CHAPTER 2

The History of the English Empire as a Fall

P. V. Ramaswami Raju

It was July and the southwest monsoon had arrived in Hyderabad. As the car idled in standstill traffic on a waterlogged road with bubbling potholes, I mindlessly scrolled through my phone. Suddenly the whooshing of the wipers and the rumble of the rain were interrupted by the electronic beep of an email message. “Dear Dr. Leela Prasad,” it said:

I came to know about your work on ethnography in colonial India, in an article under *Madras Miscellany*, “When the Postman Knocked” by S. Muthaiah. I am glad to inform you that the great-grandson of P. V. Ramaswami Raju, P. V. Sundaresan, resides in Chennai. I have informed him about this and very soon you will be hearing from him with more information on P. V. Ramaswami Raju, who had written *Pratapachandra Vilasam* and *Sreemad Ramanatha Rajangala Mahodayanam*. By now you must be wondering who I am? I am the grandson of P. V. Ramaswami Raju’s son’s first cousin, P. V. Bhaskara Raju.¹

The message was signed by Dr. T. D. Babu and included a phone number.

I almost jumped out of the car to dance in the rain. The email was a response to an article published *ten* years earlier. In 2003 I wrote to Mr. Muthaiah, a historian of colonial Madras (now Chennai), who authored a regular column called “Madras Miscellany” in the regional edition of *The Hindu*, a

leading national daily. I was hoping he could help me find biographical information on P. V. Ramaswami Raju (1852–1897), who had written plays, essays, poems, fables, social drama, and comedies in English, Tamil, and Telugu, and even translated Shakespeare into Tamil. Years ago, Muthaiah had published a similar query that had helped me find information about Pandit S. M. Natesa Sastri; this time there had been no response. I pursued every biographical trace in Ramaswami Raju’s writings: records of the Department of Sea Customs in the Tamil Nadu Archives, the barrister rosters of London’s Inner Temple, and the employment records of University College London, for instance. I learned a great deal about where he had worked and what he had written. But I still did not have a sense of him that perhaps his descendants could provide. And now, ten years later, like a little paper boat that startles you in a street stream, a channel I had considered closed had been opened by Dr. Babu’s discovery of a newspaper clipping that he had misplaced.

I called Dr. Babu immediately. A marine biologist and founder of civic organizations in Chennai, Babu connected me to his uncles, Ramaswami Raju’s great-grandsons, Mr. P. V. Sundaresan, a retired senior executive in a private company in Chennai, and Dr. P. V. Ramamurti, a retired professor of psychology and dean at Sri Venkateshwara University, Tirupati. A few conversations and some days later, taking up their invitation, I showed up in Chennai with copies of all the books by Ramaswami Raju that I had collected over the years. I met Babu at an intersection just off the Royapettah High Road. He had agreed to take me to Sundaresan’s house, which was only a short distance away but would have been tricky for me to locate. “I’ve managed to get hold of this,” Babu said, showing me a copy of Ramaswami Raju’s Tamil musical play—the first play in Tamil—*Pratapachandra Vilasam*.² Sundaresan was waiting on the front steps of an airy modern structure tucked behind a canopy of old trees and a fitness center. Within minutes we were chatting in Telugu over a special celebratory homemade lunch with Sundaresan’s children and grandchildren, in honor of our shared connection to their erudite ancestor. Ramaswami Raju, I learned, belonged to a Telugu-speaking family that had its roots in colonial Madras, with an ancestral connection to the village of Vallam in Panruti *taluk* of the Cuddalore district of modern Tamil Nadu. (The *taluk* and the village names supplied the initials P. and V. in Ramaswami Raju’s name.) Traditionally Rajus are a peasant landowning community, sometimes affiliated with the Kshatriya (warrior) caste order.

Ramaswami Raju wrote in what we may call a “double register,” a style he perfected. The double register is a creative strategy that simultaneously speaks in two voices, two languages, sometimes across two cultures, creating meanings and suggestions that ripple in many, even counter-flowing direc-

tions. The result is more than satire; it is a theater of being, by which I mean two things. First, Ramaswami Raju's writings reveal the persona of a raconteur who is, at different times (and sometimes all at once), a political critic, an ironic humorist, a spiritual seeker, and an enchanted enchanter. There is thus in his writings the constant presence of an allusion to *something else*—a something else that creates a near invisible adjacency of meaning beyond the worlds indexed by the words. Second, there is the theater of English rule in India with its dramatis personae and its presumptions. Imperialism as a category of rule troubled Ramaswami Raju throughout his life. Its imperatives and impulses were founded on a colossal arrogance that presumed the right to possess and dispossess persons and property. If English empire fortified itself at least in part through a belief in its higher moral ground, its civilizational superiority, and its unvitiated past—all infused into the Macaulayan idea of “English history”—Ramaswami Raju sought to destabilize these foundational constructs through a sophisticated double register that seemingly praised and simultaneously critiqued empire's practices. In his last piece of writing, an essay on “the religious life of Hindus,” he says: “The causes of the greatness of England have been summed up by some in three words—Christianity, Commerce and Conquest. St. Paul's Cathedral, The Bank of England and the British Parliament may be said to be the emblems of the three great causes. The British people are really proud of these.”³ As I will show, the double register often also opens up life worlds in which Europe is not the center, and sometimes is even subjugated to an Asian center. I argue that through moral rescaling and geopolitical reorientation, Ramaswami Raju was already engaged in the task of “provincializing Europe.”⁴

As I immersed myself in Ramaswami Raju's writings and interacted with his family in Chennai over the years, two distinctive biographies of Ramaswami Raju began to converge. I began to understand the lightning-like political audacity that characterized his voice and the lotus-like sovereignty of his self.

A Lightning-Like Audacious Voice

I caught my first glimpse of Ramaswami Raju through the introduction that Henry Morley, professor of English literature at University College London wrote for Ramaswami Raju's *Tales of the Sixty Mandarins* (1886). Morley says:

He is a graduate of the Madras University; he is a Member of the Asiatic Society; and he had just been called to the bar at the Inner Temple when he left England for India, and left the manuscript of these tales in

my hands. We had come into friendly relations at University College, London, where he was Lecturer on Tamil and Telugu in the Indian School for the training of Selected Candidates for the Indian Civil Service.⁵

Ramaswami Raju had gone to England in 1882 to study law at the Inner Temple (one of four professional associations in England for lawyers). The entry in the student register of the Inner Temple describes him as “P. V. Ramaswami (aged 30) of Madras, India, BA, formerly Inspector, Sea Customs, Madras, the eldest son of P V Ramaswami of Madras, Government Superintendent of Salt.” The entry notes that he was “admitted [to the Inner Temple] on 4 November 1882, and called to the bar on 29 April 1885.”⁶ I learned from Sundaresan that after Ramaswami Raju had returned, he became a successful advocate in the High Court of Madras.

In the little over two years of his studentship, from late 1882 to early 1885, Ramaswami Raju, perhaps to support himself, applied for the position of lecturer in Telugu and Tamil at University College London. His application tells us that he had been “headmaster, Pachhiappah’s High School, Conjevaram [Kanchipuram], Madras; till recently Examiner to the University of Madras—Tamil and the Uncovenanted Civil Service—Telugu.”⁷ Pachhiappah’s High School was a private school founded in 1846, prestigious as the first non-missionary Western-style educational institution funded by a Hindu trust, and reputed to be a feeder school for the University of Madras.⁸ Colonel R. M. MacDonald, the director of public instruction for the Madras Presidency, wrote in his testimonial, “A copy of the 1879 Report of the school at Conjevaram shows that that the attendance had risen from 140 to 203, the matriculation class from 4 to 10, and the quality of work and discipline reflected great credit on the headmaster, Mr. P. V. Ramaswami Raju.” Other testimonials effusively praise Ramaswami Raju’s expertise in Tamil, Telugu, and Sanskrit.⁹ The search committee’s report concludes with a quotation from one of the testimonials: “I can scarcely conceive a rival candidate in the essential points.”¹⁰ Ramaswami Raju also offered to teach Tamil and Telugu to British officers who were preparing for their postings to India. In the archives of University College London I found an 1883 letter by Ramaswami Raju. It triggered a strange sense of *déjà vu* regarding my own experiences of living in Edinburgh as a child and in London as an adult. Perhaps it was the nameless awareness of being brown in England, even though a hundred years separated our experiences. The letter is addressed to an unnamed “Sir.” Ramaswami Raju says: “Telugu is my ‘mother tongue’ and Tamil is the Indian language in which I graduated at Madras. I need hardly observe that

I should be able to afford you special facilities to converse fluently in these languages and make your progress in the literature of such as satisfactory as possible before you leave for India.”¹¹

Ramaswami Raju's political views had already begun to show in a tongue-in-cheek manner when he was just twenty-four. *Lord Likely* (1876), a play he had written six years before he landed in London to study for his law degree, is ostensibly a lost-and-found story of a young marquis who, as a baby, is presumed to have drowned in a shipwreck. The play, set in London, is a sly critique of British policy and conduct in India. The central characters are Sir Strictly Sternface (a retired governor of India), Lady Homely (a former memsahib), Sir Dreadful Dash (a failed colonel returned from Algeria), Sir Stingy Lucre (a Kentish baronet), and Quicklash (a former key official of British India). A couple of the minor characters are General Sir Hasty Crack Caput and Major Mincemeat. These caricatured archetypes of colonial figures become quasi-real as Ramaswami Raju stages British rule and its ruination of India, pointedly in two “aside” scenes. In one, two clownish characters, Gog and Wire, bring the baronet Sir Stingy Lucre to the ex-governor Strictly Sternface's mansion.¹² In their banter, Gog and Wire describe Strictly Sternface as someone with a calm countenance. He is the sort of ruler who, “how'er low his position at first,” would convert a country—as he did “the country of the mogul in the Indies”—into such a paradise that the devil himself would want to tempt another Eve in it.¹³ This motif of the fall from paradise is one that Ramaswami Raju found tremendous political use for—as we will see in his long narrative poem *Sreemat Ramanatha Rajangala Mahodayanam* (The Auspicious Story of the Great Park of the English Raj).¹⁴ In fact, in a preceding “aside” scene, a teacher named Simon Twaddle conducts a class in a “subterranean vault in the City.” Twaddle describes in graphic shorthand the fall of Adam and Eve in paradise: Eve “ate up the forbidden fruit” and Adam “got a wiggling.” He then lists other biblical events—Cain “cut down” his brother Abel and the Lord cursed his blood—and rhetorically asks the pupils Cockrifle, William Hiccup, and Quickshear, “Now, tell me if Evil then is not a right bequest to the race?” Twaddle's lecture for the day focuses on how theft, housebreaking, and robbery are “necessary institutions” for the existence of society, where “polished crimes are all the fashion of the day.” The lesson concludes with a review of the main categories of theft—“theft simple and theft compound”—that are “sanctioned by Acts of Parliament” and common law. Twaddle's *summum bonum* teaching, though, is that liberty is the Briton's birthright. So innate is the Briton's love for liberty that every English cat can mew lectures on it to “many a tyrant abroad.”¹⁵

To return to Gog and Wire, after they show a general confusion about the location of India, speculating that it is possibly somewhere “between the Spice islands and the continent discovered by Captain Cook,” Wire declares that India is that “country that’s covered all over with temples, Brahmins, and wealth.” The group is joined by Quicklash, a former official in India, who begins to show the baronet around the mansion. It is “a little museum in itself,” he declares. Actually, it is full of the loot that the governor has brought back from India. The walls are decked with hunting trophies, which include the head of a great horned buffalo, the skin of a leopard, and the tusks of an elephant. The ivory-handled dagger “*had* from a great Rajah” (my emphasis) also festoons the wall, along with a “collection rare of birds and shells and pictures, and baubles and trinkets and other toys gathered in the east.” It is hardly an innocent reference. Ramaswami Raju was surely aware of the Museum of India in the headquarters of the East India Company in London. Until it was dismantled in 1861 and its exhibits dispersed across various locations in London, the museum displayed Indian booty from “intricate ivory carvings, jewel-inlaid daggers and spears, gorgeous fabrics, rugs and carpets” to “a replica of the tomb of the founder of the Sikh Empire Runjeet Singh,” “an effigy of the Muslim ruler Nawab Schurff smoking a hookah,” and “thousands of models of ordinary Indian people ‘clad, or half-clad, or unclad’ cooking, conjuring, digging, exercising, juggling, snake-charming and weaving.”¹⁶

Quicklash—his name suggestive of his method—quickly chronicles his political successes. He boasts: “Pray, who was it that wrote the Minute that gave the Sirdar Thulwar Singh his due? Who was it who suggested to Sir Strictly that the only mode of giving peace to the province was deposing the prince Zulum Shah, and putting on the musnud [*masnad*: throne], in his stead, the Prince Puppet Jah Bahadur?” The thin fictionalizing of names barely provides cover from the rain of allusions; instead it creates a spate of adjacent meaning. All too real are the English *shikars*, the great hunts that depleted India of its wildlife;¹⁷ the broad plunder of things and species such as Tipu Sultan’s ivory-handled dagger, a spoil of the Fourth Anglo-Mysore War of 1799.¹⁸ This war, in fact, generated several trophies for the British monarchy (which one can see today for a steep fee at the Tower of London’s Jewel House or the Victoria and Albert Museum). Quicklash’s boast brings to mind a composite of allusions to the insidious politics of Company rule. First, in 1848–49, Lord Dalhousie, the governor-general of India from 1812 to 1860 (who uncannily resembles Sir Strictly Sternface),¹⁹ aggressively suppressed the Sikh rebellion in Punjab. He then had his foreign secretary, Henry M. Elliot, draw up a vengeful treaty that stripped the nine-year-old

Raja Dalip Singh of Punjab and all his jewels including the Koh-i-noor diamond and wrenched him from his mother, Rani Jind Kaur, a feisty regent who was quickly exiled.²⁰ Does Ramaswami Raju's character Quicklash contain a trace of Elliot, who was also a bricolage chronicler of Mughal history? The second allusion could be to an earlier event of 1838, when the British deposed the Mughal emperor Akbar Shah II ("Prince Zulum Shah" in the play) and replaced him with his son Bahadur Shah Zafar ("Prince Puppet Jah Bahadur")—who became the "last Mughal."²¹ Incidentally, Elliot was assistant to the political resident and commissioner at Delhi in 1830.²²

On a first reading, *Lord Likely* appears to be similar to Ramaswami Raju's other early plays *Urjoon Sing* (1875) and *Maid of the Mere* (1879), as it imitates nineteenth-century English drama, teeming with themes from English literary history and social custom that would have been alien to its author's lived experience. Indeed, an English reviewer, identified by the initials H. T. W., concluded contemptuously that *Lord Likely* was an instance of failed mimicry of high British social life by an overimaginative Indian litterateur.²³ Yet mimicry in power-stratified contexts is not the imitative aspiration that H.T.W. so naïvely thinks it is. Mimicry is a political act. It is, as Homi Bhabha has said, "the sign of a double articulation; a complex strategy of reform, regulation, and discipline, which 'appropriates' the Other as it visualizes power. . . . The menace of mimicry is its *double* vision, which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority."²⁴ The historical exposé demonstrates how Ramaswami Raju's play is more than mimicry; it employs a double register. *Lord Likely* unfolds between allegory and satire and *performs* "English speech" to deconstruct English conceits about empire. Through Twaddle's pedagogic method and the underground training center, Ramaswami Raju deploys the theme of Christian transgressions to enumerate the closet routines of British imperialism. And via Quicklash's walk through the museum-like rooms of the ex-governor's house in London, the very seat of colonial exercises, Ramaswami Raju orchestrates a recollection—a recollection that not only names, describes, and makes visible the moral and economic inebriety of colonialism but also makes the colonizers themselves inadvertently confess it.

If the idea of England occupies *Lord Likely*, which Ramaswami Raju wrote while in India, it is Asia that rules the imaginary of his *Tales of the Sixty Mandarins*, which he completed during his two years in London. Just as *Old Deccan Days* had announced itself with the image of an imperial Ganesha, *Sixty Mandarins* arrived in 1886 with its own "Eastern" aura: a green and gold cover with colorful Chinese figures carrying golden satchels, a title in letters that look like bamboo sticks, and a Chinese lantern on the spine. The illustra-

tions in the book were done by one of Britain's best-known illustrators of the time, Gordon F. Browne, who illustrated books such as Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1885), Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1886), and Washington Irving's *Rip Van Winkle* (1887). (Browne's famous father, Hablot Knight Browne, known as "Phiz," had illustrated Charles Dickens's work.)²⁵ The book is reminiscent of the frame-narrative format of well-known Eastern story collections such as the Sanskrit *Kathāsaritsāgara* (Ocean of Story) and the Arabic *Alf laylah wa-laylah* (A Thousand and One Nights). In *Sixty Mandarins*, a Chinese prince has sixty learned mandarins (wise men) for friends, each of whom tells him a story. At the end of each narrative, the prince pithily sums up the story and what he gleans to be its moral. The summing-up inspires another mandarin to tell a different story, sometimes expanding on the prince's interpretation of the previous one. And so it goes until all sixty mandarins have told him a tale.

When I discovered *Tales of the Sixty Mandarins* amidst other collections of tales that were published around the same time, I expected Ramaswami Raju to rehearse the obsessions of colonial-era anthropologists and comparative mythologists: *In which province were these tales found? How do they relate to (so-called) classical motifs? What do they reveal about the physical attributes and the social and religious mentalité of a people? Where on the ladder of civilization are they positioned?* Instead, his colleague Henry Morley's introduction to the book tells us: "This is a real book of new Fairy Tales. Gatherings of the legends of the people, partly Indian, partly Chinese, have been touched by the genius of the writer, himself from the East, who brings his own wit and fancy to the telling of his tales, and is *as ready to invent as to hand down tradition*." In his preface Ramaswami Raju writes:

In a country like India, or China, where people from all parts of Asia, if not the world, meet for commercial purposes, there is free interchange, not only of commodities, but also of ideas. In the course of such friendly communion, not seldom the speakers cite proverbs, tales, and traditions, by way of argument or illustration, in the way best suited to the special subject of discourse. Listening to such talk, not to speak of higher paths of research, is one of the chief sources from which stories like these might be drawn. . . . It may be added that the difficulty of tracing the origin, or recognising the position [of these tales] or their parallels, in "the lore of the learned of the land" will . . . be found to be very great.²⁶

Furthermore, so difficult is this task that scholars too would be baffled about the origins of the stories and perhaps not even recognize them. Yet,

says Ramaswami Raju, stories and proverbs are told and heard in Asian marketplaces and along the bustling trade routes that connect the many regions of Asia—and with that we are left to presume that Ramaswami Raju places himself in those circuits where ideas are exchanged and cross-cultural observations occur. At such a crossroads, the question of scientific origins and genealogies and types of humankind becomes secondary—in fact worthless—to the absorption and creative transmission of narrative. To make his argument more potent, he tells us how nonplussed the Arabic scholars whom he consulted about “The Story of the Caliph Haroun Alraschid and His Fool” had been. As much as it seemed to *resemble* the stories in which Caliph Harun al-Rashid and Zubeida appear in the “Arabian Nights Entertainments,” they said, it was not to be found in it or elsewhere. He then defers to the authority of a mysterious “Wazeer Abdul Ali” of an equally mysterious “Three Maha Mondon Pur” who says that “so far as such popular tales go, it matters not whether they are anchored firmly like great ships in the havens of the writings of the learned, or floating like stray waifs on the seas of the traditions of the people, provided they fulfil the triple conditions of being wholesome, entertaining, and instructive.”²⁷ In short, stories are not for debating origins and types; they are for pleasure and learning.

In setting the stories in an Asia that ranges from China, Japan, and Korea to Morocco and Algeria, from Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan to the islands of Indonesia, Ramaswami Raju suggests a political vision that gives us, in Wang Hui’s words, “the possibility to create new narratives of ‘world history.’”²⁸ Imams, sheiks, and sultans, Arabian princesses, rabbis, Buddhist monks, ordinary humans, animals, and other creatures populate the panoramic Asiatic geography of the tales. The prince’s mandarin friends narrate out of a cosmopolitan memory that crosses customs of regions with recorded (and contested) histories of places such as Samarkand, Algiers, Kashgar, Alexandria, and Bihar. In the process, they draw attention to Asia as a parallel zone of entry into world systems of economy, politics, and cultural and religious flows. As Prasenjit Duara notes, such flows were “nothing short of world transforming.”²⁹ We might alongside note a visceral irony: it is in the colonial metropolis of London, probably consulting its prodigious libraries, that Ramaswami Raju conceptualizes such a turn away from a Eurocentric view of history.³⁰ The story “The Famous Book on Alchymy,” for instance—and a classic instance—is about the now lost city of Balkh (in modern-day northern Afghanistan), a city that was among the world’s greatest cultural centers in late antiquity (its pre-Islamic name was Bactra, in Greek), and the birthplace of the renowned thirteenth-century poet Jalāl al-din Rūmī. As Arezou Azad notes, Balkh was “the missing link between the western and eastern Iranian

worlds, at the crossroads between the 'Iranian' and 'Turkic' peoples of the north, at the western fringe of Buddhism, the mythical death place of Zoroaster (or Zarathustra, the prophet of the ancient Iranian Zoroastrians), and the cradle of Sufism."³¹

Ramaswami Raju's story takes for its background the historically established Arab invasion of Balkh in the early eighth century. The plot, though, possibly fictionalized, is about how a prominent library of Balkh was destroyed. The story tells us that this library held a book on alchemy composed thousands of years ago by a magician-philosopher who was born in Ethiopia, trained in Egypt, and settled down in Balkh practicing "the religion of Zartusht."³² Then, artfully using popular legends about the destruction of Alexandria's library, the story describes how the invading Arab general commands that all books in the Balkh library be burned; those books that repeat what the Qur'an says are redundant, and those that do not are heretical. The general, however, comes to an agreement with the Jewish people of Balkh (known to have historically lived there) about preserving the book on alchemy. The book is sacred to Balkh's Jews, but since they cannot raise the money to keep the bargain, the famous book of alchemy is burned after all. (The view that the second caliph Umar ibn al-Khattab [r. 634–644] had ordered the destruction of the Alexandrian library and said words to that effect had been debunked as a polemical myth,³³ but it seems to have given Ramaswami Raju fabular material.) What is striking about the story is not how it makes up its fiction but how it constructs Balkh itself—as a learned city between the pre-Islamic and the Islamic and as a space in which Buddhists, Jews, Muslims, and Zoroastrians robustly coexisted—at least before the Mongol conquests of the thirteenth century. The reference to alchemy immediately calls up Balkh's prominent place in ancient Egyptian traditions of alchemy. The formidable Arabic scholar and alchemist of the eleventh century Abu Ali Ibn Sīnā (Latinized, Avicenna) tells us his father was from Balkh.³⁴ In this manner, as the stories in *Sixty Mandarins* unfold maps of Asia's pasts, we are taken to a world of abundant interactive history in which Europe is included as a player with a role but not as a director, center stage.

If we look for a center-staging of Europe in *Sixty Mandarins*, we will find it in an especially satirical story called "The Virgin from Velayet," in which the sultan of Damascus, in the hope of transforming his country into the free and enlightened place that he has heard Velayet, in England, to be, seeks to marry a virgin from there—and thus brings home his English sultana. "The political relations between the East and the West have given rise to some amusing tales," explains Ramaswami Raju in the preface, blandly continuing, "The nucleus of this story was found among a section of the Indian

peasantry, and must have arisen from that good-humoured representation of Western ideas and institutions, which very often recommends itself to their rustic and unsophisticated hearts." The sultana, who, Victoria-like, takes "great interest in the welfare of her subjects," guides the sultan in the process of a seismic transformation, undoing many indigenous institutions so that "all arts of civilized life" could begin to flourish in Damascus. While this is going on, the sultan asks his English sultana if they should not also replicate the British Parliament in Damascus. He observes:

Of course, in your country, the members of this body, as you said, appear to spend a great part of their time in factious declamations and hair-splitting harangues. Again, there appear to be two parties in the body, one saying "no" to every "yes" of the other, out of sheer party spirit and jealousy. When one party gets into power, the other goes about the country inflaming the hearts of the people against their successful rivals till they pull them down and step into their place.³⁵

The sultan proposes a solution to prevent the parliamentary problem: summarily execute any member of Parliament who talks for more than five minutes, including himself, the head of state. (I am reminded of the Red Queen in Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking-Glass*, which was published in 1871 and became immensely popular at the time. The Red Queen's "solution," like the sultan's, is to cut people's heads off constantly.) With this observation, Ramaswami Raju maneuvers the story in the direction of lampoon. The story ends with the resigned sultana declaring that a "naturally" despotic regime could never become a democratic one. But it is hardly lost on us that the story is also describing the autocratic measures of imperial polity and the power-grubbing and self-serving habits of British parliamentarians. Such a model of Parliament deserves to be muted, the sultan seems to say, if not made extinct.

A Lotus-Like Sovereignty of Self

It is unclear when exactly after 1885 Ramaswami Raju returned to India. But what can be said with certainty is that after he returned, the political cosmopolitanism that had marked his work began to converge with his interest in Hindu sacred narrative and philosophy. The conversation introduced a dramatic new voice in his writing. The lightning-like strikes in his work were now also complemented by a complexity best encapsulated in the image of the lotus, which is one of the most celebrated symbols in Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain art, mythology, and spiritual practice. As the art historian Stella

Kramrisch describes it: “With its root in the mud, its stalk traversing the entire depth of the waters on which it rests its leaves, its flower open to the light of heaven, the lotus belongs to this world and those below and above, to light, earth and water. Its open flower emits a fragrance of the subtlest vibrations.”³⁶ These qualities of the lotus have given it a commanding presence as a symbol of sovereignty in Sanskrit poetry. David Smith writes: “The lotus is a support, a provider of coherence, moving through the content of the poem with a binding and strengthening force. Through its pervasive invasion of the subject matter of *kāvya*, it creates a poetic universe that obeys its own laws—or should we speak rather of a universe that simply succumbs to the dominance of the lotus and does not question its obtrusive presence.”³⁷

As I spoke to Sundaresan³⁸ and Ramamurti,³⁹ the two great-grandsons of Ramaswami Raju, perhaps the last generation to know the family’s stories about him, I became conscious that the hundred years that had passed since Ramaswami Raju’s death had distilled the family’s memories. Oral ancestral memory rarely exists as a singular, disembodied diachronic narrative. Rather, it is a collection of vital synchronic impressions composed by different tellers who find resonances between their own lives and those of their ancestors. Sundaresan had heard stories about Ramaswami Raju from his father, and Ramamurti from his father, his maternal grandfather, and Sundaresan’s father. Their recollections did not contradict but expanded on and added to each other’s, touching their own lives in different moments in different ways. I present here a pastiche of impressions.

“Ramaswami Raju’s setting sail to London was itself a great achievement. . . . [H]e came from a middle-class family with meager resources, and it was with financial assistance from known sources that he finally set sail,” says Sundaresan in a biographical note he wrote up for me after we met in Chennai in July 2013. But before he left for England, Ramaswami Raju promised his mother he would be a vegetarian (possibly to avoid beef and pork, I suspected, as traditionally the Rajus are not vegetarian). It was a practice he continued even after he returned. The going in London was not easy either. “It was believed that for survival in London, Ramaswami Raju wrote and sold poems and stories,” Sundaresan’s note said. When we met next in April 2014, I shared with him my finding that Ramaswami Raju had taught Telugu and Tamil as a part-time instructor at University College London and at Oxford. We wondered whether the numerous Indian stories by Ramaswami Raju that appeared in *The Leisure Hour*, the popular Victorian-era magazine, were related to his monetary struggles.⁴⁰ His financial fortunes, however, seem to have improved after he returned to Madras. In a detailed email account, Ramamurti wrote in July 2018: “My father told me Ramaswami

Raju was given a large estate in Royappettah that included the area of the present Royappettah government hospital, neighbouring wooded areas that extended nearly to the present area where Sundaresan lives. Ultimately, [the family] gave a good bit of the land away to the government retaining only some houses and area in and around where Sundaresan now lives.” This was the house I had visited. Both great-grandsons say that the government gifted this land in recognition of Ramaswami Raju’s achievements, but I wondered whether the gift was also in appreciation of the Telugu and Tamil training he provided to prospective officers of British India. Ramaswami Raju had also flourished as a barrister, becoming a civic-minded citizen of colonial Madras who, I was told, donated away much of his wealth and property to charitable trusts and public welfare institutions.

Ramaswami Raju’s command of Sanskrit came through an early transformative spiritual experience. According to Sundaresan, his great-grandfather’s spiritual experiences “began long before he left for England.” It was curious that Ramaswami Raju seems to have chosen not to allude to these experiences directly in any of his writings. As Sundaresan had heard it told, this is the story of the mystical experience:

One night Ramaswami Raju had a strange dream. He dreamt that the next morning, a *bhikshu* [spiritual mendicant] would knock on his door asking for alms. The *bhikshu* would be no ordinary *bhikshu* but a very learned Brahman. As the dream had predicted, a *bhikshu* came calling. Ramaswami Raju told the *bhikshu* that he knew he was a learned man and asked if he could please recite the Ramayana. The *bhikshu* told him that he had had a similar dream and that he would be glad to recite the Ramayana. It would take a month. When should he start? Ramaswami Raju said, “*Shubhasya shigram*”—good deeds should begin at the earliest. After the thirty-day recital, Ramaswami Raju wrote a shorter Ramayana in Sanskrit verse.⁴¹

Babu, who was listening to the conversation, added, “I’ve heard that the *bhikshu* wrote *bijaksharas* [sacred mantric syllables] on his tongue.” I was reminded of the popular story about the great poet Kalidasa that my mother told me—a story that cannot be found in critical commentaries on Kalidasa. The goddess Kali, the story goes, was so moved by his hapless circumstances that she wrote on his tongue, and Kalidasa, who knew no Sanskrit, was transformed into the legendary poet who came to shape the literary history of Sanskrit poetry. Ramaswami Raju himself does not mention any formal training in Sanskrit, though his testimonials observe that he was not only competent in Sanskrit but also wrote Sanskrit plays, which were performed

by the Sanskrit Dramatic Society in Madras. The great-grandsons had no doubt. Ramamurti said, “My maternal grandfather told me that PVRR was a Sanskrit scholar; he used to host scholars from Benares and discuss spiritual matters with them.”

The story about the *bhikshu* is also about Ramaswami Raju as a spiritual inquirer. Ramamurti recalled:

Sundaresan’s father used to tell me that when he was young, he had accompanied Ramaswami Raju [his grandfather] on a pilgrimage. First to Badrinath, and then onwards to Kedarnath, Kailash, and Manasarovar [pilgrimage sites in the Himalayas]. They used to travel during the day on ponies and rest for the night in *dharamshalas* [pilgrim guest-houses]. It was a description I enjoyed listening to. . . . My grandfather also told me that Ramaswami Raju was spiritually oriented and used to communicate with trees on his long morning walks.

Ramaswami Raju had called his estate Temple Garden, a name that brought to my mind Ramaswami Raju’s stay at London’s Inner Temple. In fact, Sundaresan had told me on one of my earlier visits that in the evenings, Ramaswami Raju used to go up to the roof of the building, which he later donated to the government (and is now the Government Royapettah Hospital). He would isolate himself there and meditate. “Some divine force guided Ramaswami Raju,” mused Sundaresan. “The memories are all now fading. But his blessings are definitely there on this family. We feel it.”⁴²

The Great Park: A Sacred Ethos for a Profane Empire

England, “that little island which is but a particle of earth in the great sea, the hideous home of eternal unhappiness,” is where native Englishmen live “without any form of enlightenment like wild animals.”⁴³ How did this audacious statement escape censure? In fact, the statement is one among many that abound in Ramaswami Raju’s remarkable long narrative poem titled *Srīmat Rājāṅgala Mahodyānam*, or, *The Great Park of Rajangala* (the English Raj), which he began publishing in 1894 when he was an advocate in the Madras High Court.⁴⁴ *The Great Park* was Ramaswami Raju’s magisterial ambition. In his words, it was meant to be “an account of the origin and rise of the Angala [British] Empire on Earth in Samskrita verse (25,000 thousand stanzas) with Angala [English] translation.”⁴⁵ The “account” was never completed. Ramaswami Raju died in 1897, three years after he published the first segment—1,500 Sanskrit verses with a parallel English translation of text that had been conceptualized to be of a length comparable to that of

Valmiki's Ramayana. Nonetheless, these 1,500 verses express a grand idea—the originating moment of the English race—and in the process, a view of “history” both from below and from above. This unfinished narrative, a swan song for all we know, can also be read as the final account of an individual whose literary immersion and fluency in a Western episteme had never, at the end of the day, co-opted the flourishing of his religious personhood and eclectic literary self. *The Great Park* carries the resonance of Ramaswami Raju's transformative experience with the *bhikshu* who had initiated him, using mantras, into the Ramayana.

Synoptically, the 1,500 verses of the unfinished narrative are a flashback. The central narrator is the elephant-headed god Ganesha, the proverbial scribe of the epic the Mahabharata, who tells a story to Ramodwitiya (Rama II), the emperor of a prosperous country called Samnaya Bharata in some future time. Ramodwitiya hears the story and commands that it be written down and disseminated across the universe as a sacred text whose reading bestows well-being and prosperity upon all listeners. In this flashback narration, the English empire is long over, and many rulers have come and gone, the fall of each brought on by a corrupt and self-serving leadership. In Ganesha's narration, the originating moment of the English race happens through a dramatic fall from heaven: In the grand heavenly court of Indra, the king of gods, a spectacular performance has been arranged in honor of two special guests, the mighty god Shiva and his equally powerful wife, Parvati. As the performance reaches its climax, a celestial musician (*gandharva*), who is the lead harpist, strikes a wrong chord in a drunken stupor. Darkness immediately shrouds the court. For this cataclysmic mistake, Indra expels the *gandharva*, cursing him to live “without a name” on earth, on a miserable “little island,” which we discover is England. The fallen *gandharva* is the progenitor of the English people. With abundant digressions into magical lands and other histories, and with only 1,500 verses of the hoped-for 25,000 verses completed, we do not get to hear the story of how the British established an empire in India or a narrative of India's Mughal past.

With “the English race” being the subject of *The Great Park*, the narrative curates two ways of speaking within and across the Sanskrit and English texts, intermingling praise and critique, and the sacred and the secular. It is in this text that I see most vividly Ramaswami Raju's political voice—which I described earlier as lightning-like—illuminate the sovereignty of his self, which I find is lotus-like. In *Lord Likely*, we saw how English characters in an English play themselves inadvertently lampoon English imperialism, and in *Sixty Mandarins*, we saw how a “collection” of Asian tales defies imperial disciplines of anthropology and comparative mythology while dislodging

Europe as the center of the world and world history. Here in *The Great Park*, the double register is enabled by what I call “absent translation,” a strategy of translation in which certain details or features are deliberately left untranslated without altering the plot. Only a reader literate in both Sanskrit and English will see the innovations involving syllables and semantics that are available in literary Sanskrit and liturgical Sanskrit but are absent in the English translation that Ramaswami Raju provides alongside. Giridhara Shastri, a friend and former professor of English and Sanskrit at Sri JCBM College in Sringeri, Karnataka, translated for me selected verses of Ramaswami Raju’s Sanskrit text to compare against Ramaswami Raju’s own translation.⁴⁶ Ramaswami Raju’s translation is literally accurate, but it is marked by an “absent translation” that is missing not because of self-erasure or incompetence. Rather, “absent translation” is a strategic narrative choice that allows an author who is also the translator of the same work to position the texts in two worlds, each conveying a different resonance.⁴⁷ The juxtaposed Sanskrit and English texts create an “unprecedented [third] poetic space” and allows a reader who knows both languages and cultural worlds to see and hear different things across the two texts, in the contrast between them. The bilingual reader, in short, is able to perceive how Ramaswami Raju has represented a risky subject between and across two texts. We could say of Ramaswami Raju’s poem what Velcheru Narayana Rao and David Shulman say about the translational accomplishment of the fourteenth- to fifteenth-century Telugu poet Śrīnātha: “The interactive presence of these two languages creates a third.”⁴⁸

In addition to absent translation, a second strategy that facilitates *The Great Park*’s double register is Ramaswami Raju’s choice to use an aesthetic form that allows colonial power to be critiqued within a structure of piety and praise. The *purāṇa* is arguably that form. The dominant mood and narrative quality of the Sanskrit text of *The Great Park* reflect a *purāṇa*, a genre of Hindu sacred narrative whose recitation is associated with spiritual merit and well-being. Technically, the definition provided by Amarasiṃha, a fifth-century lexicographer, has become the notional definition of a *purāṇa*. According to this definition, to be a *purāṇa*—primarily an oral genre—a text should display five signature features (*lakṣaṇa*), called the *pañcalakṣaṇa*. First, it should narrate stories about the creation of the universe; second, it should describe how this universe is destroyed and re-created; third, it should tell stories about the genealogies of gods, mortals, and *rākṣasas* (demons); fourth, it should herald the arrival of a progenitor of a new age; and fifth, it should document the dynastic history of a ruler. These five distinguishing marks do

not form a rigid structure that circumscribes a *purāṇa*; instead, as Narayana Rao points out, the five features must be thought of as forming a flexible framework that allows diverse materials to be molded to “create a world and a worldview.”⁴⁹ Unfolding through dialogues between seekers and seers, a *purāṇa* enacts its ideological commitment to a worldview that could be sectarian or place-centric, taking and transforming topical events and offering new ways of looking at the present, the past, and the future.

It is easy to locate *The Great Park* in this narrative scheme. It regales readers with the story of the origin of the English and their empire in India; it takes us through lavish descriptions of both prosperous and fallen lands, charts battles and magical maps through which we are ushered by a progenitor called Mahamangala, the first Englishman; it links earthly history to cosmic events; and it presents lineages of key figures. This intermeshing of cosmological occurrences and this-worldly events is so pervasive in Indic and Indo-Persian narrative traditions—whether *itihāsa*, or *kathā*, or *caritra*, or *qiṣṣa*, to mention only a few genres—that it is important to take it seriously. Rao, Shulman, and Sanjay Subrahmanyam remind us that when, for instance, the catastrophic moment in the conflict between the eighteenth-century raja of Bobbili (present-day Andhra Pradesh, a story I return to in the next chapter) and the French coalition is recounted by the Telugu narrator through the metaphor of a “fateful cockfight,” we need to think “in terms of history that includes independent insets, syncopation and whorls.”⁵⁰ In other words, colonial rule is rendered differently “present” through *itihāsa-purāṇa* techniques of past-narration.

Our first step into *The Great Park* is through the gates of a mandala, which is a sacred diagram.⁵¹ This is the first page of the book, the only page that encases its text in a special visual arrangement, and the only page that is exclusively in Sanskrit. (The other pages feature both the Sanskrit text and its English translation side by side; see figure 5.) A rectangle with decorative borders contains two sections, the first called *ādeśa* (proclamation), and below it the second, called *upadēśa* (instruction). These two sections together spell out the lofty intent of the work and set its tone. The proclamation sanctions the publication of *The Great Park*. The Sanskrit text provides the reader with a vivid description of the court in which this proclamation is made. The court is in an enchanted city called Maha Mondon, which is part of deeply interconnected cosmic and human landscapes.⁵² Maha Mondon, nestling on the banks of the Ganga, is the city of the goddess Vindhyachaleshwari. It is a part of the Himalaya-adorned (*himavatālankṛita*) country of Samnaya Bharata, a land with a rich heritage. Samnaya Bharata is on the continent of Dharma (Dharmadvīpa), which itself belongs to the world of matter (*bhautikolōka*)

— श्रीमद्वाङ्महोद्यानादेशः —

श्रीमाननंतो विराजति वैराजः प्रपन्नः—तस्मिन् भौतिको लोकः— तस्मिन् धरण्यां धर्मदीपे हिमवतालंकृतस्साम्रायभस्तः—तस्मिन् गङ्गातीरे देवीविध्याच-
लेश्वरीविलसितं श्रीमहामण्डनपुरं—तत्र सर्वामण्डप इति प्रोक्तसार्वभौमण्ड-
प्रदेशः—तत्र श्रीमदयोध्याचलराक्षसार्वभौमाण्यचत्वरं—तस्मिन् मण्डनमहावु-
र्गं—तस्मिन् बुद्धद्वादशराशिगोपुरपञ्चकोशमव्यस्य तेजोविमानाहयो महा-
नानंदनिलयः—तस्मिन् महोदजसमीपमहाश्वत्थदहसामण्डपः— तत्र
सप्तशकर्वसन्निधौ प्रणवबीजभद्रासने श्रीलक्ष्मीसमेतः प्रतिष्ठितः रामोद्वितीयः
शुद्धास्तिकसाम्रायभस्तमहासार्वभौमः महीमध्यस्थः राजा दण्डधरोद्युक्तः उरुणा-
दिष्टः—श्रीजगन्मुनिः श्रीसाम्नायभस्तसार्वभौममहासचिवः सहस्रास्तासी—
श्रीपुरंदरः श्रीसाम्नायभस्तसार्वभौममहासांप्रदायिकः गजशुविनिलयः—
श्रीप्रद्युम्नः श्रीसाम्नायभस्तसार्वभौममहानैगमः धर्मालयाध्यक्षः—
श्रीशिवश्रद्धः श्रीसाम्नायभस्तमहासागरसांप्रदायिकः महासामरघट्टालयः—
एतेषां महात्मनामनुमतिं प्राप्यादिशति—

ओम् परमात्मनोवयम् राजाङ्गलमहोद्यानम् दिशोदश

इति श्रीमद्वाङ्महोद्यानादेशो नाम सप्तपञ्चतुर्वापसार्वभौमादेशः

— उपदेशः —

विरङ्गवेणीकावेरी त्रिवेणी त्रिपथा शिवा ।
ददाति लालयत्वेन कर्मशोभंशमादरात् ॥ १ ॥
हिताहितं यल्लोकस्य तन्नजानाति शेषुषी ।
केवलं मानुषी नित्यं परतन्त्रो हि मानुषः ॥ २ ॥
विश्वंभरेण विहितं विमुक्ष्य सह विष्णुना ।
विश्वेश्वरेण कथितं त्रिलोकहितवेदिना ॥ ३ ॥
राजाङ्गलमहोद्यानं यत्र यत्र प्रतिष्ठितम् ।
तत्र तत्र विशंत्याष्ट सारसा इव सम्मदः ॥ ४ ॥
साम्रायभस्ते देशे सर्वेषां गृह्येभिनाम् ।
एष हर्षप्रदो ग्रंथो भवतीति सतां मतिः ॥ ५ ॥

(१)
चक्रसारङ्गकोटमहोद्यानयो विष्णुसूक्तः ।
पञ्चकुम्भसहितं राजानं चरित्रिकायाः ॥

(२)
नारायणसाम्नायै परं धर्मप्रदायः ।
राजाङ्गलमहोद्यानं नन्दनस्य विराजतः ॥

(३)

वचनं मुद्रितं ग्रन्थश्रीविद्यानिलवेद्युगे ।
साम्रायभस्ते देशे कुम्भस्थे महापुरे ॥

FIGURE 5. Mandala. Reproduced from P. V. Ramaswami Raju, *Srimat Rajangala Mahodyanam, or, The Great Park of Rajangala* (Kumbakonam: Sree Vidya Press, 1894).

in a radiant universe (*vairāja prapañca*). The city is a perfect architectural mandala with named concentric squares and circles that eventually take us to the twelve-gated palace of the sovereign and righteous emperor Ramodwitiya. (Note that the name means Rama II, an allusion to the reputedly perfect reign of Rama of Ayodhya [*rāmarājya*].) Seated on a resplendent throne with his consort Sri Lakshmi, Ramodwitiya is holding court in a grand hall. Noblemen and sages surround him. Commanded by his preceptor and with the approval of his four learned teachers—Jaganmuni (the prime minister), Purandara (the commander), Pradumnya (the chief businessman), and Sivaschandra (the naval chief)—Ramodwitiya issues the proclamation.

The proclamation is set apart in its own embellished box in the middle of the page. It says:

Om paramātmanōvayam rājāṅgala mahodhyānam diśodaśa.

We, descended from the supreme soul, command that [this book]

The Great Park of the English Empire be spread in the ten directions.

The traditional prefix *Om*, the primordial sound signifying consciousness, makes the proclamation function like a mantra or a sacred utterance, and since, in puranic geography, the ten directions encompass the universe, the reach and potency imagined for the book become clear. A succeeding sentence clarifies that *The Great Park's* realm is the limitless cosmic empire (*sārvabhoumadeśa*), which is held up by four great statements (the *mahavākyas*) and the syllable *Om*. Given Ramaswami Raju's interest in Vedic literature, the "four great statements" would very likely refer to the four Upanishadic "essential" statements believed to describe the unity of consciousness.⁵³ The book's ambitious geographic imaginary is ratified by a succeeding section called the *upadēśa*, teaching imparted by a guru to a disciple—a common feature of a puranic text. The metaphor of sacred expanse continues through this teaching: *The Great Park*, we are told, was planned by the creator Brahma after consulting the god Vishnu. A few other declaratives follow: Human intellect cannot know what is good and bad for the world, but the god Ganesha, the remover of obstacles, knows, and being the archetypal scribe, he narrates *The Great Park*. The holy rivers, Kaveri in the south and Ganga in the north, cherish and distribute this work. Wherever *The Great Park* is respected and recited, prosperity will enter as waterfowl enter a lake. And finally, it is the opinion of good people that *The Great Park* will become an object of joy to all householders in the land of Samnaya Bharata.

This teaching is then enclosed between two-line verses just as a mandala's innermost point is secured by protective boundaries. These verses extol the sacrality of the place where *The Great Park* has been printed—"Sri Vidya

Press, in the city of Kumbakonam, Madras.” Kumbakonam is no ordinary city in Hindu sacred geography. It is the home of a large holy lake and temples to many forms of Vishnu. In effect, cosmic contextualization, mystical pronouncements, and visual cues irrefutably establish the identity—and authority—of the Sanskrit text of *The Great Park* as a puranic text. It recasts a mundane place into a sacred space by recovering memories of the landscape and extolling its virtues.

The last page of the book, which provides the English translation of the first page, is a complete contrast to the first. Unlike the first page, in which a purely Sanskrit text is contained in concentric rectangular mandalas, the last page is exclusively in English. The puranic tenor of the first page is now absent. The mandala-like boundaries have been (mostly) dispensed with. Instead, information such as Ramaswami Raju’s credentials, his degrees, and the titles of his books, and details of his installment-pricing scheme, are provided. Indeed, this page seems to be more like an advertising brochure, which Ramaswami Raju probably intended it to be—“the language of the gods in the world of men,” rather literally speaking.⁵⁴ The translation of the proclamation itself is literal and almost unintelligible: “Pranava—From the Supreme Soul (are) we—Rajangala Mahodyanam—Ten corners.” This incoherent English translation withholds the semantic import of the mantra for an English (that is, a foreign) audience, making the mantric aura of the Sanskrit proclamation available exclusively to Sanskrit readers. In fact, the only three pieces of text enclosed in mandala-like borders on the last page are the sacred proclamation, the names of the gurus, and the name of the sacred city in which the narration occurs. These reflect visually what the author regards as the poem’s sacred core. I return later to this point about how Ramaswami Raju controls sacrality by inserting mantras into the Sanskrit text (but not into the translation) and by determining where in the narrative the mantras should end. At this point, the text becomes non-sacred. This exercise of control over the textual aura is a sovereign act.

The real departure from the first page’s tightly contained puranic ethos is the command that the emperor Ramodwitiya and the four learned teachers issue to the author of *The Great Park*, a command that is absent on the first page. These authoritative figures—of the king and the gurus—who are “ardent admirers of British rule have ordained that the work should assume a purely Indian character, that no word other than Samskrita should be found in it and that it must take the form of a narrative of the acts of Angala history by Ganesa to a spiritual Indian sovereign in a great city named Maha Mondon.” Admiration for the British notwithstanding, the

gurus commission a work that is nationalist in language and spirit. This account of “the origin and rise of the Angala (British) empire on earth,” we are further informed, is structured as a Great Park (*mahōdyānam*) with five groves (*brindam*). The groves are named Narmabrindam, Mangalabrindam, Shishthabrindam, Varunabrindam, and Yashobrindam. Ramaswami Raju draws our attention to the fact that the initial syllables of the groves’ names—na-ma-śi-vā-ya—constitute the five-syllabled (*pañcākṣari*) mantra invoking Shiva.⁵⁵ Chapters are referred to as “trees,” *drumas*. Ramaswami Raju was able to complete 1,500 verses of only “the first grove,” the Narmabrindam.

The metaphor of a park for an account of the English empire is a masterly literary choice. From the fifteenth century, English royalty deliberately cultivated large parks as private hunting grounds, which continue to be the property of the royal family. It was only in 1851 that London’s eight royal parks were opened up to the public, providing access as an act of royal grace but with no rights of use.⁵⁶ Ramaswami Raju, living in London and familiar with English society, surely could not have missed the emblematic connection between parks and British monarchy. Even though Indian literature of earlier periods, especially Sanskrit and Persian, is full of garden landscapes that contribute to the mood and motif of the aesthetic work, Ramaswami Raju conjures something novel by organizing the story of English rule in India around the metaphor of a great park. The five parks of *The Great Park*, taking their names from Hindu sacred syllables, are now part of an Indian ethico-religious landscape—in which British history unfolds as one phase of a puranic history.

The main text begins with endorsements by acclaimed contemporaneous Sanskrit scholars, indicating the intellectual community to which *Rajangala Mahodyanam* belongs. Its author, we learn from these testimonials, is not an ordinary author; he is specially endowed to bring a park to life by enchanting it with cosmic time, events, and auras. The glowing letters that accompanied his application for the position of Telugu lecturer at University College London pale into bread-and-butter testimonials as we read Pandit Sri Teagarajadhvari’s praise:

[Ramaswami Raju is an] eminent poet. . . . [He] is (also) well-versed in English and [he] has a sound knowledge of the principles of that great law which guides the rulers of the earth. He who knows English well rarely knows Samskrta equally well. This Ramaswami is indeed conspicuous as one deeply learned in both the languages. Proficiency in English, surpassing skill in Samskrita composition, a sound knowledge

of ethics, elegant taste, charming poetical power—all these are apparent in this work.

Pandit Raghavarya, who is the author of “a commentary on the great work *Lakshmi sahasram*” and resides “on Pattarachary Street in Kumbakonam,” is of the opinion that “the learned who scrutinize this work will see that it is not inferior in style to the Ramayana.”⁵⁷ The family’s stories of Ramaswami Raju’s devotional life come to mind.

I turn now to five moments that illustrate the working of the double register in the narrative, drawing on Ramaswami Raju’s prose translation of the Sanskrit verse text. At times I draw on an independent translation to highlight “absences” in Ramaswami Raju’s English translation.

The First Moment: Mantra as a Textual Boundary

The narrative begins in the realm of the gods. Ganesha has just finished invoking the gods and is meditating, when the four sons of Brahma, the god of creation, approach him. They have a question for him: Could he, the wise storyteller with a long memory, explain how it had transpired that the Angalas who were but

inhabitants of a little island had overtaken the entire earth. There is no sea where there is not some ship of theirs; there is no mart where they do not derive great profit from trading; there is no kingdom of which the head does not seek their friendship; and there is no measure of world-wide utility which is carried out without their aid. Many, who were counted brave and honorable on earth, have been conquered by them just as inferior birds are subdued by falcons. Even Bharata, the great country that has been protected by divine power, was subdued by these manly and energetic people. Wherever the invincible Angalas go endowed with dominion, the earth soon seems to smile with prosperity.

The awe, which is significantly limited to colonial success in commerce and conquest, turns to incredulity as the sages continue: “By those, who know the ancient history of the world, [the English] are said to have been originally living in the forests without any form of enlightenment like wild animals. How is it that such fame has been acquired in this world by people so described?”⁵⁸ The provocatively phrased question sits waiting for an answer while Ganesha digresses to narrate the puranic story of the churning of the

ocean of milk from which Lakshmi, the goddess of prosperity, rose to the surface. He tells us that as she emerged, “the lotus with a hundred thousand petals, effulgent like the sun, where the goddess took birth, shone forth with the sea,” and the gods announced that Lakshmi is the “architect of the well-being of the entire universe.”⁵⁹

Interestingly, the Sanskrit reader’s entry into the poem is through the opening word *namashivaya*, the Vedic invocation to Shiva as the “supremely auspicious one” who inhabits the elements and is consciousness itself. (The mantra, we recall, provides the logic behind the names of the five books of *The Great Park*.)⁶⁰ In Ramaswami Raju’s English translation the mantra—which Ganesha recites—is nominally translated as “Salutations to Siva,” but a reader who knows both Sanskrit and English immediately recognizes that the potency of *namashivaya* as the five-syllabled mantra (*panchakshari*) is lost in translation. This dynamic of fullness and absence between the Sanskrit text and its English translation continues. I discovered further that the story of the birth of Lakshmi titled “Lakshmisambhava” in Sanskrit also encodes the twenty-four-letter Rig Vedic verse commonly known as the “Gayatri mantra”: *tat savitur vareṇyam bhargo devasya dhīmahi dhīyo yo naḥ pracodayāt* (I meditate on that most desirable divine illumination; may the radiance of that light awaken my intelligence).⁶¹ The Gayatri mantra is considered by

Indian sages, saints, and practitioners to be *the* most powerful mantra of purification and transformation known to the *yogic* traditions. . . . It is an invocation for enlightenment that can have the effect of drawing other individuals into the same state. The repetition of the *Gayatri* mantra creates a unique series of vibrations that integrates a person’s mental awareness with deeper levels of the unified energy system that is believed to be at the core of being.⁶²

If one reads the first syllables (which appear in bold) of the twenty-four verses of this chapter vertically, one would be reciting the Gayatri (see figure 6). To illustrate, *ta sa vi*, the first syllables of the Gayatri, help form the first words of the first three verses (*tapas*, *samudre*, and *viṣṇuṣ*). In fact, the Gayatri mantra resonates *throughout* the work. From the second chapter onwards, each chapter’s first syllable is once again from the Gayatri, and in this manner the “sound” of the Gayatri permeates the text. Since the mantra is absent in the English translation, the potential for a transformative meditative experience of the text is precluded for the English-only reader. Sanskrit readers who may choose not to avail themselves of the mantric experience can still participate in the literary play within the Sanskrit text. Without com-

तपस्वाध्यायनिस्तास्तर्वे देवाः प्रहर्षिताः ।
 अहवच सागरे विष्णुं समद्रमथने प्रसा ॥२६॥
समुद्रे भाति देशेश रत्नजालं महागुणम् ।
 तस्मिन् वरेण्यमस्मभ्यं कृपया दातुमर्हसि ॥२७॥
विष्णुर्देवां सुमहतीं निलमात्स्यहदिस्थिताम् ।
 उवाच त्वं महाभागे भवरत्नमनुत्तमम् ॥२८॥
तुष्टा सा करुणा प्राह किं रूपं रत्नसन्धये ।
 तवेप्सितं तदेवेश वक्तुमर्हसि साम्प्रतम् ॥२९॥
वचः प्राह ततो विष्णुः स्त्रीरत्नमभितप्रभम् ।
 भूत्वा त्वं सर्वलोकानां मङ्गलं महदाचर ॥३०॥
 रेखा चान्द्रमसी दीप्ता यथा भाति सारद्धने ।
 तथा दधार कलगासागरे रूपमनुत्तमम् ॥३१॥
निखिलं जगदभ्येत्य निर्निगेषमवैक्षत ।
 तां तब सर्वशवेन परमानन्दरूपिणीम् ॥३२॥
यज्ञस्य फलमित्याहुर्गुणयज्ञकानिस्थिताम् ।
 तपसः फलमित्याहुर्गुणयज्ञकानिस्थिताम् ॥३३॥
भेद्रं सर्वस्य लोकस्य ससुत्यज्ञं यमोद्यमात् ।
 इत्याह संस्मरन् वेधाः परमां शक्तिमात्मनः ॥३४॥
गोप्ता विदेशसंघानामेवं प्राहशतक्रतुः ।
 भागधेयस्य मे नूनं फलमुत्पन्नमीदृशम् ॥३५॥
देवस्तां समितः प्राह विष्णुः कस्य तपःफलम् ।
 भद्रे त्वमसि संजाता प्रसन्ना क्षीरसागरे ॥३६॥
वचः प्राह पुनर्देवी नित्यं तव हृदिस्थिता ।
 तवातुग्रहमासाद्य जाताहं क्षीरसागरे ॥३७॥
स्यन्दनं वृषभं दिव्यमारुह्यप्राप्तवान् शिवः ।
 देव्या यदहं तत्तत्पुण्यमित्याह पुरुषोत्तमम् ॥३८॥
धीमन् समुद्रतनया भार्या ते परमाङ्गना ।
 सञ्जाता सर्वलोकस्य कर्तुमत्यन्तमङ्गलम् ॥३९॥

मङ्गलेयं महादेवी सर्वं सम्पत्प्रदायिनी ।
 इति पर्वतपूजस्य सुता प्राह श्रुतं वचः ॥४०॥
हितार्थं सर्वलोकस्य जातेयमिति सादरम् ।
 जयस्सर्वं संहृष्टा दिवि चाप्सस्ताङ्गणाः ॥४१॥
धिया कोण्या पृथिवी प्राह वाम्न्यं समद्रदम् ।
 अहं वसुमती नूनमनयेव ममेश्वराः ॥४२॥
योगक्षेमविधावीर्यं विश्वलोकस्य तत्त्वतः ।
 इत्याहुर्हस्तसुन्नम्य देवाः तद्विप्रयोगमाः ॥४३॥
योगवतामीदृशीं तस्याश्नुत्वा संकीर्तितां सुरैः ।
 पाणिना परिजग्राह तां विष्णुस्सर्वशोभनाम् ॥४४॥
नलिनं शतसाहस्रदलमादित्यसन्निभम् ।
 स्थानं यत् जन्मनो देव्या विराज ससागरम् ॥४५॥
प्रहर्षमनुलं लेभे पद्मकिञ्चलकोणभिः ।
 लितां देवीं समासाद्य लीलया विष्णुप्राप्तवान् ॥४६॥
चोदितास्तस्यवाचयेन सर्वलोकस्तस्यहृष्टाः ।
 त्वं लक्ष्मीति तां देवीं प्रणेसुः परमा मुदा ॥४७॥
द्याविष्णोर्महाभागा भूत्वैवं देवतापरा ।
 सन्निधौ सर्वलोकानां प्रतिजज्ञे यशस्विनी ॥४८॥
या वाञ्छा देहिनां लोके सतां शक्तिमतां मयि ।
 तामहं सर्वभादेन कतेमि सफलं सदा ॥४९॥

FIGURE 6. The bold letters shown vertically form the Gayatri mantra. Reproduced from P. V. Ramaswami Raju, *Srimat Rajangala Mahodhanam, or, The Great Park of Rajangala* (Kumbakonam: Sree Vidya Press, 1894).

promising a semantic translation, mantras nonetheless create experiential and aesthetic boundaries between the texts and their readerships, and when uttered aloud, they create resonances.⁶³

The Second Moment: English Character, Virtue, or Vice?

The story of the birth of Lakshmi becomes an occasion for an exposition on the rule of righteousness. Ganesha declares, "It is righteousness that protects valour, strength, riches, glory and fortitude. Kingly power and greatness shine forth exceedingly only when maintained by righteousness." As long as the kings of Samnaya Bharata were ethical, prosperity "resided" in Samnaya Bharata. But then the rulers "swerved from the path of righteousness," and the country became vulnerable to foreign invasion by "energetic people outside the pale."⁶⁴ We could speculate that the "foreign conquerors" are eleventh-century Ghaznavi invaders; such speculation raises the question of whether Ramaswami Raju was presenting a Hindu nationalist view that painted Indian history in terms of "pre-Islamic glory and the unceasing trouble that came to reign ever since the Muslims came to the subcontinent."⁶⁵ I am not persuaded, however, that Ramaswami Raju held such a view. That would require us to disregard the cultural cosmopolitanism of *Sixty Mandarins*, whose lively stories draw on global Islamic cultures; it would also require us to disregard Ramaswami Raju's precocious foregrounding of the British betrayal and looting of Sikh and Mughal rulers in *Lord Likely*. And it would mean that we disregard the Hindu-Muslim alliances depicted in Ramaswami Raju's play *Urjoon Sing, or, the Princess Regained* (1876), which pivots on Rajput princes marrying the Mughal emperor Jahangir's daughters in the presence of Thomas Roe, the East Indian Company official who represented the British monarchy in Jahangir's court. (In fact, in this play, Jahangir challenges a Catholic missionary about the Christian denunciation of Islam and especially the Qur'an.) In short, *The Great Park* asks that it be read through the literary inspiration not of a Hindu nationalist but of a *pauranika*, a narrator of myths, who used story and sacred utterance to categorically maintain that all arbiters of justice had to be morally incorruptible to deliver justice.

To return to our story, with the corruption of the rulers of Samnaya Bharata and their consequent decline, the stage is set for the entry of English rule. As a teaser, Ganesha sums up the accomplishments of English rule in broad strokes. He says: "It has filled with people many lands that had no people in them before. It has become the protection of many weak kingdoms. It has relieved the oppressed from bondage. It has given liberty and happi-

ness to all people without distinction.” Just as we begin to think that this description of an enlightened despot reflects the text’s internalization (and indigenization) of a Millsian ideology, it distances itself from that possibility by declaring that nothing human can explain the might of the English; the English empire was made possible by Hindu gods who ordained it. Ganesha argues that the English themselves assert that “if [they] should lose Bharata, they should lose their greatness in this world” and that “Bharata is the brightest jewel in the imperial diadem.” In short, we have a new reading of the jewel in the crown: the crown exists because of the jewel. Ganesha, the ever credible narrator, tells the sages that before they are misled by rumors about the moral depravity of the English, he would ask them to note “four great qualities” of the Angalas: “straight-forwardness, truthfulness, a natural love of justice, and fruitful gratitude.” These noble qualities, he says, in fact counter the gossip of “ignorant people” who believe that Vishnu would take up an *avatāra* to destroy “English hordes.” After all, Ganesha reminds us, “what man is there who is without a fault and who has been born sinless?”⁶⁶ We find ourselves engaging a crafty secondary text that uses rumor to place English rule on a slippery axis between virtue and vice. The sages are now even more eager to hear the rest of the story. But Ganesha tells them that the full story could be told only in a fitting venue and that venue is the court of Emperor Ramodwitiya, who rules in the resplendent earthly city of Maha Mondon, located somewhere between Varanasi in the east and Allahabad in the west.

The Third Moment: The Myth of History

And so, disguised as ascetics, the four sages and Ganesha proceed to Maha Mondon. As they journey through the country of Samnaya Bharata toward its capital, Maha Mondon, and the palace, the holy troupe is wonderstruck seeing the gilded domes, the palaces, and the parks; they marvel at the spectacular thriving of art and pleasure and science and law. Everybody is happy doing their duty, peace prevails, and the king and queen are humble but authoritative and just. In contrast to the disputable goodness of English rule, Ramodwitiya’s rule is marked by a moral perfection: “This great ruler had attained the position of the arbiter of the earth for the good of the whole world by the consent of all races.” We learn further that “in this court, the great emperor presides as a protector of the law surrounded by wise men and himself hears the petitions of his subjects and administers justice. Master and servant, the rich and the poor, the high born and the low born, all see the law equally dealt out at this court.”⁶⁷ This ideal court presents a stark contrast to the messy Anglo-Indian judicial system with its contrived texts, judicial

hierarchies, and culturally incompetent and racist dispensations of law.⁶⁸ As a lawyer in the Madras High Court, Ramaswami Raju would have known the Anglo-Indian legal system very well.

But, we might ask, why does the story have to be narrated “in the presence of the emperor?”⁶⁹ Why should Ramodwitiya’s court in Samnaya Bharata be the venue that befits the narration of English history, and why not Indra’s court in heaven or Shiva’s abode in the impenetrable Himalayas, surely more appropriate locations for the holy crew? The answer to these questions has broader implications for how Ramaswami Raju constructs *the political* in a dual register. The temporal ruler Ramodwitiya and his officers—ministers, the commanders, tributary representatives, and other judicial and political functionaries—are the most fitting audience as well as agents to hear and enact a particular political theology. This theology’s central assertion is twofold. The first premise—which we have already encountered—is that temporal sovereign power is divinely given. (Thus English empire could not have been possible without the intervention of Hindu gods.) The second is that consequently, such power obligates the sovereign to govern righteously and justly. Conceptualized this way, political power is a sacrosanct power, its abuse sacrilegious. Ramodwitiya himself states: “The sovereign that falls from the path of justice undoubtedly falls from everything. Is not justice said to be the centre of the wheel of this world? The wise have said that the sovereign is the centre of the wheel of state; his efficient ministers are said to be the firm spokes of the wheel; his subjects content with his rule are the circumference. Thus by mutual support turns the wheel of state.”⁷⁰

Further, the earthly location for the narration of the story about the English empire allows Ramaswami Raju to conflate several kinds of mythic narrative and make a counterstatement about history itself, dominantly imagined as linear and Eurocentric. Implicit in the conflation is Ramaswami Raju’s argument that there are many ways of constituting the past and arriving at its many meanings, and many ways of linking temporalities—for instance, the distant future (represented by Ramodwitiya’s reign), the forgotten past (represented by a primitive Angala race), and the authorial present (evoked through Ramaswami Raju’s awareness of world events). Myth, as scholars of mythology note, is not, as it is in common parlance, a euphemism for an untruth or a delusion.⁷¹ Instead, Wendy Doniger argues that a myth is a special kind of narrative that “combines distant and near views . . . is greater than the sum of its parts . . . expresses cross-cultural human experience . . . and expresses both an idea and its opposite, reveals—or sometimes conceals—certain basic cultural attitudes to important (usually insoluble) questions, and is transparent to a variety of constructions of meaning.”⁷²

As Ganesha recalls the mythology of Samnaya Bharata, dwelling on its political order and its ethico-economic prosperity, he also constructs a mythology of English antecedents. Through these welded mythologies, Ramaswami Raju reconstructs the idea of English history. The early English, Ganesha tells the listeners in Ramodwitiya's court, were once a people "devoid of all wealth" who dressed in barks, skins and leaves and lived in "caves, bushes and hollows of trees." Their country itself was made up of "dense forests infested with carnivorous animals." They earned their daily bread and did not possess the ability to discern good from evil as other civilized races did. At last—in line with narrative's political theology—divine grace willed prosperity and fame on the English. They began to build invincible ships that "with hulls and wood and iron, capacious holds, manned by warriors skilled in the ways of the sea vomit terrible fire that burns adverse hosts, like giantesses that are sprung out of the sea for the protection of the [English]." England's naval capability matches the disposition of its people:

Its invincible warriors have, by various means, conquered many prosperous countries and established by their might a boundless empire over which the sun never sets—which is unprecedented and productive of infinite happiness to mankind. . . . The learned men of this island, who know many sciences, who are ever impelled by the desire to discover the subtle truths of nature, proceed higher and higher in their career of research . . . in a manner peculiarly their own. . . . [Its] able and enterprising merchants possessed of a potent love of wealth, have gathered the treasures lying scattered over the world in many forms and amassed them in an exceedingly magnificent style in their own country. The men and women inhabiting this island are mostly truth-speaking.⁷³

Yet, ultimately, this is a description that equivocates. Lurking in the admiration is a shadow that falls on English claims to enlightenment and rationality, to urbanity and advancement. Phrases such as "potent love of wealth," "mostly truth-speaking," and "proceed higher and higher in their career of research . . . in a manner peculiarly their own" punctuate the narrative of the glory and accomplishments of the English. English conquest "by various means" is subtly juxtaposed with Ramodwitiya's rule "by the consent of all races." The contrasting utopian description of Maha Mondon backhandedly suggests that the flourishing of India was plentifully possible and secure without colonization. The wonder that is Samnaya Bharata exposes the fiction of progress on which the English empire was founded. Implicit in Ramodwitiya's not knowing that the English had once ruled his country—

clearly *that* history does not seem to have been chronicled in traditional royal genealogies—is the fall of the English empire in India. In this double register where the English empire, long gone, is remembered in the court of a king in the future of time, it is myth that makes history visible. The myth of Ganesha's visit to an earthly realm, the myth of English civilization, and the myth of a Hindu utopia enable not one but many constructions of history, showing the hollowness of the supposition that historical consciousness and its emancipatory possibilities were exclusive to Europe. The Sanskrit text, with its puranic tenor, the mantras with their potential to enlighten, and the mandala-like sacred arrangement of text draw on a sensibility that is outside European thinking; European thought and experience at best provide the raw material for the narrative.

The Fourth Moment: New World, Old Serpent

Ramaswami Raju recognizes that a story of “the British Empire” is incomplete without reference to Europe's colonization of the Americas.⁷⁴ Ramaswami Raju anticipates modern scholarship that recognizes that this colonization is a story of “immigration, slavery, and disease” that left “90 to 99 percent of the [indigenous] population dead in two generations.”⁷⁵ As Ganesha describes the continents (using Sanskrit names for each), one of the sages asks whether he could narrate the story of how Mahodyama (“Man of Gigantic Enterprise—Columbus) discovered America. In Ganesha's telling, Columbus, a native of Hitastalas (Italy), resolves to prove that the earth is spherical for the “good of the world” and proposes to the Spanish king Ferdinand (Dharma Vardhana) and queen Isabella (Dharma Vardhini) that he would sail “westward” till he finds land.⁷⁶ After he overcomes ecclesiastical opposition to his plan, Isabella agrees to sponsor his expedition.

A long and eventful journey that includes the near mutiny of his crew brings Columbus to lands occupied by indigenous peoples. He quickly plants “with his own hand the banner of the Supunias [Spain].” When the natives offer hospitality and friendship, Columbus “exclaim[s] with astonishment—‘How can these be said to be uncivilized who possess such an excellent character by nature?’” Wandering around, he “saw here a beautiful waterfall, there a winding stream, at one place a lake resonant with the music of aquatic birds, at another place woodlands with verdant turf and trees, creepers and bushes . . . and exclaimed with delight, “The world is but the picture of one artist!’” One might almost like Columbus for his fledgling ethnological sensitivity. But Ramaswami Raju's characteristic double register returns: Praise for a problematic subject is quickly felled by a word or a line or a twist in the

plot. Columbus, preparing to return to Tejodwipa (“Continent of Light”: Europe), assiduously begins to collect “all that is peculiar to the land,” a sample of every botanical and animal species, in an unmistakable colonial act of illegitimate acquisition.⁷⁷ Ramaswami Raju’s description of Columbus’s collecting zeal indexes the beginnings of the story of a networked European capitalism that fueled the colonial enterprise—Mahodyama, Columbus, after all, is a “Man of Gigantic Enterprise.” As Daniela Bleichmar notes:

Botanists and ministers alike hoped that a better-known and efficiently administered empire would furnish rich revenues by allowing Spain to compete with trade monopolies maintained by other nations. The Dutch, for instance, controlled the pepper, cinnamon, and nutmeg trades, while the French did the same with coffee and the British with tea. This climate of international economic and political competition created opportunities for naturalists to sell their services to interested patrons. Botanical expertise became a highly valuable form of knowledge: in the eighteenth century, botany was big business and big science. . . . Over the course of the eighteenth century, natural history became a global project, and European naturalists hungered for observations and specimens from distant parts of the world.⁷⁸

When his shipmen propose that, in addition to plant and animal samples, they also help themselves to a few natives who would present a “strange and novel sight,” Columbus gives a lofty moralistic speech about how all men belong to their own homes and families and hence should not be abducted. But Ramaswami Raju is not quite done with the narrative about the colonization of the Americas. The natives, Ganesha tells us, are themselves so overcome by Columbus’s radiant nobility that they swim out to the departing ship in the same way that “iron is attracted by magnet.” They implore Columbus to take them along with him, and to this entreaty Columbus says, “So be it.” Everybody on the ship is enveloped in adoration for Columbus, and the journey back to Spain with samples is smooth.⁷⁹

Ganesha immediately seeks forgiveness for using the simile of iron and magnet: “This simile is not proper. The wise should forgive its use. The qualities of the good and the great certainly exercise a nobler and lovelier method of attraction in respect to men’s minds than that of magnet towards iron.” The narrative apology is timed well because it is offered too late: Ramaswami Raju has succeeded in alerting us to the clank of shackles. And it is the kind of apology that does not restrain more unflattering metaphors such as the proverb “The serpent enters the hole made by the white ants,” which Ramaswami Raju uses to describe the English advent in North America.⁸⁰

The Fifth Moment: The Fall

The climax of this unfinished poem centers on how the English got their progenitor. The scene is the celestial court of Indra, where Shiva and Parvati are expected to visit. A grand reception has been organized for distinguished delegates, and Indra's staff has rehearsed an elaborate protocol of entry and hospitality. There is much tension in the air, as they cannot afford to have anything go wrong, given the exalted status of the guests. At this event, the *gandharvas*, heavenly musicians, are expected to perform. The minister of the *gandharvas*, who is also the son-in-law of the king of the *gandharvas*, is called Mahamangala. Unfortunately on this momentous day, he gets drunk and forgets all about the event. Reminded by his wife, Sreevardhini, he scrambles and just in time manages to join the performing troupe with his harp. As the concert unfolds, "the movable and immovable in nature stood intent on listening . . . mountains danced . . . the trees in the woodlands embraced one another, oceans overstepped their limits and went back after congratulating the earth; the rivers came back reversing the course of their limp waters, carnivorous animals . . . adopted holy lives." In the midst of this serene music, a terrible thing happens. Sudden darkness descends on the court. All three worlds are shaken with alarm. Horrified, Indra cries, "What is this?" The sage Narada, famous diagnostician, says, "Out of the lips of Mahamangala a wrong note has proceeded; from that this great disaster has happened to the three worlds."⁸¹ Upon Indra's command, the Wind quickly removes Mahamangala from the hall. This dismissal returns the performance to harmony.

After the event, Indra summons Mahamangala and curses him:

On earth there is a cold and desolate island in the western ocean, which is an expanse of perpetual snow. Dense forests resounding with the yelling of carnivorous animals and mountains and marshes make it impassable. It is surrounded by a sea ever rough with waves lashed by tempests. There water does not flow; fire does not burn vigorously; the sun does not shine which is ever shrowded [*sic*] by masses of clouds. There the midday which is generally as bright as twilight (in other places) suddenly becomes night enveloped in dismal fogs. Long days in summer, protracted nights in winter, in a moment wind, in a moment rain, in a moment thunder, make that little island, which is (but) a particle of the earth in the great sea, the hideous home of eternal unhappiness. There, fallen from heaven, reside for interminable years in the form of a man ever addicted to liquor and flesh-eating. . . .

As through your folly you forgot my timely word, you shall totally forget your former history. . . . [Y]our all-exterminating act has destroyed your name also; therefore without a name bear the burden of your miserable existence.⁸²

Upon hearing the curse, Mahamangala lets his harp fall, but it is caught by Sreevardhini. Mahamangala becomes speechless. Sound has great significance in *The Great Park*, which begins with *Om* (the *pranava*), the original, generative sacred sound. Indra admonishes Mahamangala:

Where a singer does not exercise self-control and act with retentive memory, earnestness and purity, there, sounds prove highly hurtful to him. Just as the world of matter is made of fine particles of matter, the world of sound is made of fine particles of sound. Natural acts like coughing, laughing, talking and weeping arise in all animals by the union of particles of sound. A sound mispronounced by a guardian of sound is known as a wrong sound which is capable of destroying everything.⁸³

By this logic of cosmic sound, if Samnaya Bharata is born of a perfect primordial note, then the birth cry of the Angalas is a discordant one, an *apasvara*. It is a commonplace sound like talking or sneezing.

Sreevardhini feistily protests and Indra, relenting, reduces the earthly exile to a few centuries. He gives her three magical gifts—a suit of armor, a helmet, and a lance—gifts that remind us of medieval English romance heroes. She is still not satisfied. She laments to Indra, “How can I, who have thus received a holy name and many benedictions from you, follow a nameless husband?”⁸⁴ A minor drama ensues involving politics between celestial teachers and students and husbands and wives. Indra answers Sreevardhini’s prayer and showers six names on the now nameless Mahamangala: Speethari, Pingaloddama, Mitaharsha, Mitotsuka, Yogi, and Janmabala. But the teacher of the gods, Brihaspati, thinks that Indra has made a mistake in pronouncing the names and has therefore given the name Mitotsuka inadvertently. He corrects it by conferring a seventh name, Hitotsuka, on the still speechless Mahamangala. At this, Brihaspati’s wife, Tara, points out that in correcting Indira, Brihaspati himself had gone wrong. After a heated argument between Tara and Brihaspati (in which Tara questions his knowledge), she tells Mahamangala that among his friends, he will be known as Amitasharsha and Amitotsuka, and among his enemies he will be Ahitotsuka.⁸⁵ This is an interesting strategy by Ramaswami Raju, since these three

names can be read both positively and negatively, serving to offset the other insulting epithets.

Ramaswami Raju provides these names in the English text as proper nouns, transliterated, not translated. The reason for the absence of translation becomes clear: not one of the ten names is flattering. Giridhara Shastry helped me unpack the uncomplimentary semantics.⁸⁶

1. *Spheetari*: *Spheeta* means bloated, increased, or numerous. *Ari* is enemy. Literally, *spheetari* would be “one whose enemies are increasing or numerous.”
2. *Pingaloddama*: *Pingala* means tawny, monkey-like, ruddy. *Uddama* means unrestrained, intoxicated, bold, dreadful, or vain. So *Pingaloddama* would mean an “unrestrained monkey.” (In many regions of pre-independent India the English were popularly called red monkeys; for example, *kempu koti* in Kannada or *lal bandar* in Hindi).
3. *Mitaharsha*: *Mita* means limited; *harsha* happiness. Thus, “having limited happiness.”
4. *Mitotsuka*: one who feels little emotion.
5. *Yogi*: trickster, conjurer.
6. *Janmabala*: one with natural (brute) strength.
7. *Hitotsuka*: self-interested.
8. *Amitaharsha*: one whose happiness is unbounded (alternatively, one who is unboundedly concerned with one’s own happiness).
9. *Amitotsuka*: one whose curiosity is unlimited (alternatively, one who is meddlesome).
10. *Ahitotsuka*: eager to harm others.

Understandably, the names do not pacify Sreevardhini. Let us look at the final verses of *The Great Park*:

Thereafter Sreevardhini respectfully addressed Indra, “O Lord, the names bestowed graciously by you, the preceptor and his consort are all of special distinction. They are like branches. How can a tree, cut at the roots, bear branches? (verse 463–64)

The name given in the childhood ritually in the presence of his father is indeed the real name and all other names are ornamental. (verse 465)

That name is the root of the tree of renown; that is dear to all beings. Is not the love for one’s own name, home and land natural? (verse 466)

O wise one, are you not aware of the real nature of the course of action of the one who cuts the roots of a tree and adorns its branches?" (verse 467)

And thus abruptly ends the unfinished project of *The Great Park* or *Rajangala Mahodyanam*. Without a name that links them to ancestors, the English are without history—nameless in the Great Park, and rootless heads of an empire destined to wither. The origin of the English in the fall from heaven reads like a strategic subversion of Milton's "Man's first disobedience" in that Great Park, and of Shakespeare's "special providence in the fall of a sparrow"—lines from bards who epitomize the very identity of England. As far as British imperialism is concerned, *The Great Park* erases the independent identity of the British as an exceptional power; it creates a moral caesura in the narrative of British glory. Empire is not the consequence of English agency; rather, *The Great Park* insists that the rightful provenance of all power and justice is divine providence. By incorporating into a Hindu mythos the origin of the English race from a fallen progenitor, it renders the very idea of "English" history impossible. Ramaswami Raju did not merely refute the refrain of English historians that ancient India did not possess a historical sense. He reversed it.

The Tamil Nadu Archives in Chennai is a red colonial-era building that dates back to 1909,⁸⁷ a building that went up eight years after Ramaswami Raju died. It sits diagonally opposite Chennai Central Station on Gandhi Irwin Road in the Egmore area. Mr. Rajendran, the helpful chief archivist, met me outside the building, understanding, as only an archivist does, why I was so keen on reading Ramaswami Raju's obscure plays. To read Ramaswami Raju's writings during those humid afternoons in this colonial building, with its high ceilings and its long-stemmed fans tirelessly making a clicking noise, was quite different from reading the Mary Frere papers in the British Library in London. A passage I had circled with pencil in my photocopy of *Urjoon Sing* stands out: Jahangir asks Thomas Roe (of the famous inaugural tax grant "and all our woe"): "Sahib Roe, what kind of people are you? Do you brave danger? Love your homes and friends? Hate a lie? Like a war?" These lines summed up what had most disenchanted Ramaswami Raju about colonialism: its moral repugnance. Another set of lines is from a scene where Roe waxes rhapsodic about Shakespeare, and Urjoon Sing responds, "Perhaps, a Kalidoss?" (Kalidasa).⁸⁸ The accomplishment—or the hope—of the unfinished *Great Park* is in inventively deploying gods to make possible meta-historical tellings of history that are both equitable and rooted in everyday life.