifty years later, India was a secular democracy, Tamil Nadu had a Nadar Chief Minister,⁴³ and it had become impossible for courts to uphold discriminations based on caste, however 'orthodox' they claimed to be (Galanter 1989: 157).

The Role of Father Caussanel

Mahé's lengthy obituary gives a judicious assessment of Caussanel's character, particularly his career as a litigant. During his stewardship Palaiyankottai accounted for a large proportion of lawsuits involving the Madurai Mission, and Caussanel himself gained fame and influence through these activities. In discussing his approach to litigation, Mahé paints a vivid picture of the missionary's personality:

⁴³ K. Kamaraj, a Ramnad Nadar, headed the Congress administration in the 1960s. Ironically, his support for Congress prior to Independence had provoked violent opposition from the then-dominant Nadar faction in Ramnad (Hardgrave 1969: 186–8). A further irony is that when Ramnad district was partitioned recently, the southwestern half was named after Kamaraj, and the northeastern half after Mutturamalinga Tevar, a Maravar and the Nadars' bitter political enemy (*ibid.*: 223).

He was competent in the law, and familiar with the ways of lawyers; his assurance and tenacity in court, unpredictable attacks, and agility in debate impressed magistrates and advocates all the more because they did not always understand his arguments or his English . . . Judges, too, soon had reason to fear his bold methods: he inflicted humiliating defeats on them by appealing to higher authority, and petitioning the government, Viceroy, and Secretary of State for India. This showed the Church to be a refuge for all unfortunates, and led providentially to thousands of conversions (Mahé 1931: 245–6).⁴⁴

Some in the church felt, apparently, that Caussanel was too eager to resort to litigation. Disagreeing with this view, Mahé notes that few of his most celebrated cases were actually instigated by him; Father Superiors are often circumscribed by the prior actions of subordinates. Caussanel's predecessor at Palaiyankottai⁴⁵ had actually engaged in more litigation, but with less publicity. He concludes:

Did he abuse a tactic which he knew only too well how to use? Despite opinions to this effect, I cannot bring myself to believe it . . . The Father's real strength lay not in the number of his judicial actions; it was the way he conducted them that made him a formidable adversary. Yet a combative attitude is not out of place in legal matters: it has the great advantage of deterring would-be trouble-makers, and overall poses less of a threat to success than overt displays of pacifism (*ibid.*, 246–7).

Whatever one's general assessment of Caussanel's penchant for the law, he seems to have been fully justified in supporting the Kalugumalai Nadars in their court case. Equally clearly, however, he cannot be absolved of blame for creating the situation in which the riot took place, for even church historians admit he knew full well that siting a chapel in East Car Street was bound to reopen the running sore of the procession dispute (Bazou n.d.: 513–14).

Communal Riots and the Kalugumalai Case

The depressing frequency of mass violence in South Asia is sometimes seen as intrinsic to the colonial and post-colonial state. According to this view, any state whose legitimating concepts include national security, development, and modern technology, is bound 'to promote violence . . . against smaller minorities [and] sects' (Nandy

⁴⁴ This exemplifies the tendency to credit Caussanel undeservedly with success in his dealings with higher government authorities.

⁴⁵ This was Fr. Verdier, who was Superior of the entire Madurai Province during Caussanel's time in Palaiyankottai (Krishnaswami Ayyar 1934: 225).

1990: 89). Others see this violence as a form of social pathology. The state's failure to create a sense of cultural homogeneity in society generally, or to satisfy fairly and adequately the aspirations and grievances of its citizens, helps foster ideologies which encourage the scapegoating of other sections of society, or express alienation from a state perceived as inefficient, corrupt, or authoritarian (Das 1990: 4–5). Whichever position is taken, collective violence is clearly far from *sui generis*. It marks one instant of heightened, expressive action in a long process of social conflict, and can be understood only in light of the general context and specific circumstances under which it arises. Moreover, the apparent chaos of a riot conceals a remarkable degree of structure, even stylization, in form and content. Far from being random or disorganized, rioters' behaviour is in fact highly distinctive and draws on a restricted cultural repertoire, so much so that riots can usefully be analysed in terms of the distinctive features of rites of passage, including temporary breakdown or inversion of normal rules and institutions, and a heightened sense of *communitas* among participants. This concluding section addresses such issues by looking at the broad political context of the Kalugumalai riot; the particular significance of the time and place at which it occurred; and the styles of violence employed at different stages. As the discussion will show, the riot provides a test case for current theories regarding collective violence in contemporary South Asia, for it displays several key attributes of such violence to which Veena Das (1990) has drawn attention.

In an influential general article, C. A. Bayly shows that religious conflict did not suddenly spring up as a concomitant of modernization following the end of Company rule, but was already occurring in the eighteenth century and before, even in places where religion was markedly syncretic—and without necessarily undermining this syncretism in any way (1985: 202–3). He argues that eighteenth-century religious riots

bear a very close resemblance to the riots of the later colonial period. Like them, they often occurred when local structures of *police* and urban government were in the process of change. Again, religious conflict seems to have taken on an overtly communal form when local systems of compromise and bargaining were being rapidly modified by the social mobility of *new groups of merchants*, or artisans or by the defensive manoeuvres of a declining urban *gentry* (1985: 202; italics added).

He might almost be describing Kalugumalai, with the italicized protagonists replaced by Maravars, local Nadars, and zamindari or

temple officials, respectively, a convergence all the more striking because his own examples concern circumstances, times, and places far removed from 1890s Tirunelveli.⁴⁶ His most general conclusion may be paraphrased as follows: *religious differences are more likely to become communal conflicts when they coincide with shifts in political and economic power* (1985: 203).

Susan Bayly takes an even stronger line on continuity in South India, asserting that there was nothing 'modern' about nineteenth-century honours disputes (1989: 447). These had occurred for centuries, though they intensified in the late eighteenth century as old southern kingdoms collapsed; they were therefore not a by-product of economic or political modernization under colonial rule, and the only really novel feature of late nineteenth-century upheavals was the involvement of lower castes previously unconcerned about such matters. She also questions the colonial tendency to attribute them to the influence of mission education. Christianity was not seen by protagonists as

a radical foreign ideology . . . working to 'unhinge' a static and hierarchical social order . . . Conversion . . . merely provided one more set of bargaining counters . . . If a group failed to win new rights in a locality's ranking scheme as Hindus, they could convert to Christianity, re-stage their campaign for new honours, and hope to win on the next round (*ibid.*: 448).

Bayly uses the Kalugumalai saga to illustrate these general statements, but whereas there can be little argument that local Nadars provide 'a classic example of a tactical "conversion" to Christianity' (1989: 445–6; cf. Hardgrave 1969: 111),⁴⁷ I am less convinced that their behaviour displays quite the seamless continuity that she implies. Agreed, it would be mistaken to attach much importance to whether disputes involved Hindu or Christian Nadars; hence perhaps her apparent misgivings about describing such conflicts as 'communal',⁴⁸ an issue returned to at the end. She also concludes, however, that they 'did not appear as products of a "modernising" form of colonial rule' (1989: 447), yet while she demonstrates conclusively

⁴⁶ Many examples involve state-sponsored violence against external rivals or against internal minorities professing another religious affiliation, and nearly all are Hindu-Muslim conflicts in northern India.

⁴⁷ Even the missionaries admitted this, as shown above. The corresponding strategy among groups which were already Christian was to change sectarian allegiance (Bayly 1989: 431–2).

⁴⁸ I deduce this from the fact that the term only appears right at the end of her book, and even then is qualified by being contained within quotes.

that such conflicts were nothing new, surely the very fact that they flared up in the late nineteenth century indicates that significant 'shifts in political and economic power' (C. A. Bayly 1985: 203) were indeed taking place? Whether or not these can legitimately be described in terms of 'modernisation', they do seem unequivocally to be products of colonial rule—under the stimulus provided by the British census, for instance (Hardgrave 1969: 109).

It seems more fruitful to recognize that although identities based on caste and religion are ideological constructs whose significance is continually being renegotiated and reinterpreted, they nonetheless happen often to be expressed in historical terms. The coming of widespread education was clearly a prerequisite for the kind of scholarship, however tendentious and misguided, which lay behind the new Nadar claims to Ksatriya origins. Moreover, those claims—not uncommon, after all—might not have generated such intense opposition but for the existence of a small Nadar elite with the material resources to act out the pretensions of such a status. Finally, although Kalugumalai Nadars still held a view of status which placed a premium on such matters as temple entry and procession rights, so that the dispute was couched in the quintessentially 'primordial' terms of caste purity and precedence, it was nonetheless pursued by the relatively novel means of a case in the revamped civil courts. Nadars had only recently begun using this new arena of conflict provided by the colonial regime, and given the emphasis in official rhetoric on 'equality before the law' the attractions of such a strategy are obvious. In practice the law was to prove something of a broken reed for some decades yet, for although secular exclusions based on caste never received more than limited support, courts continued well into this century to uphold customary rights in supposedly 'religious' contexts, since these were believed to reflect 'an overarching, differentiated Hindu ritual order in which the various castes were assigned, by text or by custom, certain prerogatives and disabilities' (Galanter 1989: 147). This strategy was not markedly successful, therefore, but it *was* new.

So far the argument has assumed that 'Nadar' is a clearly-defined, unproblematic category. Recent scholars disagree markedly over this, however, though a brief summary risks making these differences seem starker than they really are. Hardgrave, first of all, distinguishes poor toddy-tappers in Tirunelveli from wealthy Ramnad merchants further north. For toddy-tappers the church's organizational support was crucial; they displayed 'no consciousness of a Nadar com-

munity' until, thanks to the missions, they 'found the strength of unity and, through education, began slowly to advance' (1969: 263); by contrast, most merchants went on acting within a Hindu frame of reference,⁴⁹ avidly pursuing Ksatriya-hood in order to redress the growing disparity between their wealth and status. Hardgrave's explanatory framework thus resembles that of the nineteenth-century colonial authorities cited earlier, except that he separates out two strands which they tended to jumble together, no doubt because an over-substantialized view of 'caste' led them to see Nadars as more homogeneous than they actually were.⁵⁰ Even so, Washbrook has criticized Hardgrave for not going far enough in this respect, and questions his assumption that these two groups, for all their differences, still constituted a single 'community' (1971: 279). In similar vein, Ludden challenges Hardgrave's assumption (1969: 21) that Nadars shared a common origin as autochthones of south Tirunelveli. Inscriptions and other evidence suggest that relatively high-status Nadans were early immigrants into Tirunelveli and Ramnad; that toddy-tapping Shanars arrived later and settled in a more limited area; and that they were always endogamous subcastes (Ludden 1989: 48). Yet after agreeing with Washbrook that the two were still quite distinct in the nineteenth century, Ludden joins Hardgrave in downplaying their differences; although there were 'no direct connections' between them, they nonetheless 'responded culturally and politically in similar ways' (*ibid.*: 255). It is certainly true that claims to Ksatriya status employed terms drawn largely from the writings of southern Christians (Hardgrave 1969: 78), yet Washbrook argues that while it suited Ramnad Nadars to profess unity with Shanars, because the larger the group they claimed to represent the greater the influence wielded under British administration, they did not make common cause in practice.⁵¹

⁴⁹ From the start of the 20th century onwards, by contrast, their emphasis shifted to the pursuit of secular goals through more conventionally political means (Hardgrave 1969: 264).

⁵⁰ In emphasizing Christian conversion, education, and economic advancement, official accounts (e.g. *Disturbances*) do not conform to the pattern which Pandey finds in the colonial historiography of 19th century North India, where riots are interpreted in terms of timeless antagonisms, and 'the rise of new social identities and aspirations is practically inconceivable' (1990: 130).

⁵¹ Various 'caste associations' formed from 1895 onwards claimed to represent all Nadars, yet membership was confined to a few eminent individuals, culturally remote from most of their alleged constituency (Hardgrave 1969: 130). The outcomes were quite different in the two cases, too: 'While the Ramnad Nadars pro-

Turning from Nadar protest in general to the Kalugumalai riot itself, it manifests several key attributes of 'communal' violence to which Das has recently drawn attention. For example, the context was clearly one of 'conflicting temporalities' in different religions (Das 1990: 17), though officials were unaware of this, or chose to ignore it. While the District Magistrate explained the peaceful conclusion of the earlier Tai Pusam festival by the fact that ring-leaders on both sides were facing court proceedings, another contributory factor may have been that its car procession occurred on a Friday,⁵² and did not conflict directly with Christian religious observances. In contrast, the Pankuni Uttiram car festival fell on 7 April 1895, which was also Palm Sunday (Besse 1914: 664; also High Court judgment). The fact that this was an important Catholic festival day which local Nadars might legitimately wish to celebrate, particularly as it came so soon after their baptism, was never mentioned in the official report, reinforcing the impression that building the pandal was an act of pure, wilful provocation.

The most obvious aspect of the dispute was that it concerned access to and control over sacred space; this too is a common feature of South Asian communal violence (Das 1990: 11). The entire procession route is sacred ground (Good n.d.), so a chapel anywhere in the car streets would certainly have caused trouble, but the northeast corner is particularly significant from several different points of view, so much so that the chapel could scarcely have been sited in a more provocative location. The first set of significances concerns religious cosmology. The altar in question is dedicated to *Īsāna*, the god of fertility (Gonda 1954: 250n) and universal government (Brunner-Lachaux 1963: 333), and divine regent of the northeast.⁵³ Iconographically, he is the central aspect of Siva's five-faced form,

gressed, the Hindu Shanars of Tinnevely continued much as before' (Washbrook 1971: 279). Washbrook proposes a 'big man' view of Nadar politics, rather than one based on any sense of 'community'; others feel he goes too far, and accuse him of 'cynical materialism' and of over-stressing politics at the expense of culture (Roberts 1982: 193, 203).

⁵² Festivals coincide with lunar asterisms in particular solar months; see Fuller (1980) for a clear account of the Tamil religious calendar. Tai Pusam car festival happens in *Tai* (Jan.–Feb.) on the day when the *pūcam* asterism is current at sunrise; in 1895, according to my calculations based on Swamikannu Pillai (1982), this was 8 February.

⁵³ It is called the eighth altar, though it is never the eighth visited during processions; this may reflect the fact that *Īsāna* is also the eighth, all-encompassing form of Agni (Stutley 1977: 120).

and is portrayed looking vertically upwards.⁵⁴ Consequently, the northeast symbolizes the vertical axis, the centre and, by extension, the whole of Kalugumalai. During temple festivals, for example, seedlings are grown in earth brought from the northeast, whose fertility encapsulates that of the entire village. This is the only altar whose cosmological significance is elaborated to any extent in practice.

Its particular significance for Nadars derived from the fact that it marked the limit beyond which wedding processions could not lawfully go. The positive as well as negative aspects of this restriction are now clear; the Nadars had been allowed to approach *a* sacred centre, but not *the* sacred centre of Kalugacalamurti's shrine itself. But this corner is also significant as the place where temple porters, who are predominantly Maravars, cook ceremonial meals during car processions, and take precedence in receiving honours (*mariyātai*) after the ensuing worship (See Appendix). The status and prestige attached to such honours is out of all proportion to their material value (Appadurai & Breckenridge 1976; Appadurai 1981: 46–7), and even today people often come to blows over them. This applies to porters above all, and ceremonies are often disrupted because they have fallen out with temple staff or each other over matters infinitely more trivial than the building of a chapel so close to their prime ritual site. It is, however, puzzling that just as none of the contemporary accounts refer to the preceding bullock cart, so too they do not mention this prolonged halt; yet it would surely have helped build up tension to have the two factions within such close proximity for so long.

Another feature of communal conflict to which Das draws attention is its association with a distinctive, often highly stylized, cultural repertoire of styles of violent behaviour, not only among its instigators but also among the forces of law brought in to deal with the problem (*ibid.*: 20–5). In Kalugumalai this aspect came more to the fore as events unfolded, and as spontaneously aroused passions gave way to premeditation and deliberate incitement. The violence in the car street began with stone-throwing, followed by a series of stabbings and the arson attack on the chapel. Arson predominated in the afternoon attack on the Nadar quarter, along with the use of fire to maim and kill.

⁵⁴ The Sanskrit names of the four outer faces are *Tatpuruṣa*, *Aghora*, *Sadyojāta* and *Vāmadeva*, respectively, going clockwise from the east.

In this context, throwing stones seems to indicate unpremeditated aggression using weapons closest to hand. This is truly disorderly violence, and it is really only in this context that the perpetrators can justly be described as a 'mob', with its attendant connotations of chaos and lack of control. On the other hand, stabbing, decapitating, or dismembering one's opponent are regarded in rural Tirunelveli as the prime forms of interpersonal violence, so much so that all killings and woundings are described as 'cuttings' (*vettital*) whatever the means actually employed.⁵⁵ Stabbing involves premeditation or apprehension (why else go to the scene armed?) but is characteristic of individual rather than collective violence. The use of knives in the car streets is therefore culturally consistent with the theory that the whole incident formed part of a more-or-less planned attack on certain individuals, probably including the Manager.

Arson was used first in the attack on the chapel, but several hours later the use of fire against houses *and individuals* became the dominant motif in the attack on the Nadar quarter. It is noteworthy that no knives are mentioned in descriptions of this attack, even though, self-evidently, several of those involved had been carrying them earlier in the day. This form of violence has quite different cultural resonances. In the first place, it is associated with organized strife between caste groupings, particularly violence by higher-caste gangs against Harijans—who, being poor, still often have thatched houses vulnerable to this form of attack.⁵⁶ Moreover, arson against property was a common *modus operandi* of Maravar criminals, as a Police Superintendent of the time described:

Maravar criminals are particularly bold, cunning and skilful . . . Arsons are committed by means of a cotton ball, soaked in phosphorus, and thrown on to houses which will ignite, according to its strength, any time within ten minutes (quoted in *Disturbances*, p. 5).

In the attack on the Nadar houses, fire was also used in a distinctive way to maim and kill individuals. Caussanel's report is typical,

⁵⁵ On the symbolism linking harvest, sacrifice, and murder—all performed using a sickle (*arivāl*)—see Good (1985: 139–40). During my earlier fieldwork 50km from Kalugumalai, several killings nearby were reputedly carried out by local Maravars hired for the purpose.

⁵⁶ The most notorious recent incident was the burning to death in 1968 of more than 40 Harijans at Kilvenmani, Tanjore District, during a labour dispute (Gough 1989: 187). Such attacks are usually ascribed to 'mobs', yet must involve considerable organization and planning—recruiting gang members, collecting combustible materials, etc. It is also worth noting that they are perpetrated exclusively by men, yet directed disproportionately at women and children.

though by no means the most detailed and gruesome in the Jesuit archives:

Yesterday a young Kalugumalai lad was brought to me whose legs and feet had been burned by the pagans . . . He named two Maravars who had initially locked him in a house in order to burn him, and pursued him when he managed to escape, and had finally thrown him down and spread him out so as to burn his legs. They also burned the arms and legs of another catechumen, seeking to kill him by slow degrees. The child who was brought to us recounted how one of his small brothers had been torn from his mother's arms and thrown into the flames, where he died (quoted by Verdier 1895: 373-4).

This highly distinctive, systematic brutality bears out Spencer's view (1990: 621) that cultural patterning is more evident in collective violence than in everyday interpersonal violence, to which I would add the obvious rider that it is more evident still when collective violence is pre-planned rather than casual or spontaneous. The origins of this particular cultural pattern are unclear, however.

Finally, despite all these parallels with the examples analysed by Das, does it aid understanding to characterize the Kalugumalai riot in terms of 'communal violence'? Here it is first necessary to specify what historians and political scientists mean by 'communalism' in South Asia.⁵⁷ Pandey argues that it plays the same role as 'nationalism' does for western historiography. Until the late nineteenth century, caste blocs like Rajputs and religious denominations like Muslims were often described as 'nations', but as nationhood came to be restricted to Western nation-states and denied to colonized peoples, so in its place came the blander notion of 'communities'. Whereas colonial writers saw these as the South Asian equivalent of nations, Indian nationalists saw them as obstacles to nationhood; either way, the effect was inherently Orientalist, in that Indian history was presented as a deviation from the (western) norm (Pandey 1992: 1-9).

In contemporary anthropological usage, a 'community' is a context-dependent, fluid entity, definable in terms of people's self-perception as members of a community, and their presentation of this identity in social practice (Cohen 1985: 117). In South Asian writing, on the other hand, the term merely signifies 'religious

⁵⁷ I am less concerned here with its everyday use in South Asia, which is common enough to qualify it as an indigenous term worthy of contextual explication in the standard ethnographic way.

denomination', or, more narrowly still, serves as a mealy-mouthed euphemism for 'Muslim' (Pandey 1992: 9n). The most general criticism of any such usage is that it reifies community identities to an unacceptable extent, rendering them static, immutable, and de-contextualized. In this case, moreover, the only communities recognized are religious ones—a paradox indeed in a supposedly secular state. Freitag suggests that

religion provided the most compelling basis for community. Drawing on the symbolic behaviour and rhetoric that had developed around religion in nineteenth-century public arenas, communalism gained popular support more easily than did the other available ideological alternatives (1989: 197–8).

Yet this hardly squares with Susan Bayly's persuasive view that religious affiliation was a tactical resource for Nadars, rather than a primordial identity around which the entire community could cohere, and it is tempting to suggest—though beyond my competence to demonstrate—that Hindu-Christian conflicts in the South may require a quite different explanatory framework from that appropriate to Hindu-Muslim relations in North India.

Although he uses 'communal' in the restricted sense just criticized, C. A. Bayly also raised three important methodological caveats which are worth considering in the present case (1985: 179). First, it cannot be assumed, *a priori* that people define themselves in broad terms as either 'Hindu' or 'Muslim', or, if they do, that this provides the impetus for any conflict between them. Kalugumalai people did come to portray themselves as Hindus or Christians—at least in public rhetoric—but there was probably little consensus over what the former label implied,⁵⁸ and certainly no pretence that these identities were anything more than new ways of labelling a pre-existing social schism. Second, Bayly cautions that disputes should not be tagged communal merely because the protagonists have different religious affiliations, but only when they themselves see this as salient. The situation seems in fact to be even more complex, for while religious affiliation was certainly seen as relevant in Kalugumalai, at least in the sense of providing new pretexts for disagreement and new contexts within which these disputes could be pursued, it was clearly not central.

⁵⁸ Perhaps because Hinduism stresses practice relative to faith or belief, it does not lend itself so easily as Judaeo-Christian-Islamic traditions to forming strong, *exclusive* senses of identity. As Susan Bayly shows, this was also true of Nadar Christianity at this period, for other reasons.

C. A. Bayly's third point is that there is no clear distinction between 'religious' disputes over ritual precedence, and 'communal' conflicts where religious affiliations are seen as encapsulating broad socio-economic or political differences. Despite recognizing the subjectivity of this distinction, he continues to apply it, saying that his chosen cases 'contain examples of both types' (1985: 179). Quite generally, in fact, writers on this issue seem too ready to elide 'communal' and 'religious', not recognizing that 'communal' disputes, by South Asian definition, involve followers of different religions, whereas 'religious' disputes may equally well arise between members of the same religious denomination, as in Kalugumalai at the start. In both cases the disputing parties are of course 'communities' in the more usual sense of the term—further indication of the fact that the narrower South Asian definition creates more ambiguities than it resolves.

Tracing the origins of late nineteenth-century hostility towards Nadars in Tirunelveli generally and Kalugumalai in particular, colonial writers stressed caste as the initiating factor. Though doubtless guilty of conceptualizing castes as monolithic, primordial entities, they were clearly right to perceive that communal conflict in the narrow sense—conflict between Hindus and Christians *qua* Hindus and Christians—was not the heart of the matter. These were initially disputes over ritual status and ceremonial privilege, and protagonists themselves admitted that the public symbol of high caste status, the procession palanquin, was more significant than the religion in whose name it happened to be carried. In other words, religious affiliations were instrumental, strategic matters rather than expressions of primordial identities or moral-ideological convictions. They were not the bases upon which 'communal' political and economic interests were organized; rather, they were the means whereby status interests—themselves related in close but complex fashion to political and economic interests—were asserted and defended. In short, the Kalugumalai dispute did have a strong religious element, but it did *not* lead to a 'communal riot' in the sense in which that has come to be understood in South Asia. Yet we have also seen that many of the general features identified by Das in connection with the latter are applicable here too. This suggests that the appropriate analytical category should be significantly broader, embracing not merely 'communal riots', certainly not in the narrow South Asian sense of that term, but collective violence generally.

Appendix: Car Festivals in Kalugumalai, 1984

The Tai Pusam and Pankuni Uttiram festivals are described elsewhere (Good n.d.). I concentrate here on the car festivals (*ratōṛsavam*) on the tenth morning of Tai Pusam, and ninth morning of Pankuni Uttiram—19 January and 16 March, respectively, in 1984. At Tai Pusam, the main festival images (*ursavam*) of Murukan and his wives were pulled round the streets in the small temple car (*ratam*), led by Vinayakar in a bullock cart (*kōratam*). The cars are kept on South Car Street, and their processions—simple clockwise circuits of the four car streets—began and ended there. At Pankuni Uttiram Vinayakar went out in the small car, led by Sandikesvarar in the bullock cart, and the main images did not go round in the big car until this procession was over.

Otherwise, the processions involving the main deities took basically the same form on each occasion. After the morning offerings at the altars in the streets (Good n.d.), the images were placed in the car and decorated elaborately. Eggs and lime fruits were placed under each wheel, to be crushed when the car began moving. A rooster was sacrificed, and its blood put on the wheel chocks of both cars. This is done unobtrusively nowadays; formerly a goat was used, and the sacrifice was more public. It guards against anyone being killed during the procession, as once happened. Local notables and guests of honour were fetched in procession, to witness the worship of the deities. They and the priest broke coconuts against the wheels of the car; this offering is called *viṭalai* ('splitting').

At Pankuni Uttiram, the priest and temple musicians first climbed aboard the small car. Its chains were picked up, mostly by men and boys, but with a few women or girls at the front of each chain. They pulled the car with relative ease round the four car streets, preceded by the *kōratam*, and returned to the starting-point in about an hour. The only stoppage along the way was for a camphor light to be shown to Vinayakar outside the palace; this happens during every procession throughout the year.

Once this car had safely returned to its starting-point, the priest and temple musicians climbed onto the big car holding the main images. This had three chains, and before the real pulling got under way some important guests were photographed holding these. This car was far harder to pull and steer than the smaller one, and manoeuvring it was distinctly dangerous. Workers from the municipality had been round the route the previous day filling in pot-holes, though Palace Street between the gates was still the responsibility of the temple.

The car stopped briefly outside the south door of the temple. It halted much longer at the northeast corner, near Isana's altar, while the temple porters boiled large quantities of sweet rice (*poṅkal*), using materials supplied by the temple. These porters (*sīrpātam tāṅkikal*; 'bearers of the sacred feet') carry the divine images around the streets at all other processions during the year, and have key roles supervising the pullers at car festivals. Their positions are hereditary, and although they are drawn from several castes, the great majority are Maravars. The meal is consequently described as 'the Tevar's *poṅkal*', 'Tevar' being the Maravar's honorific caste title. Once this was ready, a camphor light and some rice were offered to the deities, and a tray with two coconuts was ceremoniously presented to the porters' leader. The car remained there for several hours. When it finally restarted, an egg and lime were placed under each wheel again—clear evidence that this halt was premeditated and regular. There were no more stops, and the car was returned to its starting-point as speedily as possible.

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