CHAPTER 4

The Irony of the “Native Scholar”

S. M. Natesa Sastri

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“Two months back,” Mr. Gopalakrishnan began his speech to his extended family, looking around at about twenty-five people seated on chairs and sofas or standing in his home in Sayeenagar, Chennai, “a small article appeared in *The Hindu*, talking about Natesa Sastri as a scholar, his works, and it ended with a small plea.” He was referring to the letter I had written to Mr. Muthaiah in which I asked if he knew anything about the family of Pandit Natesa Sastri.¹ Sangendi Mahalinga Natesa Sastri intrigued me. He was born in a Brahman family in Tiruchirapalli district of present-day Tamil Nadu in 1859 and graduated from Madras University in 1881. Immediately after graduating, he joined the Government Archaeological Survey and over the years held positions in a variety of colonial departments—the Board of Revenue, the Office of the Inspector-General of Jails, the Local and Municipal Secretariat, and the Registration Department, where he was a manager when he died, just forty-seven years old.² I later learned that the circumstances of his death were sudden and tragic. A panic-stricken horse in a temple procession in Triplicane in Chennai knocked him down, and he died of his injuries. Like Ramaswami Raju, Natesa Sastri published on a variety of literary, religious, and philosophical subjects. A polyglot and a nimble translator, he had translated countless inscriptions and literary works from Sanskrit,

FIGURE 15. Natesa Sastri. Reproduced from S. M. Natesa Sastri, *Hindu Feasts, Fasts and Ceremonies* (Madras: M. E. Publication House, 1903).

Urdu, and English into Tamil and from Tamil into English. He was the first to publish Tamil folktales in English and was among the first to write novels in Tamil. He published also on Telugu and Kannada folklore in a number of leading journals of that time, drawing on his travels through the Madras and Bombay Presidencies. The scholar of Tamil literature Kamil Zvelebil writes:

Natesa Sastri's rich and many-sided work would require a full-fledged monograph of its own, so amazing are his activities and so remarkably diversified is his output: administrator, archaeologist, linguist, translator, folklorist and, above all, novelist, he went from one activity to another. The most prolific of all early Tamil prose-writers, driven by thirst after ever new achievements, he wished to demonstrate that what could be done in English could equally well be done in Tamil.³

The letter to Mr. Muthaiah was precipitated by a meeting I'd had with the literary critic P. G. Sundararajan, well-known as "Chitti," in Chennai in September 2001, when I visited libraries in Chennai in search of Natesa Sastri's materials. Chitti also described Natesa Sastri as a pioneering scholar. Although Chitti did not know anything about Natesa Sastri's family, he had a mysterious clue. About twenty years earlier, he said, he had heard that somebody in Natesa Sastri's family had his manuscripts. So I wrote to Mr. Muthaiah. I was expecting a reply from him, but instead he published parts of my letter in his column "Madras Miscellany" in *The Hindu*.⁴ It worked like magic. Within hours of the morning newspaper's arriving on readers' doorsteps, he telephoned to give me the contact details of several people who had responded. And soon Natesa Sastri's grandson Gopalakrishnan, a partner in a consulting firm in Chennai, and I, in Hyderabad at that time, had connected. Now I was at the family lunch that Gopalakrishnan had organized, with cousins and other relatives gathering from all parts of Chennai. A Coimbatore family had planned to be there but were unable to arrive in time.

Gopalakrishnan continued his speech, indicating me: "This author who has been researching Natesa Sastri has not been able to come across any of his descendants. Jambu [a relative] saw the article and called me, and immediately also called Pattabhi [another relative] and some of you. The moment I got the message I contacted Mr. Muthaiah just as many of you called *The Hindu* and gave our contact information. Subsequently she contacted us." I had left my recorder on a coffee table that had been moved to the middle of the room; the little red lights on the recorder were flickering synchronously with the excitement in the room. I reproduce part of that conversation here. It was in English. (I have only keyword comprehension of spoken Tamil.)

GOPALAKRISHNAN: Dr. Leela Prasad is a professor of religion, interested in folklore and folklife, Hindu arts, and so on. As part of her research, she happened to come across Natesa Sastri's works. There are a lot of English publications by him on the folklore of south India, in various places, like the Archaeological Survey of India.

After she called me, I also started visiting Connemara Library, the Maraimalai Nagar library, and other libraries.

*Someone mentioned another library's name.*⁵

And that is the first time I started to ask, Who is my grandfather?

I think none of us knows him—due to design, or ignorance, or innocence, or failure of some sort, I do not know. I would like all of us to know that a great scholar has been forgotten by the family. Forgotten in Tamil Nadu, forgotten in the country.

Everybody was silent as he paused.

From today, let us try and learn who he was. He passed away in 1906 at the age of forty-seven. My father was at that time two years old. Maybe that is why we did not discuss him in the family.

Some people began to discuss how old their own parents might have been when Natesa Sastri, who had eleven children, passed away.

A RELATIVE: My father was the first person who republished *Dinadayalu* in 1971 [Natesa Sastri's first novel; second edition 1902].

GOPALAKRISHNAN: Let me finish, one second.

Forget about my generation. I want the younger generation, folks in their twenties and thirties, to get together and form a Natesa Sastri Trust, anybody among them, through a daughter or daughter-in-law—whoever has got even a streak of Natesa Sastri's blood running in their veins—let us find a way to honor him.

Tata [Grandfather] was many men rolled into one—an archaeologist, [someone interjected "an epigraphist"], novelist, folklorist, translator . . .

LEELA: His bibliography runs into several pages.

GOPALAKRISHNAN: So I hope the youngsters will do something.

Let's perhaps start with a library—some of his works are in Connemara Library, some in Tamil Nadu State Archive, some in Maraimalai Nagar library . . . we can do it. Just in two weeks, I have collected five Tamil novels by him.

Hey, Shyam!

Gopalakrishnan called out to his son Shyam, whose official name is Chandrachoodan; he had collected some of Natesa Sastri's works.

Shyam has visited the Tamil Nadu archives and already introduced himself [to librarians].

There are—um—a certain number of "statutory requirements," because he is not a research scholar . . . right? So getting access to the documents is difficult.

I spoke to the Special Commissioner and she has now said being a family researcher, personal research, it is harder.

[But] we have just overcome the difficulty.

For a while the family discussed Natesa Sastri's works, listing titles they had come across.

In closing, I want to say—

See, I see you somewhere at a marriage event, I have seen Pattabhi somewhere, I see Jambu at some other event—

But all of us have not met for one purpose together. . . .

So I say, let us rediscover Natesa Sastri.

He was our grandfather. Why not claim him?

For a while the family shared, in piecemeal fashion, stories of ancestors nobody had met and details of where Natesa Sastri had worked.

JAMBU [another of Natesa Sastri's great-grandsons asks in Tamil]: What was Tata's first job?

SHYAM: He was assistant to Robert Sewell, Archaeology Department.

GOPALAKRISHNAN: Yes, he was in the Archaeological Survey; he was epigraphist there. From there, he was transferred to Mysore. Then he came back and worked as a jail warden for two years. After working there, he joined Inspector General of Registrars in Madras as a manager. Then went to Padalur as registrar himself, then came back to Madras. He was founder-director of the Triplicane Urban Co-operative Society.

Somebody mentioned the names of other founders.

GEETHA SUNDAR [Natesa Sastri's grand daughter-in-law]: How did he get called "pandit"?

GOPALAKRISHNAN: Robert Sewell, who was his boss in the Archaeological Survey, looking at his scholarly ability in Tamil, English, and Sanskrit, named him "pandit."

SHYAM: He knew eighteen languages. He translated all of the inscriptions of the first Archaeological Survey of Western India. He translated all the Dravidian inscriptions—and he was given the title of "pandit."

LEELA: I tried to follow this lead because I also got the same information. I went to the library at Fort Saint George, and I spoke to the superintending epigraphist here about Natesa Sastri. The other thing is, in his prefaces, Natesa Sastri mentions Brodie's Road as his residential address.⁶ Now, I don't know what that means. . .

GOPALAKRISHNAN: As soon as I learned of this, I called [mentions a relative's name, unclear on my tape]. He is one of the oldest around—

and he told me Natesa Sastri had never lived on that road. He lived only in Triplicane on Parthasarathy Swamy Road.

LEELA: I looked up the English almanacs, and there, the address that was given, under “Native Residents,” they list all the native residents for eighteen ninety-three, and the exact address that was given was 10 Veeraraghava Mudaliar Street.

Animated discussion followed. Should we trace old addresses—like the one on Brodie’s Road? Look up records of the Triplicane Urban Co-operative Society? Who had family portraits? If we visited Sangendi, would we find anybody still there from the family? (Gopalakrishnan later did visit Sangendi.) Which libraries seemed promising? Should we try old printers and publishers in Chennai? The discussion also mapped the family tree: Natesa Sastri had eleven children, and soon I was writing down the names of each one of them, notating them with the occasional glosses that family stories came up with. Natesa Sastri’s daughter-in-law, Gopalakrishnan’s eighty-four-year-old mother, who had married Natesa Sastri’s youngest son at age thirteen, shared memories of the family she had virtually grown up in, especially of the friendship she had with her much older “co-sister” (Indian English for sister-in-law). She sang a couple of Tamil songs that ran in the family. My recording became precious to the family after she passed away a few months later.

I handed around my fragile copy of Natesa Sastri’s *Folk-Lore in Southern India*. As the four small volumes circulated, their faded green covers and threads of the binding showing, somebody recognized the story of “Why Brahmans Cannot Eat in the Dark.” In the tale, two gutsy sisters nab and get rid of a demon that has been stealthily finishing their meal as they eat in the dark. Somebody else in the gathering began to narrate the story enthusiastically from memory, and the narration was collectively completed—in a mixture of Tamil and English—amid laughter. A few more stories were narrated that I recognized as part of Natesa Sastri’s collection. People remembered who had told stories and when they had been heard, but most palpable of all was the shared excitement in discovering that stories in Natesa Sastri’s collection had persisted and circulated across the dispersed family for more than a hundred years. The folklorist, poet, and translator A. K. Ramanujan’s remark about Natesa Sastri in his *Folktales from India* made renewed sense to me. He writes: “My grandmother, who was in her sixties when I was a boy fifty years ago, told me stories that she had heard from her grandmother. S. M. Natesa Sastri, who came from the same part of Tamil Nadu (Trichinopoly [now Tiruchirappalli]), heard the same tales in his childhood and published them

in Tamil and in English in the 1870s. This kind of corroboration inspires trust in many of these early recordings.”⁷ The last line is especially revealing: storytelling is ratified by a tradition of storytelling. It dawned on me that afternoon that Natesa Sastri had not been lost to the family. He was, just as Gopalakrishnan had hoped, being rediscovered and reclaimed by the family through their repertoire of stories. In my earlier writing on Natesa Sastri in 2003, I had echoed what Gopalakrishnan had said to his family: “Tata was many men rolled into one.”⁸

As familial and archival reflections came together, and as I interacted with Gopalakrishnan over the years and understood deeper identifications, I began to see Natesa Sastri not as a “native scholar,” the supposedly subordinate figure that colonialism created to expand its empire of information, but as a sovereign raconteur. As an epigraphist, he deciphered inscriptions that spanned several south Indian empires; as a folklorist and translator, he drew on oral and written traditions that ranged from Persia and England to Sangendi and Kashmir; and as a novelist, he crafted stories that reached into interior landscapes of memory and emotion. Natesa Sastri’s authorial self is kaleidoscopic, as we will see more fully in the sections that follow, where I trace his creativity as an epigraphist, folklorist, and novelist. When Kirin Narayan observes, “Acknowledging ourselves within multiple creative domains, I think, allows for a cross-fertilizing of insights,” she could well be speaking of Natesa Sastri.⁹ My larger argument is that this kaleidoscopic authorship articulates an epistemic sovereignty, a sovereignty that could never be reined in by the rule of empire. Such a sovereignty sets a limit on the native subordination that can be claimed by disciplines such as archaeology and folklore, or on the exclusivity that can be claimed by genres such as the novel that were colonial or “Western” in conception. Instead, it redirects our attention to the paradox that the content of these disciplines depended on indigenous learning, concepts, experiences, and, ultimately, individual creativity. This is not the kind of epistemic sovereignty that troubled Foucault, the kind in which a regime of knowledge legitimizes its power by making itself exempt from error. As Joseph Rouse puts it, “This legitimation does not produce knowledge, in the sense of producing new possibilities for truth.”¹⁰ It merely promotes a singular “truth” by suppressing conflicting truth claims, dismissing them as irrational. As we will soon see, the epistemic sovereignty that Natesa Sastri exemplifies comes from his vast erudition, from his creative faculties, and from his unassailable dignity as a scholar in fields that routinely exploited native knowledge.

Neither could Natesa Sastri’s outspokenness be reined in. Although a Tamil imaginary predominated in his literary efforts, it was a larger national-

ist imaginary that informed his political vision, and on at least one occasion it brought him controversy. In an article in the *Madras Mail* (October 29, 1902), for instance, he advocated the teaching of Sanskrit as a compulsory subject in the schools of Madras Presidency and drew the ire of many who felt he was making the case for Sanskrit—a pan-Indian language—at the expense of Tamil.¹¹ In another instance, in 1887, when a committee was constituted to evaluate the performance of the Archaeological Survey of India, he told the committee that unless the department hired more epigraphists, “it would take a hundred years to complete the task of collecting, deciphering, and translating all the South Indian inscriptions.”¹² The anonymous biographical sketch published after his death suggests that he may have been advocating for the hiring of *Indian* epigraphists. The author writes, “[Natesa Sastri’s] evidence before the Public Service Commission advocating the claims of educated Indians and their special aptitude for archaeological research, was marked by an independence which was a notable trait in his character; but it served ever after as a bar to that official preferment and personal recognition to which his scholarship and great abilities fully qualified him.”¹³

Natesa Sastri’s argument for more Indian representation echoes the sentiment expressed in the first resolution of the Indian National Congress, which was formed in 1885; it demanded an inquiry “into the working of Indian administration and adequate representation for our countrymen.”¹⁴ The resolution was tabled by the Indian freedom fighter and social reformer G. Subramania Iyer, who founded the English-language newspaper *The Hindu*—and also the Tamil daily *Swadesamitran*. It is not coincidental that Natesa Sastri chose the pen name of “Swadesamitran” for his first novel, *Dinadayalu*. *Swadesamitran* literally means “friend of self-rule,” and the pen name carried all the overtones of the politically assertive newspaper. Avowedly committed to promoting the idea of home rule, *Swadesamitran*, started in 1882, quickly acquired a vast Tamil readership. The weekly publication (which became a daily from 1899) reported on the growing political discontent toward the end of the nineteenth century in India and in Britain’s colonies in general. It exposed Tamil readers to national and world events such as Bal Gangadhar Tilak’s imprisonment in 1897, the ruthless administrative policies during the Bombay plague of 1897, and the Boer War of 1899–1902. It enlightened Tamil readers about the failings of British policy and stoked a national spirit. When Russia lost to Japan in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–5, *Swadesamitran* pointed out how the idea of Western superiority was a myth.¹⁵ The sensibility of the *Swadesamitran* would have appealed to Natesa Sastri. Its nationalist tone was “sober and its articles were characterized by cogency of argument and a thorough grasp of facts,”¹⁶ qualities

that Natesa Sastri valued.¹⁷ Natesa Sastri's adoption of *Swadesamitran* as a pen name is remarkably audacious, considering he was employed by the government. If outspokenness had barred his professional advancement in the colonial administration, he stood to lose a lot more by aligning himself with an emerging, vocal freedom movement. Yet he did. The editor of *Swadesamitran*, G. Subramania Iyer, it must be noted, was later accused of sedition by the British; he died at sixty-one, his health broken by repeated jail terms.¹⁸

The Construct of "Native Scholar"

The expertise of Indians—of pandits, *maulvis*, *munshis*, and *kazis*, for instance—came to be seen by the East India Company and the colonial government as pivotal to the success of their expansionist programs.¹⁹ The need crystallized into the constructs of "native scholars" and "native assistants," constructs that say as much about colonial tactics of subordination and demoralization as they do about colonial dependence on Indian erudition and lived experiences. Archaeological studies, as the art historian Tapati Guha-Thakurta shows, could hardly have progressed without four key Indian figures: "the site laborer, the informant, the trained draftsman and the Sanskrit *pandit*: those who dug mounds, prepared drawings and plans for the *sahib*, identified sculptures, coins, or inscriptions, and most important, helped decipher scripts and legends."²⁰ From the 1770s, when Warren Hastings was governor, the fields of orientalism and Anglo-Indian law turned to "pandits" to build their knowledge bases. One can always discuss the reciprocity of knowledge exchange between pandits and British scholars, but this reciprocity is subsequent to the fact that the "pandit" in colonial discourse (different from indigenous understandings) was positioned lower in an asymmetric relationship of power. Relationships between pandits and British scholars were not always cordial, and at times they devolved into outright suspicion over cultural and intellectual appropriations.²¹ A peculiar distancing from the contemporary is intrinsic to the construct of the "native scholar": orientalist often, in Brian Hatcher's words, "tended to view their pandit associates more as the embodiment of an ancient ideal than as living collaborators," although they viewed themselves as scholars in the present, a contrast consistent with the notion of civilizational advancement embedded in nineteenth-century racism. Hatcher incisively remarks that when the orientalist H. H. Wilson worked with Sanskrit scholars, he remained "the pandit's superior, both as the man who would arrange for their employment and as the man who would estimate the worth of their learning. Despite his respect for his pandit collaborators, he was not about to advocate sympathy

for the 'tastes' and even the 'talents' of the pandit. What he did advocate was patronage: 'we can give them bread.'"²² Orientalists like Wilson would have been surprised to discover that, ironically, "native scholars" reciprocated his sentiment. Many scholars who collaborated with C. P. Brown, best known for his dictionary of the Telugu language, did not consider him worthy of being called a pandit. They held the opinion that Brown "*paṇḍituḍu kādu, āyana poṣakuḍu*" (He is not a pandit, he is a "bread" provider).²³

It is hardly surprising, then, that colonial praise for the "native scholar" was always a discourse of equivocation. In this discourse, the "native scholar"—like the modernizing ancient who was always close to modernity but never close enough to be called modern—could be an accomplished scholar, a raw repository of native knowledge, but not capable of sophisticated analysis. For instance, Henry K. Beauchamp, introducing Natesa Sastri's *Hindu Feasts, Fasts and Ceremonies* (1903), says:

Pandit Natesa Sastri is doing most excellent work in collecting, arranging, and recording in concise and easily assimilable form some of the more noticeable tales, traditions, customs, beliefs, and ceremonies of the Hindus. And it is to be hoped that many others of his educated countrymen will follow his good example. For there are mines of wealth to be exploited in this manner, and there is work for many scores of writers, compilers and translators.²⁴

(Beauchamp was of course talking about an Indian workforce.)²⁵ Despite noting, "It is one of the excellent characteristics of Pandit Natesa Sastri that he particularizes where necessary and generalizes only where it is safe to do so"—an observation I would imagine is crucial to the work of theorizing—the bulk of Beauchamp's introduction quotes at length generalized observations about Hindu practice from an 1887 book by the orientalist William Wilkins (whom he does not name).²⁶ Similarly, A. G. Cardew, acting secretary in the Revenue Department, writes:

[Natesa Sastri] also possessed a facility of invention which left him at no loss to supply deficiencies when his memory failed. Like Sir Walter Scott, he united the talents of a *raconteur*²⁷ and the tastes of an antiquarian. . . . It is on the rescue of these popular tales from oblivion that pandit Natesa Sastri's claim to recollection will chiefly rest. His own avowed romances are meritorious productions, but they hardly possess permanent value. But his reproduction of the stories he learned at his mother's knee will always retain an interest proportionate to their faithfulness.²⁸

Perhaps the best example of arrogant equivocation is by the well-known theosophist Henry Steel Olcott, who pronounces:

The progress of modern scholarship has enabled us to trace back to Aryan sources our popular legends and nursery tales. The appearance, then, of a competent Indian pandit, who can give us, in a Western vernacular, the folklore of the Dravidians or Aryans, is a very fortunate event. And fortunate the pandit if he can find so able an editor and competent a specialist as Pandit Natesa Sastri has found in Captain R. C. Temple. The advantage of such collaboration could not be more strikingly proven than it has been in the instance of the three books under notice. The two Parts of "Folklore of Southern India," while no more interesting as to subject matter, are infinitely superior to the "Dravidian Nights' Entertainments" in being faultless in English idiom, while the latter bristles with errors and is, in fact, a bad example of the faulty style too common among our "educated" class. It is a great pity, for we have no doubt that in his own vernacular the Pandit would have made it as charming in style as it is valuable in material. The severity of criticism is, however, quite disarmed by the frank apology offered in the Author's Preface. Certainly the amateurs of this class of literature will be ready to forgive him the worst of grammatical and idiomatic mistakes, in gratitude for the pleasure and instruction to be derived from his charming stories.²⁹

Olcott was oblivious to Natesa Sastri's intent and mindfulness in translating Tamil narrative experience. Explaining why he chooses to do a more literal translation of the Tamil *Madanakamaraja Kadai* (*Dravidian Nights Entertainments*), Natesa Sastri writes in the preface:

Every original story must be read and appreciated in its original language. And Tamil stories have so many peculiarities and beauties that is almost impossible to produce a translation which, while retaining the many idioms particular to the Tamil, shall, nevertheless, be in strict grammatical accord with the language in which I have written it. . . . My principal object in publishing these translations is not to show that I am any bit of an author or translator, but that stories in Tamil are in no way inferior in their richness of thought, soundness of morality and luxuriance of imagination, to the other stories of Oriental romance.³⁰

Sift through the curmudgeonly praise for a "native scholar" by reviewers such as Olcott, and we see Natesa Sastri as a critical translator, a natural ethnographer, and an inventive raconteur in at least two languages.

The Epigraphist

In 1881, twenty-two-year-old Natesa Sastri joined the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) in Mysore (now Mysuru) for his first job as epigraphist. He quickly became recognized as a “native scholar.” The ASI had been founded in 1861 by Alexander Cunningham, a military engineer and employee of the East India Company, with the intent of launching “a careful and systematic investigation of all the existing monuments of ancient India.” Epigraphy, the deciphering of old inscriptions and scripts, was “identified as one area of archaeological research with maximum potential for roping in and training native scholars.”³¹ The south Indian branch in Mysore was only seven years old under the directorship of Robert Sewell when Natesa Sastri joined it at a salary of thirty rupees a year. As an epigraphist, he would have visited historic sites that were either decaying or active centers of worship. At these sites he would have located inscriptions and studied architectural features and archaeological relics. Sometimes he would have traced copper plates containing historical information about families and their lore to private individuals. He would have described all findings in technical terms specifying location, dimensions, and material, for example. He would have identified languages and scripts and translated inscriptions with attention to narrative, orthography, and dating. The process, it is easy to imagine, is riddled with interpretive challenges. Indeed, Natesa Sastri’s grounded knowledge of language and culture would have been essential to the survey. For example, the epigraphs of the Vijayanagara kingdom were in Kannada, Telugu, Tamil, and Hindustani, languages he clearly knew in addition to Sanskrit. Translation and contextualization depended not on “native assistance,” a euphemism for mechanical labor, but on a scholarly understanding of how language worked across historical contexts and culture.

His article on two land grants made by Eastern Chalukya kings is an excellent illustration of his erudition and skill. The copper plates conferring the grants, he tells us, were discovered by a farmer in the Krishna District (in present-day Andhra Pradesh) while plowing his field. The rectangular plates, we are told, had their “edges turned up to preserve the inscription” and were “beautifully-preserved” with Chalukyan seals of boars and lotuses. Then follows a line-by-line transliteration and translation of the Sanskrit inscription, which is replete with legend, praise, and genealogy. Glosses explicate metaphors: “That lord of Ganga, after ruling the kingdom for 44 years, acquired the friendship of the husband of Sachi (Indra, i.e. he died).”³² Ancient sites brimming with *sthala puranas* (place narratives) evoke Natesa Sastri’s sense of history. For instance, his “Notes on

the Tiruvellarai Inscriptions” begins: “Tiruvellarai is an ancient village 8 miles north of Trichinopoly [modern Tiruchirapalli in Tamil Nadu]. It is in a rocky situation and reminds one of the ancient Jaina settlements.” Two saints of the eighth and ninth centuries, Tirumangai Alvar and Periyalvar, he continues, composed songs and sang to Pundarikaksha, the Vaishnava deity of the temple. “This temple is built upon a small rock, below which is a cave temple, with no god, however, placed in it.” Lines of religious poetry must have come to Natesa Sastri’s mind as he looked at the stacked temples: “The saint Tirumangai Alvar, when extolling Pundarikaksha, must refer to this cave in his expression ‘Kallarai mel Vellarai yay,’ which means ‘The white chamber over the rock chamber.’” A fuller description of the site follows. Of the three wall enclosures around the temple, two are “studded with inscriptions.” Yet, he observes, the inscriptions seemed to have suffered wanton erasure and become illegible. Nearby was a neglected Shiva temple, and to the south of it a shrine in ruins. The inscriptions were in Sanskrit and in Tamil, which he then translates in the article.³³ For readers, the site is rendered resonant with stories and poetry and indecipherable trails that are layered in the histories of sacred structures.

When Sewell discovered Natesa Sastri’s ability with Sanskrit, he raised his salary to seventy-five rupees a year and conferred on him the title of “pandit”—something that Gopalakrishnan and his son had mentioned in the family meeting in 2001.³⁴ But more than the increases in salary and the title that the colonial administration conferred, it is Natesa Sastri’s intellectual contributions that evoke his authorial primacy. Doubtless, Sewell says in thanking his “young fellow-laborer” Natesa Sastri, his “industry and zealous co-operation have most materially contributed to the completion of this work.”³⁵ In another volume of the survey he writes, “Dr. Burgess [Cunningham’s successor] informs me that he has a very considerable number of the copper-plate inscriptions, besides others from temples, from the Madura District, and the whole of the Tamil inscriptions in the Madras Museum, already translated by Mr. S. M. Natesa Sastri and others.”³⁶ Robust author credits, rather than one-line acknowledgments, would have been more in order.

Equitable acknowledgment was certainly on Natesa Sastri’s mind. On the one hand, we could say that Natesa Sastri signals his acceptance of “pandit” as part of his authorial identity; the title “Pandit” appears on every one of his major publications. But there is more to it. As we saw earlier, his evidence given before the Public Service Commission makes it clear that even at the risk of losing promotions, he had argued that the experience and erudition of Indians deserved to be tangibly recognized. Regardless of his own promotion and position, however, Natesa Sastri’s high standing in the field of

epigraphy is summed up in the words of the superintendent of archaeology of Travancore State, A. Gopinatha Rao, who writes:

While editing the paper on the Sorraikkavur Plates of the Vijayanagara king Virupaksha in *Epigraphica Indica*, Vol. VIII, I happened to show a transcript of the inscription to the late Mr. S. M. Natesa Sastri, B.A., who, struck by the identity of the introduction of this record with another of which he had a transcript, placed that transcript at my disposal. I now edit the inscription from the transcript kindly lent to me by him. He added that the plates were discovered by one Sankara Sastri of Ariyur, while digging in a portion of his house for a foundation. The plates were made over to Mr. Natesa Sastri, who did not remember what he did with them, but thought he might have sent them to Dr. [John] Fleet [epigraphist of the government of India].³⁷

The Folklorist

From Natesa Sastri's epigraphical descriptions of sites across south India, it would not be hard to imagine how the epigraphist in him was already steeped in the world of narrative. As in his notes on the Tiruvellarai inscriptions, Natesa Sastri imagined folklore expansively. Showing little interest in primitive theory or scientific typology, he recognized "folklore" in the everyday practices and orally circulating stories of a community. Folklore, for him, was the expression of a living culture. Consequently, the oral and the literary crisscrossed each other on his narrative canvas. As R. E. Asher, Kamil Zvelebil, and Stuart Blackburn have all noted, he adapted the popular stories of Tenali Raman, the famous jester in the court of the Vijayanagara emperor Krishnadevaraya; he translated the cycle of twelve Tamil stories known as *Madanakamarajan Kadai*, or *Dravidian Nights Entertainments*; and he wrote a Tamil version of the Delhi poet Mir Amman's *Bagh-o-Bahar*, itself a classic Urdu translation of Amir Khusro's Persian *Qissa-ye Chahar Darvesh* (Tale of the Four Dervishes). Natesa Sastri's twenty essays in his *Hindu Feasts, Fasts and Ceremonies* sparkle with ethnographic observations and his knowledge of Hindu texts. But it is his spirited engagement with the tradition that makes "Hinduism" come alive. For instance, in a chapter titled "Hindu Funeral Rites," he comments wryly on the practice in which relatives provide food to a mourning family:

So far as the rule goes, it is a wise provision, for when the house goes into mourning, its comforts in the direction of feeding will be neglected unless some outside relation is chosen for the occasion. This

duty of supply is called *sar vaikkiradu*, which means the supplying of food with pepper water; only simple food is meant, and that was the rule in ancient days. But the modern Hindu custom is to supply a grand feast with all the modern art of which Hindu cookery is capable. All kinds of fruits, sweets and varieties of rice-preparations are offered to the mourners. One father-in-law vies with another in his competition to give grander and grander dinners on the successive days, and to crown the horror, quarrels sometimes spring up among some of these idiotic relations that due and proper invitation was not sent to such and such a party to be present at the dinner. Did the sages ever mean that their simple ruling should be thus abused by modern civilization? The sooner the old and orthodox custom is resumed the better.³⁸

The corruption of traditional practices by modernity frequently draws sharp criticism from Natesa Sastri, but it does not dampen his appreciation of other aspects of lived Hindu traditions. Sensory images pervade his descriptions. He evokes the light cast by cauldrons of oil that are turned into huge lamps at hilltop temples to Shiva during the Krittika festival and the flowers, fruits, and sweets that create the auspicious ambience of the Varalakshmi Vrata (women's worship of Lakshmi, the goddess of prosperity). The aural and the visual blend in his portrait of the temple town of Chidambaram (about 150 miles south of the modern metropolis of Chennai). Here, he notes, "several hundred of Sudra mendicants are taught Sanskrit. A Brahman visitor to this sacred town will be surprised to see the number of Sudras repeating the Upanishads in the early morning in these monasteries. To add to his wonder, he will find that they have not only got by heart these sacred writings but that they understand their meaning and possess a perfect knowledge of the subject-matter which is a rare thing even with Brahmans."³⁹

It was Natesa Sastri's four-part *Folklore in Southern India* (1884–1893), with its thirty-seven tales, that established him as the most prolific of Indian folklorists. While he was drawn to the riches of Sanskrit drama,⁴⁰ he writes that as he engrossed himself in the *Indian Antiquary* (the flagship journal of archaeology founded in 1872 by James Burgess, with whom Natesa Sastri worked), he "felt for the first time that [he] could utilize [his] early knowledge of folktales in the advancement of folklore literature."⁴¹ The proliferating debates in archaeology and anthropology stirred his own sense of the vast resources all around him, and indeed within himself. He remembered the oral stories of his childhood and wrote them down in Tamil. Then, encouraged by Richard Carnac Temple, the editor of the *Indian Antiquary*, he translated them into English and published them between 1884 and 1893 in that journal.⁴²

But it is not until part three of the collection (published in 1888) that Natesa Sastri provides the context:

I am a native of the Trichinopoly District and was in my early days brought up in the villages of Lalgudi and Kulitalai, where my parents lived. From my childhood, stories and tales had a great fascination for me, and I was therefore a favorite with every old dame in my family who, being disabled by age from doing any household work, was glad to beguile her hours by playing my sense of the marvelous. Moreover, having had the misfortune to lose my mother at a very early age, I was probably regarded as a fit object of compassion, and every story-teller in the village would readily comply with the poor orphan's request for a story. I, thus, early acquired an aptitude for tales and this was considerably improved from the fact that my father's second wife happened to be a great repository of this kind of learning. Unlike the stepmother of fiction, she was very kind to me, and spent all her leisure moments in amusing her step-son. So, before I had reached the age of ten my taste for stories had become largely developed, and I had heard almost all that any man or woman in the village had to tell. By constant repetition and narration, these tales became firmly rooted in my memory, and it was the greatest pleasure of my boyhood to amuse knots of eager listeners of about the same age as myself with side-splitting tales.⁴³

The memory and innocent vanities of childhood performances and the affection of childhood ties ensured that the stories, dormant during Natesa Sastri's English-based education in college, resurged with new energy into a scholarly pursuit. His ethnographic sensibility is apparent in his reproduction of a conversation with his grandfather about the origins of the Vaishnava sect in the Madras Presidency. The long conversation, reported in the first person, displays an ethnographic transparency. Documenting prevalent stories about origins, Natesa Sastri does not hesitate to report opinions that could reveal his grandfather's biases. "Here ends my grandfather's story," he concludes. "I have given his views in the hope that someone more learned may take it up, and do more justice to the subject."⁴⁴ Writing about print and the emergence of Tamil nationalism in the nineteenth century, Blackburn argues that "anglicising forces had been displacing folklore" and that Natesa Sastri, like his European counterparts, was motivated by the loss of the "vanishing village."⁴⁵ Yet as we follow Natesa Sastri's poetic descriptions of some of the temple ruins he visited, and as we read his colorful re-creations of oral stories and his novelistic fictions, we see also that a "sense of the marvelous" animates his creative spirit. Natesa Sastri's reminiscent inventiveness is more

like the “remembered village” of the anthropologist M. N. Srinivas, whose brilliant 1976 ethnography of the south Indian village of Rampura was written from memory and reflection.⁴⁶

Natesa Sastri's stories from the *Indian Antiquary* and *Folklore of Southern India* took an enigmatic turn when they appeared in *Tales of the Sun: Or Folklore of Southern India*, a collection whose authorship is attributed to a “Mrs. Howard Kingscote,” with the title page reading “collected by Mrs. Howard Kingscote and Pandit Natesa Sastri.” Mrs. Howard Kingscote, or Adeline Georgiana Kingscote, was the wife of a Colonel Howard Kingscote who was posted to Bangalore and Mysore in the late 1880s with the Oxfordshire Light Infantry. The Kingscotes lived in India for more than two decades. Our knowledge of Georgiana Kingscote's years in India comes mostly from her roughly two-hundred-page manual titled *The English Baby in India and How to Rear It* (1893). Belonging to the genre of writings by other Anglo-Indian women on domestic life and Indian servants—which we encountered in chapter 1—the racist manual catalogues the ailments that can afflict an English child in India and provides details of home remedies. The manual makes it clear that Kingscote despises ayahs. She says: “[Ayahs] marry and intermarry till they do not themselves know what relation they are to each other; they lie so readily and so craftily that the sharpest of detectives find it difficult to cope with them. . . . When we first took India we could have insisted on our own rules and regulations, and only employed those who fell in with them, and the native's love for money would have made him conform.” And she concludes, “It is almost, if not quite, impossible ever to fathom the depths of native deceit.”⁴⁷ Nonetheless, as we see from her preface, Kingscote needs ayahs and of course pandits:

When I began writing down these tales, my only means of collecting them was through my native servants, who used to get them from the old women in the bazaars; but the fables they brought me were as full of corruption and foreign adaptations as the miscellaneous ingredients that find their way into a dish of their own curry and rice, and had it not been for Mr. Sastri's timely aid, my small work would have gone forth to the world laden with inaccuracies. Mr. Sastri not only corrected the errors of my own tales, but allowed me to add to them many that he had himself collected, and that had already been published, either in small volumes or in numbers of the *Indian Antiquary*.⁴⁸

Kingscote's contextualization may have been relevant to the single story she seems to have collected (“Keep It for the Beggar”), because we discover that Natesa Sastri had already published elsewhere all the other stories in this

collection. Five tales in *Tales of the Sun* are taken from part one of Natesa Sastri's *Folklore in Southern India* (1884), seven from part two (1886), and eight from part three (1888). One long story is from his collection *The King and His Four Ministers* (1889), and two appear in the *Indian Antiquary* (1888). Two tales and their notes refer to a stepmother as a narrator, suggesting these too may have been his. In sum, out of twenty-six stories in *Tales of the Sun*, Kingscote seems to have contributed precisely one. Further, for the most part, Natesa Sastri's stories were reproduced verbatim in *Tales of the Sun*, with only small changes accommodating Victorian readers. (For instance, "courtesan" and "prostitute" are replaced by "frivolous woman.")⁴⁹ The appropriation implies that Natesa Sastri is depicted in *Tales of the Sun* as the native assistant, the pandit who gave generous and timely assistance to Kingscote, and not as the contributor of twenty-five of the collection's twenty-six tales. The brazenness did not go unnoticed. The comparative folklorist Joseph Jacobs remarked, if somewhat mildly, "It would have been well if the identity of the two works [*Folklore in Southern India* and *Tales of the Sun*] had been clearly explained."⁵⁰ Sidney Hartland, president of the British Folk-Lore Society (1900–1901), said that Kingscote "carefully refrains from telling us" where she gathered the stories.⁵¹

We do not know when and whether Natesa Sastri and Georgiana Kingscote met. Perhaps they had become acquainted in Mysore, when Natesa Sastri was posted to Mysore's Archaeological Survey branch and Howard Kingscote was with the infantry in those parts. Intrigued by this "collaboration," I tried to unravel Georgiana Kingscote's life story. She was born in 1862 to the well-known diplomat and MP for Christchurch (and later Portsmouth) Henry Drummond Wolff and his wife, Adeline Wolff.⁵² After their return to England, the Kingscotes lived in Dover, where Howard Kingscote was assistant adjutant general from 1890 to 1895,⁵³ and then in Headington, Oxford, in a house called Bury Knowle House, which now hosts the Headington Public Library.⁵⁴ I sat up when I found that a biography of an Oxford MP, Frank Gray, by Charles Fenby mentioned "the notorious Mrs. Kingscote." Gray, a former solicitor's clerk, who apparently served several writs on her, described her as "the finest adventuress [he] ever met."⁵⁵ According to Fenby, Georgiana Kingscote caused several men who stood surety for her to go bankrupt, and even obtained loans by claiming as hers property she did not own. Her obituary, excerpted from "The Daily News" in the *Bournemouth Visitor's Directory*, remarks: "She had an almost hypnotic influence over men and women, as is shown by the way in which she induced a British officer to marry her sister-in-law because she was in financial straits. The officer did as he was asked, but never lived with the lady, and five years

later, obtained a divorce.”⁵⁶ Bankruptcy seems to have spurred Kingscote into fiction writing. From 1900 until she died in 1908, she wrote over sixty novels under the pseudonym Lucas Cleeve. The titles reveal her feminist leanings: *The Double Marriage* (1906), *The Confessions of a Widow* (1907), *What Woman Wills* (1908), and *The Love Letters of a Faithless Wife* (which was published posthumously in 1911). In these, Kingscote took on themes of love and loyalty in marital relationships (which her iconoclastic heroines usually tested) and what she saw as double standards for women in nineteenth-century English society. And finally, she had fled from her creditors to Switzerland. My search took me to the library of the University of Lausanne in Switzerland, whose staff contacted the city administration of the town of Château-d’Œx. From the city’s registers I learned that Georgiana Kingscote had died in Hôtel Berthod in Château-d’Œx on the thirteenth of September 1908.

The barely camouflaged *Tales of the Sun* presents an illusion of collaboration. Did Natesa Sastri consent to the reproduction of his stories? Was he assured that *Tales of the Sun* would help his work reach new audiences in England and other parts of Europe? Was he promised a joint authorship credit that did not materialize? Kingscote’s crafty preface certainly presents an “illusion of consent,” to use Gloria Raheja’s characterization of the ethnographic construction of consent in colonial India. Raheja finds that British administrators in north India collected proverbs and severed them from their lived contexts so as to use them expediently in administrative discourse. These “entextualized” proverbs were then exploited to “prove” native consent to colonial governance, and “to foster the illusion that native opinion on caste and caste identities was unambiguously congruent with these colonial representations.”⁵⁷ But the illusion of consent is also countered, Raheja says. In Survey of India reports, she sees a revealing shift in the British characterization of locals after the initial reports of the 1830s. George Everest, the surveyor general of India and the superintendent of the Great Trigonometrical Survey from 1830 to 1943, plainly records his frustrations with locals who evidently resisted his survey operations; they removed station markers or did not allow theodolites to be mounted on sacred structures. Later survey reports, however, dis-acknowledge such acts of resistance, reinscribing them falsely as acts of a superstitious disposition. With the “consent” of natives thus discursively secured, political opposition gets erased from the report. A rare but rousing Bengali song that Raheja finds recorded in a volume of George Grierson’s *Linguistic Survey of India* (1903–1928) shows that opposition to the survey was robust and built into everyday activity and community organizing.⁵⁸

Natesa Sastri's silence about the book leaves us without answers to questions of consent while also leaving us to surmise instead that perhaps just as Kingscote sold other people's property as her own, she did the same with *Tales of the Sun*. Kingscote's usurpation of authorial space is no worse than the claim to authorship that William Crooke made for a landmark collection of north Indian folktales. Sadhana Naithani's groundbreaking work has brought to light the hidden truths of a long-term "collaboration" between the well-known colonial administrator Crooke and the Indian scholar and interpreter Pandit Ram Gharib Chaube of Uttar Pradesh, who was behind most of the contributions made to the journal *North Indian Notes & Queries*, which Crooke edited. Discovering an unpublished manuscript of folktales in Chaube's handwriting in the Crooke collection in the archives of the Folk-Lore Society in London, Naithani published it, crediting Chaube as primary author. In doing so, she reversed a historical hierarchy in which the Crookes are upheld as authors and the Chaubes as "native assistants."⁵⁹ Perhaps the way to restore authorial credit to Natesa Sastri is to recognize that he remains sovereign over the storyscape. It is *his* remembering self, entwined with storytellers in Lagudi and Kulitalai and elsewhere, that runs through the four parts of *Folklore of Southern India* and *Tales of the Sun*.

The Novelist

Natesa Sastri's entry into prose fiction began rather dramatically. In 1894 Inspector General Charles A. Porteous asked Natesa Sastri to write some detective stories in Tamil so that the Madras police force could be inspired by Western practices of crime solving.⁶⁰ Within six weeks, Natesa Sastri came up with a collection of five detective stories based on a character called Danavan, loosely constructed on James Muddock's popular Scottish detective character Dick Donovan.⁶¹ *Dinadayalu* was Natesa Sastri's first full-length novel, the first of six that he wrote between 1900 and 1903, all in Tamil.⁶² In the preface, he tells us that India was, after all, the cradle of storytelling; the *Panchatantra*, he notes, has seen global translation, and

thousands of stories have been written [in Tamil] in the form "once upon a time there was. . ." Our country is a treasure-hold or a repository of stories. There is no comparable work to our *Kathasaritasagar* And so people may criticize my current attempt to publish a new story as somewhat like "selling coal to Newcastle." My venture is not presenting a story to the Tamil folk. Thousands of stories are being published in English in the form of "novels." Our Tamil people con-

stantly ask, What exactly is this “novel?” They are unclear what is great about a novel, as it is also about storytelling. Hence, for the benefit of those who are not exposed to English or novels, I have written a novel so that the people can understand the nature and the type of storytelling in the novel form. The word “novel” means “new.”⁶³

Here was a writer who had decoded genealogical histories and praise stories from ancient rock scripts, translated popular Tamil narrative, collected and re-created oral stories, telling his readers that the “English novel form” is not novel because it tells a story; it is novel because it tells a *new* story. A *new story*—distinct from a *re-telling*.

As it turns out, *Dinadayalu* is a story that has not been told before because it is about Natesa Sastri himself. Let us trace the resemblances first with a summary of the plot.⁶⁴ We meet the Brahman protagonist, Dinadayalu, when he is twenty-five years old and employed in government service. He is married with four children. His childhood was difficult. He lost his mother in childhood, and his stepmother, Kanthi, was partial to her own son Sanku and daughter Manti. He was sent away from his hometown to Kumbakonam where he lived with his aunt Thayu and studied. He did brilliantly in his examinations and landed a government job immediately after graduating, with a salary of twenty-five rupees.

The story begins with a dramatic telegram notifying Dinadayalu of his father’s sudden illness. Dinadayalu manages to get five days’ leave sanctioned by a prejudiced and reluctant superior, and he and Thayu set out. It takes two days for them to reach the village of Kshanakkal, where Dinadayalu’s father, Mahadeva Iyer (Mahadevar), lives. This initial setting then takes us into the interior of Dinadayalu’s family life. Mahadevar has great faith in his son’s intellectual abilities and in his sense of responsibility toward the family.

In Kshanakkal, Dinadayalu consults Ayurvedic and allopathic doctors and provides great personal care. But Mahadevar dies. As soon as the cremation rites end, and while the last of the Vedic chants are still echoing in the house, Dinadayalu is besieged by lenders: Mahadevar had incurred monumental debts. Relatives begin to loot the family’s silver and other valuables, and Kanthi—consumed by uncertainty for her son Sanku—gives Dinadayalu a hard time over finances. Dinadayalu promises to repay the lenders and to continue caring for his stepmother and her children. Sanku, a wastrel and ingrate, cannot keep a job. Dinadayalu is forced to sell a major portion of the family’s agricultural lands to pay off the creditors and feed a large family of twelve, who have by now become completely dependent on him. He takes on the task of mastering land valuation, an area he knows nothing about.

But since he is gifted with the ability to learn quickly, he gets the best prices for the lands. After settling the family's finances, Dinadayalu returns to his home in Bagasuragiri with his family, Thayu, and Sanku. Kanthi and her daughter, Manti, and his father's elderly sisters all remain in Kshanakkal, living on Dinadayalu's monthly remittances to them from his salary. As his financial burdens mount, Dinadayalu becomes frustrated by the limited opportunities in Bagasuragiri. Sanku's continuous carping disrupts the peace in the family. Dinadayalu dreams of relocating to the metropolitan city of Punnai, where there are many opportunities to earn some extra money. To his luck, a senior officer who is on an official visit to Bagasuragiri is amazed by Dinadayalu's knowledge and arranges to have him transferred to Punnai as an epigraphist in the government's Archaeological Department—with his salary raised to fifty rupees per month. A year after his father's death, Dinadayalu goes back to Kshanakkal to perform the annual rites. His two elderly aunts return with Dinadayalu to Punnai, while Kanthi, fed by Sanku's lies and lured by the possibility of an extra allowance, stays in Kshanakkal.

Life in Punnai starts well, but troubles begin after Dinadayalu's boss is transferred. A detailed section describes the intrigue and the pettiness of the office under his new boss, Yenivalagan, who is given to nepotism and tactics of humiliation. Yenivalagan makes Dinadayalu the target of his vilification. Dinadayalu suspects that the animosity has its roots in one of Dinadayalu's ethnographic writings on Yenivalagan's community. His travails at work are compounded by the arrival in Punnai of Kanthi with Sanku and Manti, along with Kanthi's scheming and manipulative brother-in-law. He encourages Kanthi to impose unending extortions on Dinadayalu, who is also forced to take on the expenses for Manti's marriage. Dinadayalu is forced to sign the palatial ancestral home in Kshanakkal over to Sanku. Finally, as his aunts age, they wish to be back in Kshanakkal too, close to the village temple, so he arranges for their stay and food.

Brought to the brink of poverty, Dinadayalu sells off rare books and original manuscripts from his personal library. Kanthi and Sanku go back to Kshanakkal, where Sanku marries but begins to patronize a prostitute and to physically abuse his mother. The abuse induces a change of heart in Kanthi, who begins to appreciate Dinadayalu's goodness and generosity. She goes back to live with Dinadayalu's family in Punnai. Sanku, meanwhile, loses the house to the prostitute and falls ill. Dinadayalu's fortunes begin to change with another transfer, and an increase in salary, to the city of Pudhuverkadu, two hundred miles from Punnai. Pudhuverkadu, once a fertile city, has been hit by a severe famine, and corrupt officials have not been distributing famine relief funds. Dinadayalu excels in managing the relief effort, and within two

years he restores prosperity to Pudhuverkadu. The novel ends with Dinadayalu becoming commissioner of Cochin at a salary of a thousand rupees per month. He buys back the lost ancestral home, has Sanku restored to good health, and all ends well.

Critics and Natesa Sastri's relatives believe that the novel has autobiographical overtones. The allusions to his life are indeed resonant. Jambu, Natesa Sastri's great-grandson, said that in real life, Natesa Sastri's stepbrother was called Sanku (short for Sankaran), and his personality matched that of the Sanku of the novel. There are other parallels. Like Dinadayalu, Natesa Sastri lost his mother when he was very young and was raised by his stepmother and his aunt, although the portrayal of Kanthi is quite unlike Natesa Sastri's description of his own stepmother, who he says was kind and patient toward him. Perhaps Natesa Sastri thought that the fictional trope of the stepmother would appeal readily to his readers, but he made the stepmother reform at the end of the novel to more closely resemble the stepmother in his own life. Most important, it is hard to miss the resemblance between Natesa Sastri and the portrait of his protagonist. Dinadayalu works in the epigraphy section; he is recognized for his knowledge, intelligence, and diligence; and he takes up writing as a profession. Pressed for money, Dinadayalu muses, "One can pen a few articles or even creative writings for commercial magazines and periodicals during one's spare time; one can even write in English dailies on a variety of subjects like culture, language, history or on our epics to earn not less than Rs.15/-per month." Dinadayalu is also aware of the repercussions of writing. On one occasion he wonders if the grim politics of the office are the consequences of opinions expressed in his article on the ethnic community to which his boss belongs. "He was also aware that one should avoid getting involved in writing political issues, he being a government servant."⁶⁵

Resemblances provoke questions—questions about the relationship between the self and the past, and between the self and its dreams. They create an alluring interpretive space where authors and readers can fill in the gaps between fiction and reality, asking questions that neither history nor fiction can answer singly; together, however, history and fiction suggest possibilities for a more imaginative being and becoming than our everyday lives can muster. The audacious promotion of Dinadayalu to commissioner of Cochin with the salary of a thousand rupees per month (exceptional for a "native" government employee) makes us wonder if Natesa Sastri lets Dinadayalu index the professional recognition that would have been appropriate to his stature and experience rather than the one he was granted. As Dinadayalu's story unfolds through the journeys of a young and aspiring Indian

scholar who is attentive to the responsibilities and politics of an extended family, who overcomes the limits of colonial officialdom, it becomes clear that *Dinadayalu* is a novel about self-expression and not the self-erasure associated with a “native scholar.” Through this story, Natesa Sastri exposes the absolute limitation of colonial power: it could curb native freedom of speech through policy and policing, but it could not stop the rambunctious creativity of raconteurs.

In 2002, when Gopalakrishnan decided to translate *Dinadayalu*, he was going through a challenging time in his life. He wrote to me, “I wonder whether I am also undergoing the ordeals faced by my grandfather Natesa Sastri—in fact as I read his biography *Deenadayalu*, I am reminded of myself, my traits and my life.”⁶⁶ The translation seemed to help him tap into innate “wellsprings of creativity, resilience, and well-being” in adverse times.⁶⁷ His remarks over the years shaped my understanding that as resonances occur, translation can be an imperceptible entanglement with an ancestral past that stirs self-recognition.⁶⁸ Before long he had translated twelve of the fifteen chapters of *Dinadayalu* and emailed them to me. “I would like to get this translation published in English and I would love to have you as the co-author as it was 100% your motivation that made me to undertake this work,” he told me. “The context and the dramatization of the novel are exactly as rendered by my grandfather and I have not altered them.”⁶⁹ The note illustrated Gopalakrishnan’s characteristic generosity.

He continued to work on a polished version, which he completed in July 2016. I visited him and his wife, Anandha, in their home in Chennai. They had made a meal that included dishes I had told them I liked: *vattal kuzhambu* and *paruppu thogaiyal* (spicy soups). As we went over his translation, I asked Gopalakrishnan what his resemblance to Natesa Sastri meant to him. “Let me tell you this,” he said. “When I do the *tarpanam* [ritual water-offering to forefathers], I instantly feel connected to Mahalinga Shastri.”⁷⁰ It would have been a strange response to my question, as Mahalinga Shastri was Natesa Sastri’s father. But then I remembered the scene in which Dinadayalu sees his father, Mahadeva Iyer, die. Gopalakrishnan had translated the passage: “Every human being born on this earth has to endure the pangs of death. There was no escape from this. But, the way in which Dinadayalu was sitting close to his father’s head and chanting the Karna Mantra, it looked as if he would protect his father at any cost from this pain. As he was chanting these scriptures intently, Mahadevar breathed his last.”⁷¹ Translation turned the kaleidoscope, connecting Natesa Sastri, Mahalinga Shastri, Dinadayalu, Mahadeva Iyer, and Gopalakrishnan.

The date was November 18, 2018. It was exactly seventeen years to the day since Gopalakrishnan had organized the family get-together about Natesa Sastri in his Chennai home. We had been steadily talking during the last few months as I was writing this chapter. I messaged him to say that I would be taking a break from writing. I told him that my mother had suddenly died on November 14 and that my world had been flung out of its orbit. He instantly video-called me to offer his sympathy. Two weeks later his son Shyam texted me to say that Gopalakrishnan had passed away on December 3, 2018. He was only seventy-three. In my phone, Gopalakrishnan's messages were still fresh.