

HEALTH IDEOLOGIES AND MEDICAL CULTURES  
IN THE SOUTH KANARA ARECA-NUT BELT

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VOLUME ONE

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March 1977

In accordance with the University of Edinburgh Postgraduate Study Regulation 2.4.15, I declare that this thesis was composed by me and is based on my own research.

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ABSTRACT

The study is divided into four parts. The first provides a brief ethnography of the South Kanara areca-nut belt, the second a detailed account of the region's health ideologies, the third a portrayal of the region's pluralistic medical cultures, and the fourth an examination of the villagers' use of these medical cultures. The subjects of disease, etiology, the ontological role of illness, the language of disease, techniques of curing, and patient-practitioner relationships are investigated. Disease is considered to be a sign as well as a symptom of social and physiological imbalance.

Three themes pervade the study: the nature of power, the ideal of balance, and the formal significance of acculturation. A conceptualization of power as unstable and transmutable underlies the Hindu ideal of balance; and it in turn has influenced the distinct but interrelated Brahman and non-Brahman cultures. This ideal underlies the structural principles of hot-cold, the tridosha, and the doctrine of multiple disease causality. The conjunction of the hot-cold principles and the doctrine of multiple causality facilitate the interaction of distinct strata of society and foster a complementary relationship between pluralistic medical cultures.

The entrance of a new medical culture or paradigm into the villagers' universe is depicted as analogous to the entry of a new deity to the village pantheon. The appearance of a new deity or paradigm does not result in a loss of faith in existing practices or structural principles. It is rather incorporated into the established universe. It is either relegated to a particular domain or assimilated as a homologous expression of an already existing source of power or knowledge.

The villagers' conceptual universe evolves as an aggregate of ideas organized by basic structural principles. Health planners are encouraged to recognize these principles and incorporate new ideas within the existing cognitive universe, emphasizing a unity of the traditional and modern.

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GUIDE TO PRONUNCIATION

| Kannada Letters<br>(vowels) | Transliterated into<br>English as | Pronounced as |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------|
| ಅ                           | a                                 | a in about    |
| ಆ                           | ā                                 | a in father   |
| ಇ                           | i                                 | i in him      |
| ಊ                           | ī                                 | i in machine  |
| ಉ                           | u                                 | u in put      |
| ಊ                           | ū                                 | u in rule     |
| ಋ                           | e                                 | e in met      |
| ೠ                           | ē                                 | a in mate     |
| ಋ                           | ei                                | ei in height  |
| ಊ                           | o                                 | o in police   |
| ಊ                           | ō                                 | o in note     |
| ಊ                           | ou                                | ou in out     |

<sup>1</sup> The vowels (ಋ) ṛi and (ೠ) ṛi have been omitted because they are not common.

ABBREVIATED GLOSS

|                        |   |
|------------------------|---|
| <u>ageḷu</u>           | Ritual offering of food to <u>būta</u> .  |
| <u>agni</u>            | Fire.   |
| <u>akshata</u>         | Unbroken rice grain.  |
| <u>aliya-santana</u>   | Matrilineal system of descent prevalent in the District.                                    |
| <u>ama</u>             | Undigested foods, particularly fats.  |
| <u>amāvasyā</u>        | The new moon day.   |
| <u>amṛita</u>          | Drink taken as <u>prasāda</u> .   |
| <u>anjalu</u>          | Saliva, food which is polluted by saliva.   |
| <u>apana</u>           | <u>Vayu</u> responsible for downward movement. See page 101.                                |
| <u>arasu</u>           | Kingly.   |
| <u>arishta</u>         | Medicinal wine.   |
| <u>atma</u>            | Soul.   |
| <u>avatāra</u>         | Descent of the divine into the form of man or local deity.                                  |
| <u>ayurveda</u>        | Classical Indian system of medicine, the science of life.                                   |
| <u>āposhana</u>        | Water taken at the end of a meal.   |
| <u>Āṭi</u>             | The fourth solar month corresponding to June-July.  |
| <u>āvāhana</u>         | The invokation of <u>shakti</u> .   |
| <u>balime</u>          | Soothsaying, predicting.  |
| <u>bayaketa-madime</u> | A ceremony observed usually in the sixth month of pregnancy; literally marriage of desires. |
| <u>bhakti</u>          | Devotion.   |
| <u>bhasma</u>          | Ash.  |
| <u>brahmachariya</u>   | The first stage of life, literally 'moving in Brahma'. Generally used to mean chastity.     |
| <u>brahma kalasha</u>  | Perfunctory ritual of purification.   |
| <u>brahma rākshasa</u> | Dissatisfied spirit of a dead Brahman.  |
| <u>buddhi</u>          | Intellect.  |

|                      |   |
|----------------------|---|
| <u>bānanti</u>       | The forty day period following delivery; a woman having recently given birth. |
| <u>būta</u>          | Local god.  |
| <u>chakra</u>        | Cycles.   |
| <u>chālagēni</u>     | Annual tenancies.   |
| <u>dakshināyana</u>  | The sun's progress south of the equator, the winter solstice.                 |
| <u>daliya</u>        | Siri ritual, purification of clothes from birth or death pollution.           |
| <u>darshana</u>      | Possession by spirit (desirable).   |
| <u>dēva</u>          | A deity, a Brahmanic god.   |
| Dhanvantari          | The patron deity of <u>ayurveda</u> .   |
| <u>dhatu</u>         | Structural components of the body, i.e. the tissues, bodily humours.          |
| <u>dividhana</u>     | A full hand measure, an offering given to a Brahman.                          |
| <u>dosha</u>         | Imbalanced bodily humours, generally one of the three bodily humours.         |
| <u>dravya</u>        | Three substantial forces governing the body and all life.                     |
| <u>dr̥isthi</u>      | The evil eye.   |
| <u>dr̥isthi mani</u> | Bracelet made of black and white beads to absorb and attract the evil eye.    |
| <u>durcast</u>       | Land for the landless, waste or forest land.                                  |
| <u>gana</u>          | Attendants, body guards.  |
| <u>gangi</u>         | Boiled rice consumed with the rice water.                                     |
| <u>gāli</u>          | Wind.   |
| <u>gāndharva</u>     | Deity of streams and tanks.   |
| <u>gōtra</u>         | Ancestral line.   |
| <u>graha</u>         | Planet.   |
| <u>grahani</u>       | Eclipse.  |
| <u>graha-chāra</u>   | Fate determined by one's stars and planets.                                   |

|                       |   |
|-----------------------|---|
| <u>grāma</u>          | A village.  |
| <u>guri-kara</u>      | Village leader, a head man.   |
| <u>guna</u>           | Proclivity, property, quality.  |
| <u>halli maddu</u>    | Village medicine, self treatment.   |
| <u>hane baraha</u>    | The writing on one's forehead, destiny.   |
| <u>hōma</u>           | Sacrificial fire.   |
| <u>indira</u>         | Sense organs.   |
| <u>jappa</u>          | Recitation of <u>mantram</u> .  |
| <u>jivana da hula</u> | Worms of life.  |
| <u>jivana oshadi</u>  | Life medicine.  |
| <u>kai guna</u>       | Power of the hand.  |
| <u>kai visha</u>      | Hand poison, sorcery.   |
| <u>kalasha</u>        | Perfunctory ritual, a water vessel.   |
| <u>kandy</u>          | Two hundred and fifty five kilo weight.   |
| <u>kapha</u>          | One of the three <u>dosha</u> .   |
| <u>karma</u>          | Work, debt, divine retribution.   |
| <u>karma vipāka</u>   | <u>Karma</u> coming to fruition, <u>karma</u> being mitigated by ritual acts of purification. |
| <u>kashāya</u>        | Medicinal decoction.  |
| <u>kanike</u>         | To give as a presentation.  |
| <u>kayile</u>         | Disease.  |
| <u>kenda seva</u>     | Purification ritual involving the use of fire, boiling water, or boiling oil.                 |
| <u>kita</u>           | Minuscule insects.  |
| <u>koḷe</u>           | Minor pollution of food.  |
| <u>kōla</u>           | <u>Būta</u> possession ritual.  |
| <u>kōne</u>           | Room, compartment.  |
| <u>krimi</u>          | Minuscule worms.  |

|                      |  |
|----------------------|--|
| <u>kudi</u>          | A local economic scheme.   |
| <u>kumki</u>         | Hillsides from which green manure is gathered.   |
| <u>kumkum</u>        | Red powder, commonly a mixture of turmeric and lime.   |
| <u>kuṭumba</u>       | Family, collective members of a household.   |
| <u>lepa</u>          | Medicinal paste.   |
| <u>lōle</u>          | Unctuous substance.  |
| <u>maddu</u>         | Medicine.  |
| <u>mailige</u>       | Impurity dirt, ritual pollution.   |
| <u>makkalu kattu</u> | System of patrilineal descent.   |
| <u>mala</u>          | Bodily wastes.   |
| <u>manas</u>         | The part of the mind responsive to desires and ambitions.  |
| <u>mandala</u>       | A sacred circle or square wherein a geometric configuration has been drawn to orientate power in a specific way. |
| <u>mantra</u>        | Incantation, instrument of thought.  |
| <u>mantra devata</u> | A spirit controlled by a <u>mantravādi</u> .   |
| <u>mantravādi</u>    | Exorcist and or sorcerer.  |
| <u>maryādā</u>       | To honour, to give respect.  |
| <u>māṭa</u>          | Witchcraft or sorcery.   |
| <u>māya</u>          | An unseen power, an illusion.  |
| <u>mora</u>          | Thirty nine kilo weight.   |
| <u>mound</u>         | Thirteen kilo weight.  |
| <u>mōksha</u>        | Heaven, conceived of as <u>nirvana</u> , liberation, or joining in the ancestral line.                           |
| <u>mūdu</u>          | East, rising, to be born.  |
| <u>mūladā holeya</u> | Hereditary servant or worker of a landlord.  |
| <u>mūlagēni</u>      | Long-term tenancies.   |
| <u>mūlike</u>        | Medicinal root, medicinal plants.  |



|                        |   |
|------------------------|---|
| <u>mūrti</u>           | Idol of a deity.  |
| <u>muttāle</u>         | Areca sheath cap worn by labourers.   |
| <u>naga</u>            | Cobra, a deity.   |
| <u>naga bana</u>       | A grove in which the stone image of a serpent is installed. The place is considered sacred.   |
| <u>naga lōka</u>       | Land of the cobra.  |
| <u>naivedya</u>        | An offering of eatables to a deity.   |
| <u>nakshatra</u>       | Star.   |
| <u>nara</u>            | Nerve, tendon.  |
| <u>narmabu</u>         | Nerves, veins, arteries, channels.  |
| <u>Narayana bali</u>   | Ritual to transform an ancestor spirit to <u>būta</u> status.   |
| <u>nava graha hōma</u> | Sacrificial offering to nine planets.   |
| <u>nandi</u>           | Turmeric root tied to wrist before an auspicious occasion to prevent pollution.   |
| <u>nanju</u>           | Toxic, slightly poisonous.  |
| <u>nāchike</u>         | Shy, sense of shame, modesty.   |
| <u>nādi</u>            | Point of pulse.   |
| <u>nema</u>            | Large <u>būta</u> possession ritual in honour of a kingly <u>būta</u> .   |
| <u>oshadi</u>          | Medicine.   |
| <u>ojuś</u>            | The end product of the body's transformation process. A substance involved in controlling body metabolism and reproduction. See page 104. |
| <u>pancha būta</u>     | The five basic elements. See page 98.   |
| <u>panchāyit</u>       | Administrative zone.  |
| <u>paramana</u>        | The basic unit of <u>pancha būta</u> .  |
| <u>parike</u>          | Promise of an offering to a deity.  |
| <u>pastika</u>         | Foods whose qualities arouse the body.  |
| <u>patya</u>           | Regulated diet.   |
| <u>payasa</u>          | Sweet pudding.  |

|                   |  |
|-------------------|--|
| <u>pāddana</u>    | Legendary accounts of the local deities of Tulunad.  |
| <u>pāka</u>       | Sequential transformation of food nutrients.   |
| <u>pāpa</u>       | Sin.   |
| <u>pātri</u>      | Possession priest who initially receives possession at a <u>kōla</u> and transfers it to a <u>būta</u> dancer.       |
| <u>pinda</u>      | Balls of cooked rice offered to ancestors.   |
| <u>pishachi</u>   | A male spirit, a malevolent being.   |
| <u>pitta</u>      | One of the three <u>dosha</u> .  |
| <u>pitta-nādi</u> | The middle pulse point of the wrist which indicated the amount of <u>pitta</u> in the body.                          |
| <u>pīde</u>       | A wandering spirit which is attracted to children.   |
| <u>prakṛiti</u>   | Innate physical and mental proclivities.   |
| <u>pramēha</u>    | Urinary disorder.  |
| <u>prana</u>      | Breathing, breath.   |
| <u>prasāda</u>    | A portion or remnant of anything that has been presented to an idol and given to a worshipper as a gift or blessing. |
| <u>prashne</u>    | Question, soothsaying, astrological consultation.  |
| <u>preyta</u>     | The unsatisfied spirit of a dead person.   |
| <u>pūjā</u>       | Ritual performance to deities, worship.  |
| <u>pūjāri</u>     | Priest officiating at a ceremony.  |
| <u>pundit</u>     | Scholar of classical texts.  |
| <u>punya</u>      | Religious merit.   |
| <u>purohita</u>   | Brahman priest.  |
| <u>purusha</u>    | See page 127.  |
| <u>rakta</u>      | Blood.   |
| <u>rasa</u>       | Juice, a substance's taste in the mouth.   |
| <u>rasāyana</u>   | Rejuvenation.  |
| <u>rakshāṇa</u>   | Protection   |

|                      |   |
|----------------------|---|
| <u>rakshāsa</u>      | Dissatisfied spirit (See <u>brahma rakshāsa</u> )                                     |
| <u>rajāsa</u>        | A <u>guṇa</u> of activity, manifestation of kinetic energy and motion.                |
| <u>rāshi</u>         | A sign of the zodiac, astrological house.   |
| <u>rioyta</u>        | Land consisting of steep slopes or irregular features.                                |
| <u>rōga</u>          | Disease.  |
| <u>rishi</u>         | Seer.   |
| <u>sama</u>          | Neutral.  |
| <u>samana</u>        | <u>Vayu</u> which regulates the flow of digestive juices. See page 101.               |
| <u>sankranti</u>     | The sun's entry into a new zodiacal sign.   |
| <u>sarpa</u>         | <u>Naga</u> , cobra.  |
| <u>sati</u>          | Custom of widow jumping into husband's funeral pyre.                                  |
| <u>satvik</u>        | Reflective, a <u>guṇa</u> of calm character, associated with the process of analysis. |
| <u>ser</u>           | Slightly less than one kilo.  |
| <u>seva</u>          | Good deed, an offering to a deity.  |
| <u>siddhi</u>        | Mastering the powers of <u>tapas</u> .  |
| <u>sīme</u>          | Domain, kingdom.  |
| <u>sloka</u>         | Sanskrit phrase from a classical text.  |
| <u>soma</u>          | Heat controlling substance. See page 126.   |
| <u>sonku</u>         | <u>Būta</u> wind.   |
| <u>sutaka</u>        | Death pollution.  |
| <u>shakti</u>        | Power, reaction.  |
| <u>shān̄thi pūjā</u> | Rite of propitiation.   |
| <u>shastra</u>       | Traditional customs and laws, particularly those contained from sacred texts.         |
| <u>shāpa</u>         | Curse.  |
| <u>shikka brahma</u> | The seat of one's <u>ojus</u> in the head.  |

|                   |   |
|-------------------|---|
| <u>shita</u>      | Cold.   |
| <u>shukra</u>     | The vital reproductive element, seminal fluid.  |
| <u>sthala</u>     | Locale, place of residence.   |
| <u>sthāna</u>     | Shrine.   |
| <u>tale bisī</u>  | Hot head, emotionally or mentally out of temper.  |
| <u>tamasa</u>     | Dark, cruelty, dullness, one of three <u>guṇa</u> .   |
| <u>tambila</u>    | Small <u>būta</u> ritual where food is offered to a deity.                                  |
| <u>tampu</u>      | Coolness, inertia.  |
| <u>tantri</u>     | Brahman ritual expert in <u>tantra</u> , a Brahman exorcist attached to a temple or shrine. |
| <u>tapas</u>      | Austerities, techniques of heating the mind by chanting <u>mantra</u> .                     |
| <u>tāmbūla</u>    | Betel leaves. Ritual offering of areca-nut and betel.                                       |
| <u>tejas</u>      | The <u>pancha būta</u> of radiation.  |
| <u>tilodaka</u>   | Offering of water to the deceased.  |
| <u>tindi</u>      | Eatables other than rice.   |
| <u>tirta</u>      | Holy water.   |
| <u>tola</u>       | A weight of two hundred and ten grains.   |
| <u>tridosha</u>   | The three elementary interrelated bodily humours.   |
| <u>triguna</u>    | The three basic propensities of <u>satvik</u> , <u>rajasa</u> , and <u>tamasa</u> .         |
| <u>trishula</u>   | Three pronged pitchfork generally associated with Shiva.                                    |
| <u>Tulu lipi</u>  | Ancient script used solely for the transcription of religious teachings.                    |
| <u>ucharane</u>   | Benevolent <u>māṭa</u> , the mitigation of witchcraft or sorcery.                           |
| <u>udana vāyu</u> | <u>Vāyu</u> which controls upward movement and processes of speech and thought.             |
| <u>upadhatu</u>   | Subsidiary <u>dhatu</u> , see page 105.   |
| <u>upadra</u>     | Trouble, curse.   |

|                     |  |
|---------------------|--|
| <u>upanāyana</u>    | Sacred thread ceremony.  |
| <u>uri shita</u>    | Cool to taste, heating in effect.  |
| <u>ushna</u>        | Heating in effect.   |
| <u>uttarā kriya</u> | Death ceremony.  |
| <u>uttarāyana</u>   | Sun's northward passage.   |
| <u>ūta</u>          | Rice meal.   |
| <u>vaidya</u>       | Practitioner of traditional or classical medicine.   |
| <u>vara</u>         | Blessing.  |
| <u>vashi karaṇa</u> | Malevolent māṭa, performing acts to overcome māṭa.   |
| <u>vata</u>         | Internal wind, joint pain. One of the three <u>doṣha</u> .                                     |
| <u>vayu</u>         | Wind or wind principle. In common usage denotes gaseousness.                                   |
| <u>vāk</u>          | Speaking, spoken word, spoken contract.  |
| <u>vipaka</u>       | A substance's taste attribute during or after digestion.                                       |
| <u>vīrya</u>        | A substance's ultimate hot or cold effect after digestion.                                     |
| <u>visha</u>        | Poison.  |
| <u>visha hālu</u>   | Poisonous breast milk.   |
| <u>visha vaidya</u> | Specialist in treating poison bites.   |
| <u>vrata</u>        | Compensatory ritual.   |
| <u>vyana</u>        | One of the <u>vayu</u> , the primary motivating force of the circulatory system, see page 101. |
| <u>yajana</u>       | Sacrificial ritual.  |
| <u>yakshi</u>       | A spirit.  |
| <u>yantra</u>       | Device or diagram for orientating power, see page 140.   |
| <u>yuga</u>         | Qualitative ages.  |

PREFACE

My interest and curiosity in the pluralistic medical cultures of India was initiated by a six month exploratory visit to India two years prior to my formal anthropological fieldwork. At that time, a friendship with a rural Primary Health Centre (PHC) doctor afforded me insights into the varied forms of traditional, eclectic, and modern curative-diagnostic services used by villagers in times of illness. In April 1974, I returned to India with the objective of studying in what way and to what extent these heterogeneous medical cultures were utilized by villagers.

My choice of a field site was based on four criteria. I wanted to study a district of Karnataka State which was predominantly rural and undergoing a moderate rate of social change. Furthermore, I was looking for a region which had both a characteristic distribution of traditional medical cultures and a growing number of allopathic doctors. South Kanara District fulfilled these specifications remarkably well and was attractive from a research vantage point as little formal anthropological fieldwork had been carried out previously in the region.

After an initial period of fieldwork in southern South Kanara District, it was my good fortune to be literally adopted by members of a Brahman family renowned for the practice of ayurvedic medicine. My wife and I spent over fifteen months living as members of this extended family in the village of Panaje and small town of Vitla. I was afforded the opportunity of studying first hand methods of ayurvedic treatment, the preparation of medicines, and the diagnosis of illness. Moreover, my intimate association with this renowned medical family made a close study of pluralistic medical cultures possible. It placed me in contact with a number of Brahman and non-Brahman folk practitioners, astrologers, and exorcists who might otherwise have been suspect of my

motives, shown me far less patience, and answered fewer of my questions. I was fortunate in developing friendship with a number of these practitioners and traditional specialists.

My chief informants have been discussed in the text, but I may express special gratitude to P.S. Shankaranarayana Bhat and P.S. Venkatrama Bhat, and the practitioners of Kalpana, Kangila, and Poogavana houses for their friendship, advice, and perseverance in instructing me in the practical and theoretical aspects of ayurveda.

I would like to thank Amrith Someshwar, A.K. Rao, and the būta dancers, Pakru and Annu, for teaching me the ways of the būta spirits and the nature of their power. I would also like to express appreciation to Dr. Kusumavathi of the Government Primary Health Centre (PHC) of Panaje and the field staff of the PHC of Panaje and Vitla who helped me carry out several surveys.

Special thanks may be offered to Peter and Pam Claus for valuable discussions on complementary data from our respective field areas, to Ravi Kapur for his counsel and helpful suggestions, and to Dr. Varma of the National Institute of Mental Health, Bangalore and Mr. J.P. Naik of the India Council of Social Sciences, Delhi, for the support they offered this study. I owe much appreciation to my adviser, Bob Barnes for his helpful criticisms and useful comments on earlier drafts of this thesis. Finally, I offer my gratitude to Mimi Nichter, whose field experience in the world of women afforded me valuable insights, and whose painstaking assistance helped me revise earlier drafts of this work.

The study was carried out under the auspices of the National Institute of Mental Health, Bangalore between April 1974 and February 1976 and was in part funded by a Tweedie Memorial Award from the University of Edinburgh.

Edinburgh, 14th March 1977.

## INTRODUCTION

This work is primarily a medical anthropological account of the pluralistic health cultures and medical systems which coexist in a region of South India. It is not limited to a study of one domain of social activity, for illness involves all aspects of social life, from the distribution and exchange of material resources to the maintenance of society's moral code and affirmation of its structural principles. Illness is a time of heightened awareness and pronounced sensitivity when the patient reflects upon himself and his world. He stops to consider the myriad factors which influence his life, the life of his family, and the environment in which he lives. Therefore, in this study, I will not confine myself to the subject of ethno-medicine but will, metaphorically, look through illness as one might look through a keyhole in an attempt to gather a glimpse of the villager's conceptual universe and his internal and external attempts of maintaining balance in this universe.

Part One is a brief introduction into the field area. Emphasis is placed on the ecological and socio-economic aspects of the region as well as its local cosmology. A study of the village pantheon introduces three inter-related themes which will recur in various forms in the remainder of the study. The first concerns the formal significance of the acculturation process, the second the qualitatively unstable and transmutable nature of power, and the third the Hindu ideal of balance<sup>1</sup>. The distinct Brahman and non-Brahman view of

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<sup>1</sup> Opler (1968) has emphasized the value of a themal approach to the study of Hindu culture. He has noted that themes constitute an interpenetrating set of cultural postulates which are conceptually manageable. They may at once be expressed in a condensed and abstract symbolic form while still being demonstratable on the ground because they are based on empirical fact.



local deities is emphasized.

In Part Two, we move from an account of the external universe to the internal microcosm. An examination of Brahman and non-Brahman perceptions of the body and mind will reveal the far-reaching significance of the hot-cold principle and the ayurvedic principle of the tridosha. An investigation of local notions of health, disease causality, and curative techniques will demonstrate the profound effect which these principles have had on various aspects of village life. The hot-cold principle will in fact be seen to facilitate the interaction of heterogeneous medical cultures and distinct segments of society.

The subjects of the multiple causality of disease and the language of disease will be examined in detail. Explicit statements made by villagers about the internal and external causes of disease will focus attention on man in relation to his changing social and natural environments as well as on his conception of self. The implicit structure of the vernacular used to describe illness will be shown to convey tacit information about the villager's understanding of the onset, duration, and suspected etiology of illness.

Part Three and its supplementary appendixes provides a detailed account of the cumulative preventive and curative health practices used by the layman and the traditional medical specialist. The villager is portrayed as a pragmatist, willing to accept new modes of treatment. However, his acceptance of new medicines and ideas does not preclude faith in traditional cures and the cultural principles underlying these cures. Heterogeneous medical practices are treated as complementary because each is a form of specialized knowledge about particular types of causal relationships and modes of consciousness.

Part Three also examines the character and services offered by traditional, eclectic, and modern medical cultures and divination agencies. Illness is seen as a sign, as well as a symptom, of biological or social imbalance. Moreover, illness is examined as an idiom through which suppressed anxieties are communicated in a cultural milieu where they cannot openly be revealed. Keeping in mind Balint's (1957) study of illness as a means of reducing anxiety, I will examine the reporting of symptoms to popular traditional medical practitioners who deal with a number of psychosomatic and sociosomatic cases. Mechanic has emphasized the importance of such a study:

An emotional component has often been seen in the etiology or precipitation of illness. What is often less appreciated is the importance of life difficulties in influencing illness behaviour ... distress is often more influential in its effects on seeking help and on the expression of illness than it is on actual occurrence of the condition.

(1968: 128)

Part Four analyses the way in which the villager uses the medical resources available to him. It depicts patterns in the allocation of specific diseases to pluralistic medical cultures. On the basis of this information and a familiarity with local health ideology, I will suggest, in a companion appendix, two sets of recommendations on the vital issues of medical education and rural health care delivery. A sense of urgency prompts me to make these recommendations. I am, however, well aware of the political and bureaucratic machinery which stands between India's rural populace and an efficient health care system. I can only hope to acquaint those individuals responsible for India's health care system with the villager's conceptual framework, the medical services already existing in the villages, and the extent and scope of their utilization. The maximisation of these resources remains a complex political and economic issue.

## P A R T   O N E

Brief Ethnography of the Areca-nut Belt

## CHAPTER ONE

General DescriptionIntroduction to South Kanara

South Kanara District is situated on the southwest coast of India. It is bordered by Kerala to the south, North Kanara and Shimoga Districts of Karnataka State to the north, the mountainous Malanad regions of Coorg and Mysore to the east, and the Arabian Sea to the west. The District is approximately 150 miles in length and is enclosed on three sides by spurs of the Western Ghat mountain range. The Ghats, which reach peaks of 6000 feet, separate South Kanara from the Deccan Plateau region of Karnataka State. The Deccan region bears little resemblance to South Kanara, and if the District was to be compared to any of its neighbouring territories, it might best be compared to Kerala. Many of South Kanara's topographical, ecological and demographical features are similar to those encountered in Northern Kerala.

The southern regions of South Kanara District, relevant to this study, may be generally described as a hilly terrain with cultivable valleys. Until recently, each valley was a small, self-contained unit centred around a large household in feudal relationship to the households of tenants and agricultural labourers which were scattered at the periphery of the landowner's wetlands. Each settlement is separated from the next by an expanse of paddyland, areca-nut gardens, or by rolling hills from which workers bring green leaves to be used as mulch for paddy fields and as feed for water buffaloes, the main work animal. The village cluster, or central group of houses found in other parts of India, is noticeably absent in most of this region. Distinct social units have existed in close proximity to each other with each having its own feudal type of administration and caste composition. Each of these small

social units also has its own set of local gods called būta.

Other distinctive features of this region include the presence of several immigrant castes, a wide variety of languages and dialects, and of special importance to this study, the presence of pluralistic medical traditions<sup>1</sup>. The traditions of astrology, exorcism, and ayurveda are influential as are local possession cults, forms of soothsaying, and herbal medicine. Moreover, in the last ten years, the region has experienced an influx of allopathic doctors.

#### Lay of the Land

An orientation to the fieldwork area may be gained by a brief look at the geography and patterns of settlements of the southern region of the District. One may assume the vantage point of a traveller descending from the Ghats near Coorg and making his way to the city of Mangalore on the coast.

Descending from Mercara, the capital of Coorg, one passes numerous coffee and cardamom estates and dense forests. As one proceeds to Sampaje, located at the base of the Ghats, one passes largely uninhabited steep slopes of rugged forest land. These slopes are a valuable source of timber, and teak, rosewood, and sandalwood trees are abundant. Lumber camps have sprung

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<sup>1</sup> A wide diversity of languages and dialects are spoken in the southern regions of the District because of its close proximity to Malayalam speaking Kerala and to the settlement of Kannada and Marati immigrant castes in the region. In this respect, the southern region of the District is distinct from other regions of the District where the language is chiefly Tulu. In the fieldwork area, all villagers speak Tulu and in addition most men had a fluency in either Kannada or Malayalam, as well as in their native house language of either Marati, Konkonee, Havik Kannada etc. Tulu belongs to the Dravidian language family and has no written script. The official language of the region is Kannada which is the medium of education and of all legal transactions.



MAP OF  
SOUTH KANARA DISTRICT  
KARNATAKA



up along the lower reaches of the Ghats and the forests are being cut down at a rapid pace.

Upon reaching Sampaje, sporadic settlements are visible in basin regions of the Ghats, and small settlements subsist on plots carved out of the forest. Existence here is a constant struggle with nature and until recently malaria was rife. The paddy crop upon which the settlements depend, is occasionally overrun by wild boar and buffalo which are still numerous in the area. Agriculturists here must maintain a nightly vigil in order to protect their fields during the paddy season. During the heavy monsoons this is a difficult task. Agriculturists guard their fields by sitting in small triangular huts, constructed of woven coconut thatching and cane strip-pings and elevated a few feet off the ground. If animals raid the field during the night, the primary defense against them is noise.

Descending from Sampaje, one encounters recently planted areca-nut gardens and paddy fields which are considerably larger than the average three to five acre plots encountered in the Ghat basin region. On reaching Sullia, there are larger settlements where prosperous areca gardens flourish. This region, at the base of one of the Ghat spurs, has been developed within the last fifty years and is largely inhabited by immigrant castes, particularly Kannaḍa speaking Havik Brahmans and Gowdas who speak a mixture of Kannaḍa and Tulu.

After Sullia one descends to the towns of Uppinangady, Puttur, and then Vitla. This region gradually becomes less rugged and the hills become less steep. By the time one reaches Bantwal, the terrain consists of a laterite plateau crosscut by rolling hills and river valleys. Whereas one finds the extensive growing of areca-nut from Sampaje to Kalladka, half way between Puttur and Bantwal, the areca-nut crop becomes sparce and paddy is the main crop from Bantwal to the coast.



A watchman guards an areca-nut garden from monkeys.  
He uses a double stringed bow which shoots stones.



Nearing the coast, population density increases, the terrain becomes flatter and villages are closer to one another. Finally one reaches Mangalore, the chief port and trading centre of the District. Twenty years ago, Mangalore was a town known for its production of tiles. It has undergone tremendous change due to the opening of a new harbour, the construction of a fertilizer plant, a recent boom in the fishing industry, and the presence of a medical school.

### Patterns of Settlement

South Kanara is presently divided into 8 taluks, covering an area of 8,436 square kilometres. Within this territory, there are 687 villages and 18 cities and towns. Approximately 30 per cent of this area is cultivated, 30 per cent is forest land, and 40 per cent wasteland (Hedwige, 1975). Mangalore, the largest city maintains a population of 180,000 whereas Puttur, the largest town proximate to the fieldwork area, maintains an urban population of 17,483.

Three settlement patterns are prevalent in South Kanara, each closely connected to a traditional work or agricultural cycle. Along the coast one finds predominantly single caste fishing villages which are semi-nucleated. Traditionally, such communities have depended on the corporate activity of caste members needed to carry out fishing operations. The Hindu Mogervera and Bovi castes, as well as the Muslim Māpaḷa caste, are the most numerous of these fishing communities. Of late, however, many of these villages have undergone radical change due to the migration of large numbers of their young male members in search of urban employment and opportunity. Although this migration existed as far back as one hundred years ago, it has intensified significantly in the last twenty years.

The second settlement pattern is that based around paddy cultivation. Settlements are non-nucleated and tenant houses are found scattered around the uncultivated periphery of valuable paddy land, as well as along the water channels which feed the fields. The larger houses of landlords overlook impressive paddy fields which are a sign of the house's prestige and wealth. Social organization has traditionally been based on a feudal relationship between a large landowner and his tenants. Today, however, this organization is altering due to land reform.

A third settlement pattern is based upon the cultivation of areca-nut, a cash crop. The areca belt area is predominantly located in the southern regions of the District in parts of Belthangady and Bantwal Taluks, but more extensively in Puttur and Sullia Taluks. The houses of garden owners are generally situated on highlands or hilltops, strategically placed to afford the constant surveillance of the gardens. This is necessary because gardens are often on the periphery of forest areas, allowing for easy theft of garden produce. The houses of tenants and labourers are most often located on the dry slopes adjoining the gardens, on the outskirts of neighbouring forests, or on undesirable land along the water channels which feed the gardens. Cultivable land here, as in the paddy areas, is at a premium and houses are not built on land which could be utilized for paddy or garden cultivation.

Much of the areca-nut belt lies along the spurs of the Western Ghats and is comprised of steep hillocks and river valleys. The scattered settlement pattern here is quite different from the nucleated areca-nut settlements found in Shimoga and North Kanara. In these settlements, studied by Harper, areca growers live side by side in neighbouring houses and hire a common watchman to guard their gardens collectively. In South Kanara, however, houses are scattered and areca-nut growers function less as a corporate group and more as individual house units. In fact corporate activity is minimal.

In general, demarcated village boundaries in the areca and paddy areas have often been drawn up ad-hoc for the purpose of revenue collection and bureaucratic assessment. In actuality, the boundaries of settlements are often ambiguous unless they are formed by physical features such as rivers, steep hills, etc. Only a loose sense of village identity has traditionally existed. The village identity that does exist is based on common patronage of a central būta shrine. This central shrine is often a remnant of a powerful family's personal shrine. Village unity is expressed at such shrines during yearly possession rituals, kōla, during which different castes perform ritual functions defining their residence and status in the village.

Stronger village unity is found in those villages and towns which are the traditional seats of small kingdoms. This unity is due to the presence of a prestigious local king, his palace, and elaborate ritual functions held at a central shrine patronized by the royal family. Generally speaking however, expressions of village level co-operative unity are rare. Such expressions are limited to būta rituals which, in most cases, amount to little more than token expressions of ideal relations of caste interdependence.

#### Fieldwork Site

One of the foremost areca growing centres of South Kanara District is the Vitla region, situated seven miles west of Puttur. This area was once a small kingdom consisting of Vitla and sixteen satellite villages ruled by the Vitla Ballal King. Fieldwork was carried out in Vitla, a small town of 10,000, and in Panaje, a remote village of 3,000, which lies just outside the traditional boundaries of the Vitla Kingdom.

Both areas have been settled by migrant groups of Havik Brahman areca-nut agriculturists. Havik immigrants settled in Vitla approximately 180 years ago. Vitla has been an established and well known areca-nut

centre for the last one hundred years. Panaje, on the other hand, was intensively settled by Haviks about fifty years ago. At that time, Panaje was predominantly a paddy growing area. It was soon transformed, however, into a major areca growing centre.

The physical characteristics of this region of South Kanara are striking. Panaje is located in a rugged hill region which is topographically a spur of the Ghat range. It resembles the Sullia tract at the base of the Ghats more closely than it does Vitla. Vitla is located only fifteen miles from Panaje, but its terrain is far different. Vitla is located on a plateau with rolling hills and wider valleys permitting more organized paddy and areca cultivation.

Vitla is a crossroads town where a flow of traffic has long existed between the towns of Puttur, Bantwal and Kasaragod. Panaje, in comparison, is isolated. Panaje received its first direct link to the nearest town of Puttur in 1936 via a mud road. In 1962, the road was improved but it does not yet reach to the boundaries of the village. To date, satisfactory bridges over the rivers which run parallel to the village have not been constructed and the village is virtually an island during the heavy monsoon rains which last for four months of the year.

The nucleus of Vitla town is crowded with approximately three hundred small shops, numerous tea hotels, two banks, a small bus depot and a post office. The post office, which provides both telephone and telegraph service, overlooks the bustling bus station where connections are available to all the major surrounding villages and the trading centres of Mangalore, Puttur, Bantwal and Kasaragod. In addition to bus transport, five Ambassador Sedan cars provide taxi service to and from surrounding areas. Taxis are usually crowded with ten to sixteen passengers and the driver often drives while hanging his head out of the window, allowing two passengers to share with him

the small space behind the steering wheel. Vitla's fifteen three wheeled rickshaws which take passengers within a five mile radius of the town are only slightly less crowded.

Because of its crossroads location, many trucks stop in the town and a supply of vegetables and fruits, from distances as far off as Mangalore and Coorg, are available. Although these commodities are available, prices throughout the District are high, and the consumer price index of South Kanara is one of the highest in the state.

Vitla has had electricity for the past fifteen years and a number of private telephones have been installed by the larger shopkeepers on the main road. The town maintains two primary schools, separate boys' and girls' high schools, and a junior college. It also contains a chemist shop, a Primary Health Centre (PHC), and the offices of twelve medical practitioners.

A large temple, dedicated to Lord Panchalingeshvara, is situated just off the town's central trading area. This temple is the largest and most central in the Vitla Kingdom and a yearly festival, lasting a fortnight, takes place every January. The temple is figuratively managed by the prestigiously strong, but economically weak, Vitla King, but it is run by the donations of villagers. Several shrines are located in the village as well as caste temples of the Sarasvat and Gowda Sarasvat merchant castes. Numerous būta shrines are located at the outskirts of the village and near the King's palace, which at present houses 110 family members who are marginally supported by a government pension.

In contrast to Vitla, Panaje has two ration shops which sell limited quantities of rice, grains, a few vegetables, and kerosene oil. The few trucks which pass through Panaje are concerned with the transport of areca-nut and do not affect the supply of produce to the village. The main street of Panaje houses a sub-post office, a shoemaker, a beedie cigarette collection

agency, and an ayurvedic medicine shop. Panaje abounds with small tea hotels and open stalls which sell matches, soap, penny sweets, and single cigarettes. Two bank offices are located on opposite sides of a long dusty road which demarcates the village nucleus.

Panaje village is synonomous throughout the district with ayurvedic medicine. This fame is a result of a family of Brahman ayurvedic practitioners, vaidya, who have treated patients from all over the District for the past three generations. The descendants of these vaidya carry on the family tradition and a Shudra compounder, trained in the family's ayurvedic preparations, maintains a shop in the village. The shop serves local needs and sells medicines to a large number of outside patients. Due to the congenial nature of the compounder, the shop is a hub of village social life.

Panaje's būta shrine is located near the centre of the village. Each month small būta rituals are performed and the courtyard in front of the shrine is the scene of local cockfights, a major village past-time. The large village būta kōla which should be performed each year has not taken place for three years because of the poor financial position of the temple trustees and due to the difficulty in collecting levies from villagers. The traditional patrons, Shivalli Brahmans and Bants, have not requested donations from Havik Brahmans because they exclude the caste from taking part in the ritual proceedings on the grounds that they are immigrants.

Because of its interior location and its difficult position as a Karnataka-Kerala border village, any attempt at modernization has meant years of waiting, bribing, and extreme frustration. A few telephone lines are strung across the village. Telephone service in an interior village like Panaje is a rare occurrence in South India and it took a number of years of struggling and persistence on the part of a small nucleus of areca-nut growers to have the service installed. For these agriculturists, telephone service

meant a link to markets where their produce was being sold at auction. An initial application was submitted to Puttur in 1964, but for eight years villagers received no response from the telephone office. Finally in 1970, a group of frustrated areca growers went to Puttur daily to motivate action on the part of the supervisor. In 1972, three telephones were installed in the village and today that number has increased to eight.

Community action also was mobilized around the building of a high school. Until recently Panaje had only a primary school. Children who wanted to continue on to high school had to walk a distance of six miles to Kerala state. In 1965, Panaje petitioned the government for a high school but their petition was refused by local government officials. The government claimed that the area was problematic because a school which would lie on the Karnataka state border, would attract students from Kerala. Again in 1969, the villagers petitioned the government and filed a protest stating that they did not want their children to go to Malayalam speaking schools in Kerala. In 1970, a school was legally sanctioned, but the government would not provide funding. The school was built by donations from villagers, and local teachers worked for four years receiving only minimal income. In 1975, the school was granted a small loan from the government to cover regular salary for its teaching staff.

A PHC serving Panaje and thirty three surrounding villages was completed in 1958 after a group of citizens donated Rs.19,000 towards its construction. For the first ten years, no doctor would remain in the village due to its isolation. During those years, the PHC was staffed by a compounder, a midwife, and a health visitor. Because there was no doctor, villagers did not come forward for treatment there and the compounder is said to have sold the PHC drugs in his native town of Kasaragod. In 1969, a permanent male doctor was posted and in 1973 a lady medical practitioner joined him. The fact that there is no chemist shop nearby means that for any prescribed

medicine a villager must travel fifteen miles to Puttur.

The reason I have given a brief account of Panaje's involvement in social change is to emphasize the progressive attitude of Panaje's garden owners. However, although it would appear that these agriculturists form a united group conducive to corporate action, such is not the case. The examples presented here are unusual cases of corporate action based around essential community issues. By and large, however, areca agriculturists are intensely individualistic. The village, as a unit, is only loosely organized and not in the hands of one political group.

A significant difference between Panaje and Vitla may be pointed out in respect to the region's recent political history. From 1801 to 1956, South Kanara was a part of Madras Presidency. However, in 1956, the State Reorganization Act was passed and South Kanara was sanctioned to Karnataka State with the exception of its southern-most Kasaragod Taluk. Kasaragod was lost to Kerala in a debated political manoeuvre marked by protest. The decision was politically and not culturally based. It was the result of a series of territory negotiations going on between Karnataka and three neighbouring states. During territory negotiations, Karnataka received Karvar District under protest from Goa, and Belgaum under protest from Maharashtra State. When a dispute then arose between Kerala and Karnataka over Kasaragod the area was sanctioned to Kerala. The area is, however, closely linked to the rest of South Kanara linguistically, socially, culturally, as well as economically. As a result of the act, the southern-most section of Vitla Kingdom was sanctioned to Kerala's jurisdiction. Panaje was literally severed in half, and many garden owners found themselves responsible to both state governments for taxes, levies, and other bureaucratic matters. The two state governments are at variance with one another as Kerala is predominantly communist while South Kanara is conservative.



In 1969, Karnataka State decided to create a restricted frontier zone between the two states. The rationale behind this zone, which I will refer to as the rice belt, was that the price of rice and essential commodities are considerably less costly in Karnataka than in Kerala. The zone was created to prevent the free flow of essential commodities from Karnataka to Kerala. Checkposts were set up along the border areas of the zone. Goods now require a special permit to be transported through the zone and a ration system has been instituted whereby border villages of Karnataka are allowed only a limited amount of government controlled commodities on a weekly basis. Panaje fell within the boundaries of this zone, but Vitla situated just outside this zone, remained a centre of free trade.

## CHAPTER TWO

Ecological and Socio-Economic Features of the Areca-nut Belt

I will briefly describe features of the region's climate, health, eco-system, and agriculture. I will then document some of the effects of social change on ecological conditions and village economics. This will require a brief history of the areca-nut boom and its subsequent crash, the development of a cash economy, and recent government land legislation.

Climate

South Kanara has a semi-tropical climate with a heavy monsoon season and an average overall temperature of about 37.6 degrees centigrade. The climate is well suited for the growing of paddy, coconut, areca-nut, pepper, and various spices.

The first rains of the year are the pre-monsoon rains which occur sporadically in April and consist of only a few downpours of short duration. The heavy southwest monsoon occurs between the end of May and the beginning of June and downpours often continue well into September. Official reports quote South Kanara as receiving an average of 150 inches of rain per year, but the two monsoons I weathered in the Panaje-Vitla region of the District were each in excess of 180 inches. After the southwest monsoons subside, a few downpours occur in late October and the beginning of November due to a brief northeast monsoon. The extent of this latter monsoon in large part determines the outcome of the second rice crop, the first crop having been planted prior to the southwest monsoon in May and harvested in September.

Temperatures in the District are lowest during the southwest monsoon and the lowest temperature I recorded was somewhere about 28.2 degrees centigrade, a temperature which the local populace considered unbearable and which necessitated the wearing of blankets and shawls. After the northeast monsoon there occurs a period of intense heat until mid-November, and then from December till mid-February a comfortable temperature prevails. This is the District's winter, and temperatures range between 33 and 37 degrees centigrade during the day to around 33 degrees centigrade at night. Summer begins in February and continues until the southwest monsoon. Summer is a time of scorching heat and water scarcity. The sun is so strong that the areca growers in the region where I lived planted coconut and fruit trees along the southern perimeters of their gardens to afford shade to the areca trees. The sun becomes so intense at times that if shade is not provided, the trunks of the areca trees split. During summer, South Kanara's many shades of green gradually turn a dusty brown. By the time June arrives, the cool of the monsoon is welcomed.

#### General Health

Due to the dependability of the monsoons, famine is rare. However, food scarcity is a problem. This is particularly true during the months of June through August, and it is during these months that vitamin and protein deficiency becomes most apparent. Deficiencies of Vitamin A, D, and B complex are common as are calcium and iron deficiencies.

Seasonal variation has an effect on health. Mortalities due to fever are highest during the monsoon months of July and August, the winter months of December and January, and the summer months of April and May. Epidemics of smallpox, cholera, and enteric fever have not been as prevalent

in the District as elsewhere in India due to a pattern of scattered housing. Epidemics which have occurred have often been traced to cattle fairs, temple festivals, and pilgrimages held between the months of January and April.

Deaths due to dysentery and gastroenteritis are highest during the monsoons and in the months of December and January. Respiratory diseases and fungal infections of the skin are particularly common between June and September. Generally speaking, the six months from October to March are healthier than the remaining six months. Villagers, however, regard the winter season as particularly dangerous in respect to disease.

The Madras Manual of 1895 reports that of registered deaths in the District (153 mille male, 129 mille female), 35.6 per cent of these deaths were caused by fever and 9.24 per cent by dysentery. Stuart noted in his report of 1895 that of those deaths reported, 22 per cent were babies under 1 year of age, 21 per cent were children between the ages of 1 to 5, and that these numbers are low estimations. A more accurate child mortality survey conducted in 1938 found that at least 26.2 per cent of total deaths were babies under 1 year (193.4 mille) and that the birth rate was approximately 42.5 per mille with 104 males being born to every 100 females<sup>1</sup>. The child mortality rate has gradually reduced. In 1974, the birth rate was 31.5 per mille, the death rate 12.8 per mille and the child mortality rate was 103.6 per mille<sup>2</sup>.

Recent epidemiological reports have confirmed that fever is still the most popular return on death reports (32 per cent in 1973). They have

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<sup>1</sup> This information was extrapolated from a Health Report submitted by the Madras Presidency, 1938.

<sup>2</sup> This information was received in personal communication with the District Health Officer, June 1976.

also noted that respiratory illnesses are increasing in number to equal if not supercede dysentery as a cause of death. In particular, the tuberculosis rate is rapidly increasing.

Table 1 The Chief Causes of Death in South Kanara in 1956 and 1960<sup>1</sup>

| Disease     | 1956  | 1960                                     |
|-------------|-------|--|
| Fever       | 2,287 | 2,922                                    |
| Respiratory | 455   | 1,333                                    |
| Dysentery   | 506   | 1,333                                    |
| Malaria     | 116   | 66<br>(rapidly increasing<br>at present) |

The vital health statistics presented by government reports can at best be considered a general, rather than an accurate, indication of actual health conditions in the District. Compilation of data is a difficult task. There is not enough health staff to maintain constant surveillance of even a small portion of a PHC zone. Furthermore, villagers do not willingly report the many types of information needed for epidemiological surveys. Still-birth, miscarriage, and the death of young babies are most often not reported by mothers and the term 'fever' on death reports may mean anything from typhoid or cerebro-spinal fever to the pyrexia which accompanies most acute infections.

<sup>1</sup> South Kanara District Manual (1973, 612).

Despite these limitations, I examined the health records of a neighbouring panchāyit, Perdala (pop. 20,000), in order to gain a better estimation of health trends in an areca community. The panchāyit was ideal because it contained a town the size of Vitla and two villages the size of Panaje. The following information was compiled. The death rate for 1974 was 7.6 per mille, the equivalent of 152 deaths. Nineteen per cent of reported deaths occurred in children below the age of 5 years and 52 per cent of deaths recorded involved villagers above the age of 60.

Table 2    The Causes of Death in One Panchāyit.

| Cause of Death             | Rate (per cent)   |
|----------------------------|-------------------|
| Old age                    | 43.6              |
| Fever                      | 23.7              |
| Respiratory ailment        | 9.9               |
| Weakness                   | 5.3    (children) |
| Stomach or bowels          | 4.6               |
| Swelling of body           | 4.6               |
| Heart                      | 3.3               |
| Fits                       | 2.0    (children) |
| Murder, suicide, accident. | 3.9               |

### Agriculture

There are two primary agricultural eco-systems in South Kanara. The oldest system is based on the cultivation of paddy. One crop of paddy is guaranteed by adequate monsoon rains. A second crop may be secured in

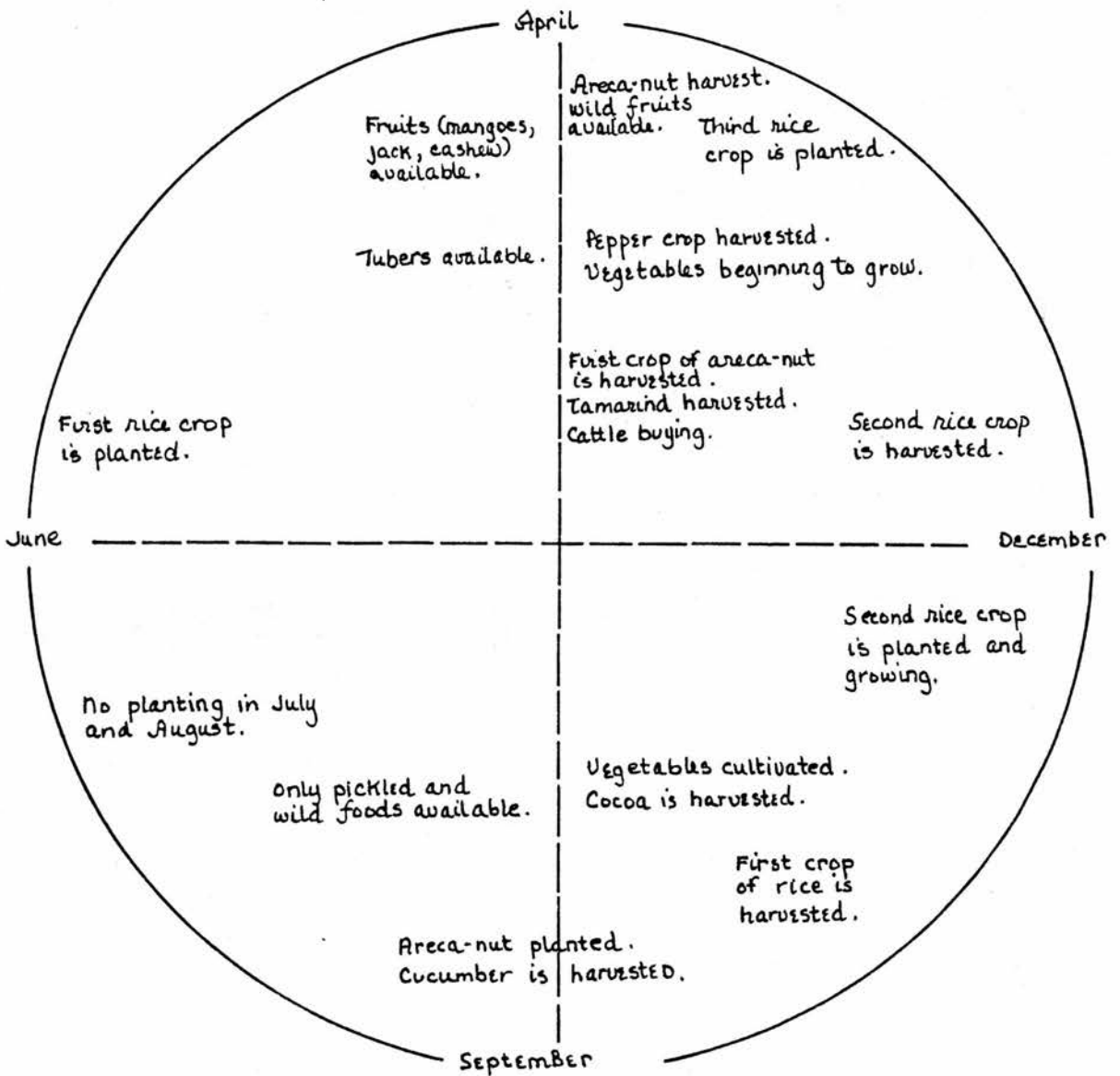
wet lands if the northeast monsoon is adequate or if a local water source is available. A third crop, which is rare, depends solely on the availability of water in the summer season and the facilities of pumping or lifting this water to the surface. Peter Claus (1970, 1974), has carried out extensive research on paddy agriculture in South Kanara. He has suggested that a causal relationship exists between monsoon paddy cultivation and:

1. The District's traditional pattern of small stable land tenures. 98.1 per cent of these tenures are under ten acres as opposed to the states average of 68.1 per cent. (1970, 42)
2. A higher ratio of female to males especially in the age group of fifteen to forty five. Females and males have distinct roles in paddy cultivation. Females have a greater role and males migrate in search of work in non-essential seasons.
3. Among tenants, the prevalence of the matrilineal system of kinship, loose marriage arrangements and the lineage segment as the basic kinship unit as opposed to the descent group due to economic and demographic factors.

Claus' first two observations hold true for Vitla and Panaje prior to the influence of areca cultivation. Areca was introduced in Vitla approximately 150 years ago by Havik Brahmins. In Panaje, it was first introduced seventy-five years ago and has been intensively grown only in the last thirty years. Areca-nut was not new to the area, however, as immigrant Marati speaking Karadi Brahmins were growing areca-nut in a neighbouring village as far back as two hundred years ago.

Areca cultivation altered significantly in Panaje and Vitla following the boom in areca-nut prices after World War II and then another boom in the mid-1960s. Prior to this price rise, areca was a forest product and garden owners diversified their agricultural operations to include coconut, black pepper, and banana. After the areca-nut boom, however, the areca crop was both intensified and systematized. Planters began to systematically cultivate from four to six hundred trees per acre. Moreover, chemical sprays and

Diagram I Agricultural Calendar





fertilizers were used to increase the yield per tree appreciably. All paddy fields in excess of a family's minimal requirements were converted into areca gardens. Areca growers depended on areca-nut as a chief cash crop and most reduced their cultivation of other garden produce. I would estimate that in the past fifteen years the yield of areca-nut has increased by 60 to 70 per cent.

For the most part, this expansion of areca-nut cultivation was initiated by the Havik Brahmins, but other castes soon joined in its cultivation. The attitude of the Havik grower, however, was significantly different than that of the new areca-nut growers. The new cultivator who formerly grew paddy looked at areca-nut solely as a cash crop. The mentality of a Havik, his pride and status, was centred on his garden. After calculating garden yields versus expenditures, I found that successful Havik growers often invested in garden improvements, such as the acquisition of an extra pump set, not for the sake of productive efficiency but primarily in order to enhance his garden and his prestige. As one Havik commented to me: "Muslims invest in decorating their homes, the Bant caste in their large paddy fields and Haviks in beautifying their gardens".

For the areca grower, areca-nut is not just a cash crop, it is a way of life. Even if growers could convert their gardens to more profitable crops to do so would be difficult psychologically for family members view their trees as extensions of their personal space. It is doubtful whether Haviks will give up areca. As one Havik stated: "Areca is a religious crop. It is always needed for rituals, pūjā. As long as Hinduism exists, areca-nut will exist. Somehow we will survive."

Before looking at the economics of areca-nut and the effect of new land reform acts on the region's entire village economic system, a few facts must be reviewed about areca as a crop.

### The Areca-nut Crop

Areca-nut cultivation in South Kanara is quite different from areca-nut cultivation in the Shimoga region. Unlike Shimoga, South Kanara's laterite soil retains little moisture in the summer months and gardens must continually be irrigated. This requires the South Kanara areca-nut grower to have a store of water throughout the year. It also necessitates a particular pattern of tree spacing, land levelling and a water channel system that will allow water to circulate to trees which are either on level terraces or on the slopes of river valleys. Water from these channels must be scooped out manually and workers water trees individually. A minimum of two to four workers per acre are needed ideally for this task. The water they use is collected in dug out storage tanks but this water suffices only from the end of monsoons until January. To tap additional water supply sources, growers tunnel into hillocks and tap the water table and springs. These tunnels are difficult to build and often extend as far as three hundred feet into the side of a hillock.

Areca-nut agriculture altered social conditions in the areas where it was propagated. Whereas in paddy cultivation there is a greater demand for females, areca cultivation requires more male workers for tree climbing, earth work, hillside levelling, and so on. Furthermore, areca cultivation requires a constant year-round labour force, whereas paddy requires a large labour force for a short time. Because of areca cultivation, there is less male migration in search of work, and the male-to-female ratio in the fifteen to forty age range is equal in areca areas.

The varieties and characteristics of areca-nut and areca-nut preparations differ significantly in Shimoga and South Kanara. Shimoga trees are 60 to 70 feet in height when mature, and new trees of the red-nut

variety take 6 to 7 years to flower. South Kanara trees are 40 to 50 feet in height and take 3 years to flower. South Kanara nuts are more tannic, larger in size, and fetch a higher price than Shimoga nuts. However, an average bunch in South Kanara yields approximately 250 nuts whereas a bunch in Shimoga yields between 500 to 600 nuts. Therefore, in comparison, South Kanara makes less profit per acre.

A major difference between South Kanara and Shimoga exists in the sale and preparation of the varieties of areca-nuts. In Shimoga, tender nuts are picked, boiled, dried, and sold. In South Kanara, only ripe nuts are plucked and dried. If an areca-nut grower does not need immediate cash for his produce, he will age his nuts for a period of one to two years and then sell them at a higher price, since the flavour of nuts is thought to improve with age.

An essential point is that the storing of these nuts requires large, dry storage areas to prevent the nuts from becoming mouldy during the damp monsoon season. These storage places are usually built over a kitchen, where the daily smoke and heat from the cooking fires provides a dry environment for the areca-nut crop. Large storage areas, therefore, require large houses and large houses are a substantial investment.

### Economics

Traditional economy in the areca-nut belt was based on a rice medium and payment in kind. This system continued until twelve years ago in Vitla and seven years ago in Panaje. An equivalency scale existed whereby rice and other commodities could be exchanged. Twenty years ago, one mound (13 kg) of areca-nut, jaggery sugar or green chillies was considered to be equal to one mora (39 kgs) of rice. Male workers were paid two ser of paddy (one ser is slightly less than a kilo) per day and women half

that amount for general garden and field labour. For specialized jobs different rates existed. Workers who thrashed paddy, for example, would receive one measure of paddy (13 kg) for every ten measures thrashed. An average worker could thereby gain approximately five ser of paddy a day. Males and females were both given two ser of rice per day for urgent transplanting and harvesting work. Heavy earth work fetched three ser per day and specialized work such as masonry or carpentry fetched between three to four ser per day.

Payment in kind was transformed into payment by cash gradually in Vitla and suddenly in Panaje. In Vitla this transition was desired both by workers and garden owners, whereas in Panaje the transition was not welcomed by either group.

Before the intensification of areca-nut cultivation, male agricultural labourers would work in the cardamom and coffee estates of Coorg during slack months in the paddy agricultural cycle. Foremen of these estates would lure workers to work off season by giving them lump sums of money as advance payment. However, after the areca-nut boom, workers were able to secure full time-work in areca gardens in their native villages. Agricultural labourers in Panaje generally opted for the security of steady employment and approximately 90 per cent of the workers who had previously gone to Coorg remained in the village after 1950.

Workers in Panaje's areca gardens were paid in rice. Garden owners would purchase rice in season at a low bulk cost and would stock-pile it. They would then dole it out to workers throughout the year at a fixed rate of payment. This assisted workers, as they received cheap rice in seasons when the price would normally have been higher. Workers also received a small amount of cash for the purchase of basic necessities such as cloth and chillies. Garden owner-labourer relations were long-term and

loans were easily available to workers for marriage expenses, dowries, and in times of illness.

The transformation to a cash-based economy in Panaje occurred when the rice restricted belt was established in 1968. As a result of the rice belt, it became impossible for garden owners to stock-pile rice in season at low cost. Areca-nut growers protested against rice restrictions to the government, claiming that the ruling would lead to deterioration in the local economic system. Their petitions were dismissed, however, on the grounds that cash payment and a ration system would release the labourer from feudal bonds inherent in a system based on payment in kind.

In 1969, areca-nut growers were forced to convert rice payment into cash payment. Male workers were paid an equivalent of Rs.  $2\frac{1}{2}$  per day (fifteen pence) and women were paid Rs.  $1\frac{1}{2}$  per day. Subsequent to 1969, the prices of basic commodities rose sharply. The most serious price rise to the villager was that of rice, a rise created by rice shortages in neighbouring districts. Between 1960 and 1975, the price of rice increased over 500 per cent in the Puttur region from fifty paise ( $\frac{1}{2}$  a rupee) a kilo to Rs.  $2\frac{1}{2}$  a kilo. Wages could not rise this fast for the 1970s brought a sudden drop in the areca market and a steep rise in the cost of all essential commodities.

In the early 1970s the areca-nut market dropped by as much as 58 per cent and it became impossible to give labourers wage increases. Workers were paid far below the traditional one and three quarter kilo rice scale. This situation continues today and when I left the region in 1976, male labourers in Panaje earned only Rs. 3 per day. Due to the shift to payment in cash the introduction of the rice belt, and the fall in the price of areca-nut, the agricultural labourer could now purchase little more than

one kilo of rice per day with his wages. The quantity of rice an average man consumed dropped from one kilo a day to half that amount. In addition the rice available for purchase at the village ration shop became poorer in quality.

As the entire region's economy is based on the areca-nut market, it is necessary to review briefly the recent history of the areca boom, its collapse, and the effect of government legislation on areca belt economy. It should be kept in mind that Panaje is an areca boom town. Most gardens in Panaje were planted after 1945.

Prior to the areca boom, Havik Brahmans, the principal areca-nut growing caste in the region, were a relatively poor land owning community in the Panaje area. Suddenly, between the years 1936 and 1943, the areca-nut market jumped from Rs.150 a kandy (560 lbs) to Rs.1000. The caste became prosperous and began searching for new lands to turn into gardens. Many Havik families from the Kumbala-Nirchal region of Kasaragod Taluk migrated to the Panaje region which was then a dense forest. They purchased land from the Bant and Manyani castes who were powerful land owners in the area. Ambitiously, they began levelling hillsides and converting paddy fields for areca-nut cultivation. As the areca-nut price was rising, large new houses were constructed with tiled roofs and spacious storing areas necessary for the ageing and storing of the nuts. House construction was facilitated by the temptation of low interest rates on bank loans, which at that time were below 5 per cent. Loans were also taken out to pay back money originally borrowed from relatives to enable the purchase of new lands.

Many Haviks anticipated government land ceiling legislation and began to partition land on paper to avoid later complications. However, partition on paper soon led to a trend of actual partition, for once shares were legally drawn up, sons found reason to quarrel amongst themselves,

usually after the death of the father, but sometimes beforehand. Partitions meant that more new houses had to be built and to do this more loans had to be taken out.

Fathers soon realized that land ceiling enforcement would mean that only a limited number of sons could maintain themselves on family property and that partitioning could not go on indefinitely. If garden shares became too small, gardens would no longer be economically productive. Therefore, a percentage of sons would have to seek work elsewhere. The status of their work, however, would have to be equal to that of their siblings who remained at home. Therefore, Haviks invested heavily in higher education for their children, particularly in the status fields of medicine, engineering, and studies leading to bank or government jobs.

New houses and education required new loans. Such loans could be paid off in a reasonable length of time as long as the areca-nut market remained high. In 1969, however, the market plunged deeply.

Table 3 The Rise and Fall of the Areca-nut Market.

| Year      | Production in Quintals | Value in Lakhs |
|-----------|------------------------|----------------|
| 1967 - 68 | 222,941                | Rs.152,744     |
| 1971 - 72 | 319,628                | Rs.173,982     |
| 1972 - 73 | 344,616                | Rs.143,781     |

(Hedwige, 1975, 24)

This price fall was complicated by a steady rise in bank interest rates on loans. Prior to the nationalization of Indian banks, a Government Debt Act had been passed designed to assist debtors, but in effect it made matters

worse. According to the Act, a man had to pay no more than one and a half times the principal amount he had borrowed as a loan. For example, a man who had borrowed Rs.100 twenty years ago at 5 per cent interest, instead of paying Rs.200, now only had to pay Rs.150. The ruling also limited interest rates to a maximum of  $6\frac{1}{2}$  per cent on past debts.

The outcome of this act was that private loans immediately ceased and money became tight. Banks were then nationalized. Money became available, but interest rates began steadily increasing. Interest had to be paid quarterly, and service charges and court fees for Rs.1000 came to approximately Rs.75. Today the interest for most loans ranges between 15 and 20 per cent plus default charges.

Areca agriculturists found themselves in an economic squeeze, sandwiched between escalating prices of basic commodities and a drop in the cash crop. The rapid rise of interest on loans intensified this situation. To make matters worse, unemployment and anti-Brahman discrimination made it difficult for the educated sons of areca-nut growers to find status jobs. Many of these sons unexpectedly returned home to claim their garden shares. When they returned they often found that their families were heavily in debt. This was a fact they were unaware of before because family economics is traditionally kept secret and the business of elders.

Havik garden owners attempted to maintain their new prestige by becoming secretive about their disintegrating economic condition. Haviks commonly took loans from banks first and would borrow from friends and extended family members only as a last resort, since to do so was viewed as entailing a loss of prestige. As debts increased so did the individualism of Havik families. As opposed to uniting the Havik community, debt fractionalized it. One manifestation of this fractionalization was that



a strong tendency evolved whereby areca growers attempted to marry their daughters to more distant places as a means of keeping family business a secret. Lately, attempts to organize the community have centred upon the renovation of shrines.

### Land Reform

Land Reform Acts and new government legislation have complicated South Kanara's economic situation. These Acts fixed a land ceiling and gave tenants the legal right of ownership to lands they traditionally cultivated. In the 1970s land reform began to be marginally enforced and widely discussed. The Acts were met with protest by areca garden owners throughout the District. They emphasized that social repercussions of these Acts, unanticipated by social reformers, would injure not only areca growers but the landless labourers whom they were in theory attempting to help.

Areca growers protested new land reform rulings on the grounds that the rules mistakenly treated rioyta land and estate land in a similar fashion. Estate land, typical of land found on the Deccan Plateau, is generally level with high soil fertility. Agriculturists who farm this land do so with comparatively little effort and field preparation. Rioyta land, typical of South Kanara's areca region, consists of steep slopes and irregular features. This land can be converted to agricultural use only after levelling and long-term high investment. Moreover, profit from rioyta land is not immediate but gradual, calculated in terms of ten year periods from the time of land conversion to the time of a first areca-nut crop. The protest was of no consequence.

One result of the Land Ceiling and Land Reformation Acts was that the development of new lands ceased. In some areas, this reduced the number

of jobs for many scheduled caste workers who had previously found employment in clearing forest lands and in levelling hills for new gardens and fields. Another repercussion has been growing social tensions between landlords, tenants, and paid labourers. Discrepancies have arisen over what constitutes a tenancy and clashes have resulted whereby landlords have attempted to evict long standing workers and tenants from their properties. In some cases, these attempts were by cash settlement and in other cases, by brute force and bloodshed. On the other hand, some short term and would-be tenants have been egged on by opportunists, under the guise of political affiliation, to file for land not rightfully theirs. Many of these opportunists have made a considerable profit by swindling illiterate villagers while representing their cases in court.

However, of greater importance than the actual number of dramatic incidents, is the fear and general suspicion which has ensued between landlords, tenants, and agricultural labourers. Episodes of sudden misfortunes and sickness are more commonly attributed to witchcraft and sorcery of late. I will have more to say about this topic in Part Three.

Additional problems complicated land reform measures. The government agreed to pay landlords for lands allocated to tenants on two scales. Tenancies which were annual, chālagēni, were to be repaid by the government on a scale of fifteen times the annual rent of the land. The annual rent was figured as ten times the government tax assessment of the land. Long term mūlagēni tenancies, however, were to be repayed at only six times the garden owner's annual rent. Garden owners complained that the amount was fractional to the value of the land. They claimed that prior to the giving of lands to tenants they had invested considerable capital in order to create the field or garden in question. Furthermore, as theft was common in the region, most landlords had offered their lands

for mūlagēni tenancy at a low rate opting for security as opposed to higher rent chālagēni tenancies. These landlords now felt that they were being penalized for their generosity. Bitterness was intensified as government repayment was only partially in cash. For example, one of my informants was entitled to Rs.18,000 by the Government. He was given Rs.2,000 in cash and a Rs.16,000 bond cashable in twenty-five years at 6 per cent interest. The informant currently has a bank loan of Rs.15,000 with an interest rate of 18 per cent which he cannot repay.

Landowners have also become gravely concerned about their right to use green leaves from the hillsides adjacent to their lands. These rights, locally known as kumki, are essential to land owners as green leaves are necessary for paddy and areca-nut fertilizers as well as for fodder for cattle, bullocks and water buffalo. Without a bare minimum of two acres of kumki lands per acre of paddy or garden, agricultural operations cannot continue without the use of purchased fertilizers and fodder which are steadily rising in cost. Land owners are becoming suspicious that these rights will be taken away and are beginning a desperate search for landless relatives or trusted friends to file for this land in their own names claiming it as land for the landless, durcast.

The social outcome of these economic pressures is a situation wherein mistrust and suspicion is rising and security and co-operation decreasing. Landlords complain that workers no longer take pride or interest in the development and cultivation of the gardens they work in. In their opinions, workers are only interested in filling their bellies.

Workers, on the other hand, in villages such as Panaje have good reason to be concerned about filling their bellies as they are experiencing a nutritional crisis. As was previously mentioned, the average agricultural

labourer's rice intake is half of what it was ten years ago and the traditional vegetable plot, to which a worker was formally entitled, is becoming rare. If a worker does own a piece of durcast land, he may cultivate it, but chances are it is on a hillside where soil erosion is great and where valuable topsoil is rapidly being washed away.

Another reason that workers are losing their attachment to the land is because social relationships between landlord and tenants have altered and workers have much less contact with their employers. This is becoming noticeable in Panaje, but is more obvious in towns like Vitla, where garden workers are treated like daily wage plantation workers. Labour relations in Panaje have not yet deteriorated to this extent and this is one of the major reasons why workers living in Panaje do not leave the village to work in towns like Vitla where wages are higher. At least in Panaje, limited security still exists. Work is continuous, housing available, and one's kin are near by.

#### The Beedie Home Industry

Panaje's areca-nut growers are heavily in debt and therefore cannot afford to raise the wages of their workers. As a result of this economic situation, some labourers have chosen to do alternative work in order to ameliorate their positions. One of the few types of alternative work available is the rolling of beedie cigarettes. The beedie home industry is attractive to villagers for it allows them to work according to their own schedule and initiative. Moreover, members of any caste may roll beedies without a loss of caste status, and rollers include both Brahmans and untouchables. Women in castes with escalating dowries, like the Bant caste, find the occupation particularly attractive for they can now earn enough money for their own dowries.

Two years ago, two beedie branches were established in Panaje and today three hundred male and female beedie rollers are engaged in full-time employment. Numerous villagers study beedie rolling at night in order to gain the skills which will enable them to take on the profession full-time. To judge the potential spread of the beedie industry in Panaje we may view the growth of the industry in Vitla. The beedie industry became popular in Vitla between the years of 1965 and 1974. The number of beedie branch offices in the 7 mile radius of Vitla increased from 3 to 74 during this period. Today, some 11,000 beedie rollers work out of these 74 branches.

Beedie rollers are paid Rs.4 per 1000 beedies rolled. Adept workers can roll from 1000 to 1300 beedies a day. In many instances, a mother of small children will roll 500 beedies a day and her children may help her by rolling another 300. If 600 to 700 beedies are completed in a day, her wages are the same as a woman who has put in a full day of labour in the fields.

Beedie work has its problems however. The health of the roller is considerably worse than that of the garden worker. Beedie workers generally sit inside in shaded and poorly ventilated huts bent over their beedie trays for long hours. Physical exercise is greatly decreased. Rollers are generally anaemic and particularly prone to tuberculosis and respiratory diseases. Among women beedie rollers, the incidence of difficult delivery is significantly more common than among field workers. Viewed from an overall perspective, what the beedie roller gains in immediate benefit is lost to the price of physical suffering and medical fees they must pay at a later date.

Garden workers have begun to realize that a pattern of unhealthiness exists among beedie rollers. Some of my young informants considered beedie rollers less desirable as marriage partners despite the economic

advantages of their occupation. Moreover, many villagers make critical remarks about female beedie rollers chastising their economic and consequently personal independence. This criticism usually takes the form of comments on their sexual mores and upon the evils of the beedie branch office which is described as a den of iniquity.

Despite these criticisms, however, the beedie industry steadily grows in Panaje for it provides an opportunity for villagers to help themselves and to advance by their own incentive. The choice is between engaging in an occupation where one derives immediate benefit from personal initiative and suffers from long term ill-health or engaging in an occupation which allows for little personal initiative.

#### Vitla: Panaje's Future?

The Vitla area affords numerous opportunities for employment. A Government Areca-nut Research Station and numerous contractors offer daily wage work. Easy access to transportation facilities affords greater work mobility and the beedie home industry has become well established and is popular. Because of alternative occupations agricultural labourers are in demand especially during peak agricultural seasons. Cash payment is desired by these workers because rice is easily available at the market and because a shortage of labour places them in a position to bargain for wages. Bargaining for wages occurs on an individual and not a collective basis. This bargaining is often subtle for it is based on a system of advances as well as wages.

When the areca-nut market is high, workers ask for benefits from garden owners. Garden owners raise wages, but only if workers continue to come daily. When the market or the crop is bad this raise is eliminated.

Under all circumstances, however, workers demand and maintain a minimum wage of the cash equivalent of two ser of rice per man and one ser per woman. If the price of rice becomes high, workers expect a wage rise to cover the difference. An average male worker in Vitla as of January 1976 received Rs. 4½ per day and the price of rice fluctuated between Rs.2.10 and Rs.2.25 per kilo.

The landowner has no choice but to pay these wages or he will not find workers. However, the average Vitla areca grower can better afford to pay these wages than the Panaje garden owner because gardens in Vitla are generally older and were established before the boom. In general, debt is less. The Vitla grower faces the same pressures as the Panaje grower in regard to government legislation and interest rate hikes on loans. As a result of the development of a cash based economy, wage bargaining, and tension over government legislation, close relationships which once existed between landlords and garden workers have become a rarity.

Today, the following pattern of labour relations is becoming prevalent in Vitla. After a labourer has worked for a fortnight of consecutive work days he will ask the garden owner for an advance of wages. The garden owner cannot refuse the demand because he needs workers, either at that time, or in the near future. Therefore, he will postpone the request for a day or two and finally **consent**. The worker will then be indebted to the garden owner, but no immediate request will be made for the amount as long as the worker continues to come to work and stays in good terms with the owner. The worker's boldness has a limit, however, for he never knows exactly how far he can push his luck in requesting advances. He does not want to create a bad relationship with the land owner in case he needs work at slack times during rainy seasons. It is difficult, moreover, for a labourer who is ill to borrow money from a landlord if his illness prevents him from coming to work for more than a few days.

The landlord must also manipulate this subtle relationship carefully. He knows that if he advances too much to a worker, the worker will not pay the sum back either in cash or in work. He is aware of a prevalent pattern whereby workers deeply in debt move from garden to garden as part of a transitory work force. This floating group of labourers primarily consists of expelled tenants, poor landowners, and debtors. The group has been rapidly expanding since land reform. The garden owner therefore never allows the balance owed to be too great and usually extends the payment of advances in a piecemeal fashion.

The granting of advances and loans has traditionally carried with it an unspoken agreement that workers will work for this landlord at critical times in the agricultural cycle as an obligation. In today's cash based economy however, a conflict of interest arises. When a garden owner advances a loan to a worker, he does so in terms of cash wages based on a scale of payment at that time. If a worker fulfils his obligations during a critical agricultural work period, he has lost his power for wage bargaining. He would therefore like to seek employment elsewhere. The outcome of this conflict of interest is highly unpredictable and the land owners have no idea whether a worker is going to show up for daily wages when he is needed. For this reason garden owners in the Vitla area have attempted to mechanize their gardens and be as self-sufficient as possible. Until the price of small power tillers became prohibitive, many garden owners purchased them. Furthermore, a preference for contract labour is increasing. Garden owners find that by hiring contract labourers they do not have to worry about gathering a labour force and they do not have to supervise their workers.

Today's economic exchange system in Vitla approximates the system described by Harper in Shimoga in 1959. Panaje has not yet developed this



pattern of labour relations because of its remoteness, its adequate supply of garden labourers, and the fact that at least 80 per cent of its areca growers are deeply in debt and cannot pay higher wages. If debt relief is not made available many areca-nut growers will lose their land. If, on the other hand, a debt relief is made available to landowners then Panaje's economy may alter to approximate Vitla's.

At present many gardens have a sub-optimal number of labourers working in them. A majority of garden owners are 'loan hunters' attempting to pay off old loans with new ones while hoping for a rise in current areca-nut prices or government debt relief<sup>1</sup>. The only other solution to their economic problems is to give up areca-nut as a crop and plant a crop that is more profitable. To do so would be of tremendous psychological and social difficulty to Haviks, for as I have noted, areca-nut gardens are a primary source of pride and identity to them.

#### Garden Labourers and Economic Insecurity

Among agricultural labourers in the areca belt debt is becoming a serious problem and loans for these villagers are not easily available. As landowner-labourer relations become less personal, cash loans become harder to secure. Due to new debt relief acts, private loans have become scarce and illegal loans which bypass legal channels often demand 50 to 75 per cent interest or the custody of marriage ornaments. The most common way in which a family enters debt is when a family member becomes ill. The

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<sup>1</sup> In 1976, the areca-nut market showed signs of levelling off at a rate close to that of boom years. However, this rate must be viewed against a backdrop of inflation, during which the cost of basic commodities has risen significantly, and the compounding interest on loans has increased.

worker who lives on a subsistence economy no longer earns wages but he must pay fees for medicines, curative rituals, doctors, astrologers, etc. Debt and ill health seem to be a perpetual cycle for many families. The growing insecurity and despair may well be the cause of a marked rise in alcoholism, gambling, and suicide.

### The Kudi Group

One strategy employed against insecurity is the proliferation of a small locally organized multi-caste loan system known as a kudi group. A kudi group consists of a number of members who promise to contribute a set number of rupees per month for a set number of months equal to the number of members. Let us say that thirty members agree to contribute Rs.10 a month for thirty months. At the end of the first month, Rs.300 will be given to a kudi leader who is a trusted member of the local area. The funds of Rs.300 will then be bid on by those members who require cash at that time. The lowest bidder wins the fund for the month and is therefore ineligible to bid during the following months. For example, one bidder may bid Rs.225 and another Rs.190. The latter bidder will win the fund for that month and will receive Rs.190. The remaining Rs.110 will go to the next fund for the following month unless particular members want to take out small amounts of the Rs.110 as a loan with interest. For example, eleven men may say that they would like to take Rs.10 each from the fund agreeing to pay an interest of Rs.2 on the loan.

The next month Rs.300 is collected from the thirty members and in addition the eleven members contribute an additional Rs.12 each, making Rs.132 available to the fund. In the second month, members bid on the monthly fund of Rs.300. Let us say the winning bid is for Rs.180. The

excess Rs.120 is added to the excess Rs.132 from the previous month making a total of Rs.252 which has now been put up for possible bid. A bidder may take the fund for say Rs.180. If no bidders had been willing to bid for a fund of Rs.252 as opposed to Rs.300 then the sum is carried over until the next month. In such a case each member would only contribute Rs.2 the next month allowing the fund to once again reach a Rs.300 margin.

If bidders come forward to bid on amounts below Rs.300 as they usually do, then the fund's thirty month stipulation is reduced to the number of months it takes for all bidders to receive funds. One fund of thirty members, I observed was closed after twenty months and bidders had to pay Rs.200 each while receiving on an average Rs.185 as a lump sum. Each bidder lost Rs.15 but was guaranteed a certain degree of security for those months that he was a member of a kudi. If a crisis occurred a member could raise a sum of cash as a bid or a loan. Furthermore, I found that landlords were willing to advance money to kudi members more readily because their economic credibility was higher.

The problems of kudi are two fold. In the first instance, all members must pay stipulated monthly dues or the system will collapse. Secondly, the system is illegal as it is considered competition to national banking schemes.

1. The house of a prosperous landlord



2. A tenant household



## CHAPTER THREE

HISTORY AND SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

The caste composition of an areca belt village is highly variable and its caste hierarchy is subject to dispute. An ideal of a fixed caste hierarchy is affirmed during būta ritual, but, as we shall see, such an ideal does not permeate everyday life. In order to understand the multiple variables which influence a caste's claim to status in a village, I must first familiarize the reader with a few basic historical facts. This diachronic perspective will also facilitate a better understanding of the South Kanara village pantheon which will be discussed in the next chapter. Furthermore, I may briefly discuss the current attitudinal changes which villagers are undergoing in respect to caste and class identity.

History

South Kanara District comprises the major part of the land area traditionally known as Tuḷunad. Local historians claim that Tuḷunad is part of the land referred to in the Purana as Nāga Lōka or the Land of Cobra.

Legends concerning the history of Tuḷunad are numerous. These include oral legends about local deities, often involving historical events. Legends, pāddana, are sung during būta possession rituals, when būta dancers become possessed and the stories of patron būta are re-enacted through dance, music, and song.

Brahmanic stories also exist which give broader legendary accounts of Tuḷunad's history. I will summarize one story told to me by a Shivalli Brahman:

Tulunad was originally a dense forest ruled by a Maila caste king called Dandaka. He fell in love with the daughter of the sage Shankaracharaya. Shankaracharaya would not agree to give his daughter to this king. Dandaka was well versed in sorcery, mantravādim, and attempted to take control of Shankaracharaya's mind. Shankaracharaya cursed this king and because of his curse, shāpa, Dandaka's kingdom was reduced to a forest which remained uninhabited for hundreds of years.

After some time, Maila kings once again settled in this place as well as men of many other castes. This was a time of many wars and quarrels. Then the sage, Janardana Agni, came to Tulunad seeking a place to perform austerities, tapas. The Maila king who reigned at that time went to the place where he stayed with his soldiers. The sage fed him and all of his men from one cow. The king was impressed and demanded the cow, but the sage refused to give it to him, saying that he needed it to feed those who came to seek his blessings. The king seized the cow. The sage's son, Purusha Rama, (sword elder to Rama), became enraged and took an oath to kill the king. This he did and after doing so, he divided the land of Tulunad into thirty-two villages, selecting good Tuluva people to live in them. He then told these people that good men would come to Tulunad and advise them.

The informant's opinion was that Brahmans and Jains had come to the District and reformed the cruel practices of the Maila kings who had reigned before their arrival.

The early history of the District is fragmentary. Tulunad was originally comprised of numerous small kingdoms. The region came under the control of the Alupa kings who were well established by the seventh century A.D. Thirty-five kings ruled this dynasty which extended until the fifteenth century. Alupa kings became subordinate feudatories of the following Karnataka overlords:

| <u>Overlord</u>                 | <u>Reign</u>           |
|---------------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Kadāmbas of Banavasi         | 4th - 7th Century A.D. |
| 2. Western Chalukyas of Ballami | 6th - 8th Century      |
| 3. Rāshtrakulas of Manyakheta   | 8th - 10th Century     |
| 4. Haysalas of Dwarasamudra     | 11th - 14th Century    |
| 5. Vijayanagara emperors        | 14th - 16th Century    |
| 6. Nayakas of Keladi            | 16th - 17th Century    |

According to the historians Gururaj Bhat (1969) and B.A. Saletore (1936) the Alupas, although subordinate, had considerable independence of rule in Tulunad until the Vijayanagara rule.

In the fourteenth century the Vijayanagara empire annexed Tūḷunad without a record of bloodshed. Their rule was one of political consolidation, general prosperity, and social integration. It was also a time when many immigrant groups entered the region. Vijayanagara kings recognized and supported established local chieftains placing them under the overlordship of appointed regents. Feudal kingdoms were set up in this manner and most of Tūḷunad was organized into provinces.

A few kingdoms, however, were allowed to exist as semi-independent principalities. One of these kingdoms was Vitla. Most feudatories at this time supported the Jain religion which had become popular around the twelfth century. The southern regions of the District were an exception however. The Kingdoms of the Kumbla Varma Ballal and Vitla Samantha Ballal did not support Jainism but were rather influenced by strong Brahmanic custom.<sup>1</sup>

Varma and Samantha Ballals took up vegetarianism and employed Brahmans to cook and perform pūjā for them. Ballal families maintained a close connection to both Brahmanic deities and local gods and they were responsible for a partial Brahmanization of local gods.

The Vijayanagara empire fell at the end of the sixteenth century and it was followed by the Nayaka empire. Then, in 1763, the Sultans of

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<sup>1</sup> The Vitla and Kumbla kings maintained distinct identities. They did not intermarry and in fact established marriage alliances in different ways. The Kumbla Varma kings followed a kinship system similar to that of neighbouring Kerala kings. According to this system, princesses who derived royalty from matrilineal descent were married to a son of one of eight Shivalli Brahman families. The purpose of this intercaste marriage was strictly for the sake of progeny. Daughters of this union were married to Brahmans whereas sons were married to Nayar women. The eldest son of the reigning queen became the manager of the Kingdom. Vitla Samantha Ballals were the prestigious heads of the matrilineal Samantha Ballal caste who married endogamously.

Mysore attempted to gain control of Tulanad and were confronted by the British. The British finally defeated the Muslim leader Tippu Sultan in 1799 and they annexed the region. In 1801, the District became part of the Madras presidency and remained so until 1956.

Several waves of immigrants settled in the District from the sixteenth century onwards. At the beginning of the sixteenth century, hundreds of Govda Sarasvat and Sarasvat Brahmans fled from Goa to escape being forced by the Portugese to convert to Christianity. Many became traders, merchants, and medical practitioners in South Kanara. Of particular importance to the southern regions of the District where fieldwork was carried out, was the immigration of large numbers of Havik Brahmans around 1800 from the areas of Sirsi and Gokarna in North Kanara.

Haviks had passed through the Malnad region for centuries before actually settling there. Early Havik travellers were paid to perform special sacrificial rituals, yajana, and were not agriculturists.<sup>1</sup> The Haviks who came to southern South Kanara about 1800, however, were areca agriculturists. Upon their arrival, they found that Karadi Brahmans, another group of areca agriculturists, had already settled in the southern regions of the District<sup>2</sup>.

Data that I was able to gather from the records of the Vitla king infers that Haviks were welcomed to the kingdom and given tracts of forest land for areca cultivation as long-term tenancies. These Brahmans became

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<sup>1</sup> Havik stories claim that Havik ritual specialists were beckoned south around 1000 A.D. by King Cherkal of Kerala who wanted to employ them as yajana performers.

<sup>2</sup> Karadis are a Marati speaking caste from Maharashtra who fled from the Poona area during the Panipet war. A number of Marati agricultural labourers of the Nayaka caste also settled in South Kanara at that time.





influential due to their industrious nature and knowledge of astrology and ayurvedic medicine. After some time they were accorded a position of ritual respect in the Vitla kingdom. Haviks became village leaders, guri-kāra, and were honoured at royal functions by the king.

Data I collected elsewhere, however, indicated that Haviks did not receive similar treatment in all places. Native Tulu speaking Shivalli Brahmans considered Haviks inferior, and in places where Shivallis were a dominant caste, Haviks were given no role in village rituals and were considered outsiders. A rise in Havik economic position as a result of a boom in areca-nut prices after World War II, however, has been accompanied by an acceptance of Haviks as equals by Shivallis, who will now interdine with them.

#### Social Stratification: Traditional Patterns

The caste composition of each village in the Panaje-Vitla area is highly variable and within the boundaries of many villages one does not find a full set of neutral service or ritual service castes. Tables 4 and 5 summarize data on house language, hereditary occupation, varna, and when appropriate, origin of migration, of the most common Hindu castes found in the region. Shudra migrant castes listed here have resided in the region for at least forty years and have, by and large, become acculturated by local customs, forms of worship, etc.

The Tables also group castes in terms of descent reckoning. Castes which comprise Table 4 claim descent matrilineally by a system known as aliya santana, or descent by sister's son. The system is similar to the marumakkathayam system found throughout Kerala. The system has recently been altered by law to give sons rights in the hereditary land of their lineage segment. However, the aliya santana system does, in fact, still persist.

Table 4 Aliya Santana Castes

| Name  | Varna               | Traditional Occupation            | House Language               | Origin           |
|---|---------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------|
| Samantha Ballal   | Kshetriya           | local kings                       | Tulu                         | native           |
| Bants   | Kshetriya<br>Shudra | paddy agriculturists,<br>warriors | Tulu                         | native           |
| Billavas  | Shudra              | toddy tappers<br>bowmen           | Tulu                         | native           |
| Maḍivala  | Shudra              | washerman                         | Tulu<br>Malayālam            | native<br>Kerala |
| Mūlaya  | Shudra              | potter                            | Tulu                         | native           |
| Gānigas   | Shudra              | oil presser                       | Tulu                         | native           |
| Baṇḍāri   | Shudra              | barber                            | Tulu<br>Malayālam            | Kerala           |
| Manyani   | Shudra              | agriculturists                    | Malayālam                    | Kerala           |
| Balyaya   | Shudra              | astrologer &<br><u>vaidya</u>     | Malayālam                    | Kerala           |
| Parava  | untouchable         | <u>būta</u> dancer                | Tulu                         | native           |
| Meyara<br>(Same group now<br>becoming Makkalu<br>Kattu) | untouchable         | agricultural<br>labourer          | Tulu                         | native           |
| Maila   | untouchable         | basket makers                     | own language<br>Maly. & Tulu | native           |
| Malekudiyas   | hill tribe          | cane products<br>agriculturists   | Tulu                         | native           |

Table 5 Makkalu Kattu castes.

| Name  | Varna       | Traditional Occupation   | House Language                               | Origin  |
|---|-------------|--|--|---|
| Shivalli  | Brahman     | temple priests<br>paddy agriculturists                             | Tulu   | native  |
| Havik   | Brahman     | areca agriculturists<br><u>yajana</u> performers                   | Havik Kannada                                | North Kanara and Shimoga (over 150 years ago) |
| Karadi  | Brahman     | areca agriculturists   | Marati                                       | Maharashtra (200 yrs ago)                     |
| Govda Sarasvat                                  | Brahman     | shopkeepers  | Konkonee                                     | Goa (over 100 years ago)                      |
| Sarasvat  | Brahman     | shopkeepers  | Konkonee                                     | Goa   |
| Sthanicka<br>(originally <u>aliya santana</u> ) | Brahman     | temple servants  | Tulu   | native  |
| Acharya<br>(originally <u>aliya santana</u> )   | Shudra      | Smiths - Tulu<br>(different types Malayalam of smiths inter-marry) | Tulu<br>Malayalam                            | native<br>Kerala                              |
| Nayaka  | Shudra      | agriculturists   | Marathi                                      | Maharashtra (200 yrs +)                       |
| Gowda   | Shudra      | agriculturists   | Kannada-Tulu<br>(mixture: <u>adi basha</u> ) | Deccan Plateau (100 yrs)                      |
| Baira   | untouchable | agricultural labourers   | Kannada                                      | North Decan (200 yrs)                         |
| Nalike  | untouchable | <u>būta</u> dancers  | Tulu   | native ?                                      |

Castes in Table 5 follow a system of patrilineal descent known as makkalu kattu. This system is ideally that followed by patrilineal Havik Brahmans. However, the criteria chosen for categorizing untouchable groups as patrilineal or matrilineal was based on traditional rules governing death pollution and the number of days pollution observed by different affinal relations. This criteria was chosen because many untouchable groups are little concerned with descent as they have traditionally held no property or tenancy rights. The right of maintenance among these groups and most agricultural labourers is primarily determined by the availability of work. Residence patterns are duolocal with a preference for neolocal residence when feasible.

The same pattern holds true for aliya santana Shudra caste tenant and garden labourer families. Claus (1970) has accurately described a bilateral kinship pattern existing among these groups biased to one side or the other by economic factors. Economic factors overshadow kinship relationships, at least in terms of short-term social organization, which by necessity is duolocal. The residence group is the basic social unit and the matrilineal or patrilineal composition of these units is based more on economic and demographic considerations than the unilineal kinship principle. The descent group as such has little material importance and where rights of land are concerned it is the lineage segment and not the lineage which is important.

Dominant castes, defined in terms of a control of the available work force (Beck, 1972, 16) are most commonly Shivalli Brahmans, Havik Brahmans, and Bants. Haviks dominate in the villages where areca cultivation is widespread, whereas Bants and Shivallis dominate in villages where paddy cultivation remains the chief crop. I will briefly portray how the ideal

of a stable caste hierarchy is expressed traditionally and then discuss the ways in which various castes identify themselves in relation to other castes of reference.

The social structure of Tuluṇad has traditionally consisted of a two-fold contingency: a caste hierarchy and a class structure based on land ownership and tenure. Social stratification in both realms was, and to some degree remains, overtly supported by intercaste village level būta rituals where a hierarchical order of prasāda taking indicates caste rank<sup>1</sup>. I will examine caste ranking in būta ritual shortly. At present I want to stress that during būta rituals, all castes comply with ritual procedure for fear of the wrath of the būta whose power must carefully be orientated by an exact following of ritual procedure. Outside of the context of būta ritual, however, many castes do not agree on their place in the caste hierarchy. Caste disputes have traditionally existed among touchable and untouchable castes. It may be emphasized however, that disputing castes do not reject the notion of caste or the caste system, but reckon their place in the hierarchy differently than castes ascribed above them.

Table 6 summarizes a few of these disputes expressed in terms of prescriptive commensality relations between castes. It may be pointed out that the presence of migratory castes and a multiplicity of castes with distinct linguistic and geographic backgrounds has complicated the scheme of caste hierarchy. Claims of status superiority are manifold. What has most often been emphasized by castes are their relationships to what I may

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<sup>1</sup> Prasāda is a term indicating blessings. In this case, the blessings are those of a būta through the medium of a substance it comes in contact with during ritual proceedings. Prasāda is sandalwood paste or turmeric in most būta rituals.

Table 6 Intercaste Disputes Expressed vis a vis the Commensality Idiom.

| Jati                     | Billava   | Maçivala  | Gānigas  | Bardāri   | Balyaya  | Acharaya  | Meyara  | Baira   | Malikudiyas   |
|--------------------------|---|---|--|---|--|---|---|---|---|
| House Language           | Tulu  | Tulu  | Tulu Malayalam   | Tulu  | Malayalam  | Tulu  | Tulu  | Kannaḡa                                       | Tulu  |
| Varṇa                    | Shudra  | Shudra  | Shudra   | Shudra  | Shudra   | Shudra  | untouchable                                   | untouchable                                   | untouchable hill-tribe  |
| Jatis they will eat with | Bant<br>Maryani<br>Gowda<br>Nayaka<br>Mulya<br>Maçivala *<br>Bardāri *      | Bant<br>Maryani<br>Gowda<br>Nayaka<br>Mulya                             | Ballal<br>Bant<br>Maryani<br>Gowda<br>Nayaka<br>Mulya                              | Ballal<br>Bant<br>Maryani<br>Gowda<br>Nayaka<br>Mulya                   | Ballal<br>Bant<br>Maryani<br>Gowda                                   | Shivalli<br>Brahmans<br>Havika<br>Brahmans<br>Kota<br>Brahmans  | All Shudras                                   | All Shudras                                   | Bant<br>Maryani<br>Gowda  |
| Jatis they will eat with | Maçivala *<br>Gānigas<br>Bardāri *<br>Balyaya<br>Parava<br>Acharaya<br>Jogi | Billava<br>Maçivala<br>Gānigas<br>Bardāri<br>Acharaya<br>Jogi<br>Parava | Billava<br>Maçivala<br>Gānigas<br>Bardāri<br>Balyaya<br>Acharaya<br>Jogi<br>Parava | Billava<br>Maçivala<br>Gānigas<br>Balyaya<br>Acharaya<br>Jogi<br>Parava | Billava<br>Nayaka<br>Majiya<br>Maçivala<br>Bardāri<br>Jogi<br>Parava | Covda Sarasvat<br>Brahmans<br>Sthanicka<br>Brahmans<br>Samantha<br>Ballals<br>Malayali<br>Acharayas<br>Jogi<br>All non-Brahman castes | Parava<br>Nalike<br>Malla<br>Meyara<br>Koraga | Parava<br>Nalike<br>Malla<br>Meyara<br>Koraga | Mulya<br>Billava<br>Maçivala<br>Bardāri<br>Acharaya<br>Jogi<br>Parava<br>Baira<br>Malla<br>Mera |

\* This indicates disagreement between caste members.

call a caste of reference.<sup>1</sup> Such a caste maintains a position which is undeniably higher or lower than the caste in question and identification with this caste may be based on secular or ritual service relationships, relationships of superordination-subordination, or even a common language.

The following are examples of how lower castes identified to me their traditional caste position in relation to castes of reference.

1. Billava identify themselves in relation to Bants because they have similar marriage and death customs. An identification also exists in terms of their related military status, which Claus (op. cit.) has noted is an expression of feudal-tenancy relationships.
2. Mūlaya identify their status by their role as cooks for Bants and Govdas during marriage and death feasts.
3. Elder Mēyara identify their status as the original inhabitants of the region who later became hereditary servants, Mūladā Holeya, of landlords of the Brahman, Bant, and Ballal castes. In return for their secular and ritual services, landlords granted them special rights and privileges. For example, each Mēyara family was allotted fruit trees, a vegetable plot and enough land to grow fifteen to twenty quintals of paddy in addition to payment in kind. Expenses for marriage and ritual functions were born by the landlord. In return, Mēyara were personal servants of a landlord's family. If death came to the landlord's family, death pollution was observed by his Mūladā Holeya and if the landlord's family partitioned, Mūladā

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<sup>1</sup> The perspective utilized here is interactional. Harper has noted that for this part of India, interactional relationships are basic to hierarchical caste ranking and are more important than considerations of the extent to which a caste approximates Brahmanical standards of purity. However, as Harper notes, attributional theory based on claims of purity, forms the basic belief structure within which the details of hierarchy are worked out or at least expressed (1959, 192).

Holeya would also be divided among the branches of the landlord's family. Mūladā Holeya cut wood for all funerals of members of the landlord's family, and collected wild plants required for the ritual which precedes the cutting of the first paddy crop.

Elder Mēyara defined themselves as the bodyguards and personal servants of their landlords and not as slaves. They considered that their special rights and privileges gave them higher status in relation to other groups of untouchable workers. To distinguish their perceived position they refused to eat beef and would not remove dead cattle from sheds.

Other castes, however, chided Mēyara because of their servitude. For this reason many Mēyara terminated their indentureship when given the opportunity. The young in particular welcomed the change from payment in kind to payment in cash. They also welcomed the opportunity to become landowners even if the land given them was worthless durcast land. It may furthermore be noted that some Mēyara groups have begun to alter their kinship system from matrilineal to patrilineal. Such a kinship alteration is not necessarily linked to the acquisition of durcast land. Because this land is acquired and not hereditary, it may be given to whomever a father chooses. The change-over is not for legal reasons or because Mēyara wish to emulate patrilineal castes. The move is, in my opinion, partially symbolic; an effort to break with their past and stress their new identity.

4. Mūlaya, Manyani, and Marati Nayaka identified their status in opposition to other Shudra groups by the fact that they were allowed to milk Brahman cattle and were allowed to carry the milk from one Brahman house to another. Brahmans express their perspective of these groups by utilizing the purity idiom. The action, however, is more



symbolic than pragmatic, as milk is not thought to convey pollution. These three castes are most commonly chosen as servants in Brahman households.

5. Marati Nayaka identify themselves in relation to Karadi Brahmans because of their common Marati house language and the claim that they originally came from the same region of Maharashtra State. Karadi Brahmans perform a ritual function at Nayaka marriages and they allow Nayaka to grind coconut for them in grinding stones which are placed outside of their kitchens. Nayaka define their relationship to Karadi as cikkamma to doddamma, literally little mother to big mother.
6. Baira stress that the Mari-Mansara jati members will eat their food, thus signifying their superiority. I have also heard a Baira woman stressing her superiority to a Mēyara in a location where Haviks were the dominant caste by pointing out that both the Baira and Havik Brahmans spoke Kannada as their mother tongue.

Castes comply to an established order of caste ranking during būta kōla out of fear, and such ranking is justified by those at the top of the hierarchy by reference to a purity-pollution idiom. The use of this idiom is much as Dumont has characterized it, i.e. as a mode or language for the discussion of hierarchy. The idiom however, is used only by the elite and not the average non-Brahman villager. The average Shudra attempts to identify himself and his status by any one of a number of means. As Beteille (1967, 24) noted, many frameworks of status evaluation exist and all these frameworks are not mutually reducible to one underlying structural principle.

Sanskritization as a mode of status elevation has been utilized by untouchables and low caste Shudras in South Kanara, As I have noted, Mēyara have given up beef eating and, in fact, deny that they ever ate beef. Touchable

castes, such as Billava, have added a hōma to their marriage performances at a new caste temple near Mangalore and most castes now discourage divorce publically, although in practice separation and remarriage are not uncommon. It must be emphasized, however, that Sanskritization no longer conveys the exclusiveness or the status it once did.

The question to be asked at present is: who are caste groups trying to impress by newly adopted Sanskritized behaviour? Brahmans are certainly not impressed and neither are competing caste groups. For example, Baira and Mēyara are two untouchable castes competing for status. Baira eat beef but still claim superiority to Mēyara who do not. The point is that Sanskritic behaviour does not impress anyone but members of the group which is changing. In order for ritual claims to be effective they must be backed up substantially.<sup>1</sup> It may also be noted that, viewed in the total context of caste status, it is of little benefit for lower castes to imitate Brahmans when other prestigious castes, such as Bants, do not. It is obvious that the elite are actively involved in the westernization status scale.

Sanskritization persists as a process of status differentiation, but it has been superseded by other status scales based on westernization and an ideal of achievement. These scales afford new identities in the wake of the Land Reform Act and in lieu of opportunities to gain durcast lands, government jobs, engage in home industry, and become educated. Whether or not durcast land is fertile, immediate cash payment diminishes overall

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<sup>1</sup> For example, goldsmiths are vegetarians, wear the sacred thread, conduct daily pūjā, etc., but are still considered of low status in the village hierarchy because they do not have the economic strength to win respect.

security, or education provides jobs, is another question. The point is that a secular ideal has been set in motion. This does not mean that caste ceases to be important, but that class has gained new importance in a time of changing priorities and new opportunities.

Today, a relaxation of intercaste relationships is apparent. Inter-dining of non-caste members of like social class is not considered an inadmissible offense. When I conducted an interdining survey, many youths were unsure of a number of traditional prescriptive rules concerning who they could or could not eat with. They most often consulted their mothers, for their fathers were also unsure about these rules. The wearing of areca sheath caps, muttāle, bearing distinctive caste markings, mandatory twenty years ago, is now rare. Most garden workers, despite caste wear similar caps which are undergoing stylistic modifications. The nature of areca agriculture may itself have influenced this relaxation. Workers of many castes work closely together in the gardens, perform similar tasks and receive the same pay. It may furthermore be noted that because of the garden owners' parentalistic role toward his workers, caste panchayat have traditionally been weak in this region. Therefore, corporate caste decisions or mandates are not operative.

Thus far, I have focused my attention on the labourer. I may now briefly consider the elite! The traditional non-Brahman landlord is losing his absolute power in the village as a result of the Land Reform Act which has placed a ceiling on the amount of land he may own. In addition to land legislation, the attraction of the city and the desire to gain status via westernization has caused many of the elite to migrate to the cities. As Claus has written:

Today the elite views the acquisition of professional occupations, particularly in the medical profession, as occupations which enable them to maintain their high status. The title "Doctor" is for the

modern Bant what the title of the Ballal was for their ancestors. Few among the elite any longer imitate Brahmanical ideology and no one today would don a thread.

(1970, 77)

This shift in status ideology now makes it possible for the son of a tenant Bant, for example, to marry the daughter of a former landlord if he becomes a doctor or is able to obtain a status job offering security, such as a government or bank job. In keeping with this change, large dowries are developing to replace caste endogamy as a means of ensuring class distinction.

Most of the upcoming elite are little effected by Sanskritic values. However, highly westernized Bants and Govda Sarasvat Brahman merchants have attempted to raise their status still further by means of a quasi-Sanskritic identity via bhakti movements, such as the Sai Baba movement, prevalent in the District. Generally, this use of Sanskritization does not precede westernization, but follows a successful attempt at raising one's status by westernization. This latter process is perhaps a continuation of the historical process whereby kings such as the Vitla king, after gaining power and prestige, took on a Sanskritic identity. In the present case, a member of the westernized elite can establish a traditional identity or facade by participation in a bhakti movement which counterbalances substantive materialism with traditional idealism.

While some Govda Sarasvat Brahman and Bant businessmen undergo qualified Sanskritization, more orthodox Havik and Shivalli Brahmans are undergoing a process of westernization and de-Sanskritization. This is not to say that orthodoxy is less respected. Some Brahmans still use orthodox ritual purity as a political and prestige lever against other more liberal Brahmans. However, the young are not attracted to the rigorous training needed to memorize classical texts and perform pūjā properly. Few boys are coming forward to become priests, purohita, and house pūjā are becoming

abbreviated. In many houses, the young treat pūjā more as convention than as a ritual act of consequence. One outcome of this situation is the attraction of many Brahman youths to bhakti movements and saints, such as Vivekananda, whose teachings integrate traditional ideals within the context of westernization. Another manifestation of this trend is an attempt being made to rationalize traditional rules and regulations via a scientific outlook which seeks to substantiate their validity. One of the clearest expressions of the scientific rationalization of traditional customs is apparent in the revitalization of ayurvedic medicine. The revitalization movement takes as its basis ideology that indigenous medicine and ayurvedic principles are scientifically sound and their use and application are justifiable. Many literate Brahmans have been attracted to this type of rationalization. I will elaborate on this subject later.

## CHAPTER FOUR

RELIGION

South Kanara has a strong Brahmanic tradition as well as a local tradition of būta cult worship. In North India, būta is a term denoting malevolent ghost, but in South Kanara, the term is used for all local deities.<sup>1</sup> Various būta are described in local stories as the army of Ishvara, as descended forms of Brahmanic deities, or as spirits of unusual men and women.

The worship of būta is the predominant non-Brahman socio-religious activity of the District. Large yearly būta rituals held at village shrines and smaller periodic rituals held at shrines or at the homes of villagers serve numerous functions. Possession rituals have curative, oracular, and political aspects, as well as judicial functions which involve the maintenance of social structure. Smaller rituals involving the ritual feeding of būta serve to enhance family solidarity and personal devotion. This chapter will concern itself with some of the broader implications of būta worship and the interaction between the būta cult and Brahmanic Hinduism. In Parts Two and Three I will examine būta in respect to disease etiology and healing rituals.

Introduction

Anthropologists working in diverse regions of South India have characterized local deities as impure and subordinate to or dependent upon

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<sup>1</sup> Various types of wandering spirits are referred to generally as būta and these must be distinguished from the būta presently under discussion. My concern in this chapter is to investigate those būta which are worshipped by South Kanara villagers and not shrineless roaming spirits which inhabit points of transition.

Brahmanic deities (Dumont, 1959; Gough, 1959; Harper, 1959, et al.). For example, Dumont in his structural study of Tamil deities states,

The inferior meat eating gods themselves exist only by the sanction, the guarantee, of the superior gods. Only the presence of the latter maintains the reality of the former.  
(ibid., 83)

Dumont and Harper portray a set of hierarchical service relationships present on a supernatural plane which mirrors intercaste service relationships in the world.

Mandelbaum (1966; 1972) has extended this logic and has suggested that a general division of labour exists between Brahman and local deities based on their transcendental and pragmatic functions.<sup>1</sup> According to his interpretation, the routine rituals of transcendental Brahmanic deities are necessary in order to maintain the social system, insure fertility, and guarantee general prophylaxis against misfortune. The propitiation of local pragmatic deities, on the other hand, is more concerned with curing and fulfilling immediate individual needs.

Shivalli and Havik Brahman informants provided me with data supporting these interpretations of the position and character of local deities. Opinions of these informants were substantiated by the conspicuous arrangement of Brahman and local deity shrines and acknowledged service relationships between local deities and Brahmanic deities. However, I will argue in this chapter that these interpretations are one-sided and do not represent the way in which the non-Brahman views these deities.

I will maintain four objectives in this chapter. First, I will examine the non-Brahman's relationship to local deities and his attitude towards

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<sup>1</sup> Mandelbaum (1972) has noted that hill tribes do not distinguish between the pragmatic and transcendental aspects of Brahmanic and local deities. I have observed the lack of such a distinction among most non-Brahmans in South Kanara.

all deities in general. Secondly, I will document the process of acculturation. In the present context the process will be seen in relation to the Brahmanization of the local cosmology and ritual procedure. A third aim will be to investigate the formal significance of what appears to be the Brahmanization of local pantheons and religious ideology in South Kanara. I will support Kolenda (1964) and Sharma (1970) in questioning the extent of Brahmanization among non-Brahman castes. Data will be provided which will demonstrate that many apparent formal changes in local ideology result, in reality, from only superficial and ambiguous acknowledgements of Brahmanic conceptualizations. These conceptualizations are not understood by non-Brahman informants<sup>1</sup>. Finally, I will focus attention on the non-Brahman representation of power. I will suggest that the conceptualization of power as qualitative, transmutable, and unstable underlies non-Brahman attitudes and actions towards all deities, be they local būta or Brahmanic gods, dēva.

### The Būta Cult

The būta cult of South Kanara is based around local deities who are considered to have a dual capacity of destruction through disease and death and blessings through fertility and prosperity. More important than a deity's name or form is the place where it has been established. Būta of the same name may be associated with different castes or levels of society in the same areas, i.e. a būta such as Panjuli which assumes the form of a

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<sup>1</sup> It is curious that Dumont does not pay credence to this fact although he has noted that in cases where features of western culture are adopted by Hindus, such are often technically misunderstood and 'recast' into the previous pattern. I am suggesting that the same phenomena has occurred in respect to features of Brahmanic culture. See Louis Dumont (1952).



wild boar, may be a family būta for Harijans as well as a kingly, arasu būta, for the village as a unit<sup>1</sup>. The power attributed to any deity is in large part determined by the fame of a particular shrine, by a deity's elaborate idol, by the force of the deity's possession in a particular spirit dancer, the quality and articulated purity of a ritual conducted at a shrine, or by a shrine manager's shrewdness.

The numerous būta of Tulunad can initially be categorized into two broad iconographic groups: those with animal shapes and those with anthropomorphic shapes. Animal shape būta are possibly the earliest totems of Tulunad and include the forms of wild boar, tiger, and cobra. The stories of these būta are sung and danced as offerings to respective deities. Dancers, who become voluntarily possessed by these deities in ritual circumstances, dress and paint their bodies in a variety of ways to depict the character of each būta. Music and dance provide further dimensions in expressing the character of a particular būta.

Būta may be male, female or androgynous, young or old, or comparatively mild or fierce. Many būta take on androgynous status. Some male būta wear mustaches to show masculine strength. Sex, as an overt desire, is not expressed in ritual. Sex is minimized in būta pantheon relationships and one does not find a common pattern of būta who have consorts. When a būta is joined to another būta of the opposite sex, via legend or astrological pronouncement, the pair most commonly takes on a fictive kin role. In most cases, a būta pair will be housed in separate shrines and the most common būta relationship is that of elder brother-younger sister. This relationship expresses an ideal of closeness which must be understood in light of

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<sup>1</sup> Some būta like Panjuli may be worshipped as the family būta of a high or low caste. However, other būta, such as Pili (tiger) are worshipped only by higher caste landlords.

A būta shrine, sthana



Non-Brahman būta  
priests, patri,  
possessed at a būta  
ritual, kōla.



A wooden idol of the būta, Deyangalu housed in its shrine. The headdress denotes the būta's status as a kingly, arasu būta, of the village.



A buta dancer dressed in gold and silver ornaments, coconut skirting, and a red cloth costume awaits to receive possession of a buta from a non-Brahman buta priest. His facial markings and headdress depict the buta's character, as does the legend he chants while waiting to receive possession.

the aliya santana kinship system. According to this system, an elder brother is the manager of a younger sister's inherited property. Prescriptively, a man's first allegiance should be to his sister's children and her property and not to his wife's children and her property.

When a dual sex būta pair exists, it is not uncommon to find villagers allocating particular functions to each. For example, a male būta such as Deyangalu, may be presented with cases of theft and sorcery, māṭa. Ullalde, his younger sister, may be appealed to for fertility and the cure of children's diseases. In this case the male būta takes on a role often in keeping with the male's ideal position as manager of the aliya santana household whereas the female būta, like the woman in the aliya santana system takes on the responsibility for fertility and prosperity<sup>1</sup>. However, when one būta of either sex exists alone, both types of cases will be presented to it.

Different būta performances link the particular regions of social space in which the South Kanara villager functions. Most būta have a specific allocation of living space although their influence is not necessarily confined to this space. Būta exist on the level of family (kuṭumba), locale (sthala), village (grāma), and inter-village (sīme). Most major būta rituals are held between November and May. The nēma, an elaborate būta ritual which generally takes place once a year, marks a larger sphere of social interaction. Smaller būta possession rituals, kōla, are held at least once a year at shrines or at a devotee's house as a vow or may be held by any villager who sponsors it for special reasons. Būta rituals, such as ageḷu and tambila mark the villager's affinity to more immediate social spheres such as

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<sup>1</sup> It is often the case in būta legends that a female būta will be portrayed as dominant or of greater strength than male būta in the same legend. This may be explained by reference to a woman's position as the defender of the matrilineal descent principle.

the hamlet or family. These performances, be they yearly events stressing general welfare or periodic events asking for immediate aid, are more intimate affairs and express a man's personal obligations and responsibilities to a family būta or a būta he personally has faith in. Each level of social interaction has its own distinctive būta ritual, but the differences between these rituals primarily involves elaboration.

The ideals of village and intercaste unity are expressed at village level būta cult rituals. In fact, the large būta possession ritual, nēma, may be viewed as an indication of a village's social and economic stability. A properly managed nēma indicates strong village leadership and the amount of offerings collected and people gathered indicates the ascribed strength of the būta. This ascribed strength has important ramifications in regard to village intercaste co-operation and law; for the būta functions in the capacity of judge and law enforcement agency. Moreover, būta kōla provide an occasion and means by which low castes may express their grievances against their higher caste landlords in a socially acceptable manner.

As I have already noted, the social structure of South Kanara consists of a ritual caste hierarchy and a class structure based on land ownership and tenure. Each village has its own hierarchical order of castes based on both ritual purity and caste dominance. Among higher castes of similar ritual purity, dominance is accorded to the caste which controls the labour force and land resources. Among lower castes, dominance is determined both by numerical strength and by caste relationships with dominant or ritually superior castes. Social stratification in both realms is overtly supported by intercaste būta rituals. Caste rank is expressed by an order of prasāda taking or the taking of blessing from a deity. Rank is again emphasized in these rituals by a hereditary roll call, wherein the honorific plural is

ascribed to high caste groups<sup>1</sup>. At such times, particular families and individuals of status are recognized.

Another way in which caste strength is expressed is by the occupation of key ritual roles. Būta ritual priests who initially become possessed by būta during kōla may be of any touchable caste. However, the occupants of these roles are often a member of a caste which is either numerous in the area or which maintains a particularly close relationship with the dominant caste. The choice of who occupies this role is covertly influenced by the patrons of the shrine, but the choice is overtly made by the būta itself through the medium of possession. Either the būta will possess the successor to the role or make a pronouncement through the possession of another village member at a time of planned or spontaneous possession. As the incumbants to these roles are chosen by the local būta, they are not questioned.

Village hierarchical stratification is stressed at būta kōla, but of equal importance is a stress on inter-caste co-operation. At such times, all long-standing castes are ascribed necessary functions essential to the performance of the ritual. Such jobs are usually in keeping with hereditary caste occupations. For example, oil pressers will supply oil for ritual torches and washermen will purify ritual materials. By emphasizing both caste hierarchy and caste interdependence, būta rituals provide an occasion for inter-caste and intra-caste confrontation and reconciliation.

A central temple, dēvasthāna, or būta shrine co-ordinates specific levels or reaches of social space via the super-ordination of inclusive būta

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<sup>1</sup> Different būta use the plural form of address to members of different castes. For example, the Vitla Malaraya būta utilizes the honorific plural when addressing Tulu, Havik and Konkonee Brahmans. However, Ullalde būta addresses Konkonee Brahmans by the singular form. Pil Chamundi, Rakteshvari, and Jumadi būta use the plural form to address the non-Brahman Bant caste and all Brahman castes. These differences accord with the caste of the managers of these different shrines.

jurisdictions. Village level būta have relationships with other local būta and they are ascribed specific duties. These duties may be as guardians of a particular direction, as bodyguards, or as collectors of revenue. Some caste have specific caste būta-heroes, and these būta are encompassed within a village cosmology. Such būta demonstrate their allegiance to other village būta by either visiting their shrines during a yearly possession ritual or via recognition of these būta through their pāddana. Feudal type relationships and obligations are often expressed in these legends and the legends serve as a charter for overt social relations such as the relationship between tenant and landlord.

#### Brahmanization of the Local Pantheon

The feudal theme was utilized by Brahmans to create a pantheon hierarchy which has subsumed local deities under Brahmanical deities which Brahmans have claimed are ritually superior.<sup>1</sup> A survey of existing historical documents indicates that in the south of the District, where fieldwork was conducted Shivalli, Kota, and Havik Brahmans, under the sanction of local kings, constructed and managed large temples and organized local būta worship around them. Such organizations provided a small scale bureaucracy for local kings and facilitated the collection of taxes and the solidarity of the kingdom<sup>2</sup>. Brahman priests, tantri, were appointed to larger būta sthāna and a structured system of pūjā worship was established. The services

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<sup>1</sup> Although each village pantheon is unique, all pantheons have a common central būta known as either Brimmeru or Nāga Brahma. Thurston has noted that Brahmans cleverly coupled this būta with the Brahmanic deity Brahma. "Brimmeru has been transformed by Brahman ingenuity into Brahma, and all the bhuthas are converted into ganas or attendants of Shiva. In the pardhanas, Brimmeru is represented as the principal bhutha and other bhutha are supposed to visit his shrine." (Thurston, 1909, 252).

<sup>2</sup> For example, rent and produce levies were collected by landlords and kings at routine būta nēma. The Vitla sīme king utilized a yearly būta kōla called a kajambu as a means to take a crude census of the children born in the sīme. Each child was required to be taken to the kajambu in order to be blessed by the king's personal būta and be registered.



of the tantri were required for the performance of perfunctory ritual cleansing rites. Today such rites are mandatory for any large būta function in which būta possession is to take place. Būta are not treated as impure; rather the purity of būta, which is stressed by non-Brahman ritual experts is re-emphasized by the presence of the Brahman tantri.

Under the patronage of royal courts and small kingdoms, an organized system of būta worship was developed within an administrative framework, Music and elaborate idolatry developed under such patronage and the chief būta of the area was involved in the king-making process itself. The necessity of a būta for the king's coronation still exists today in the Vitla area of southern Tulunad where I conducted fieldwork.

Brahman priests incorporated local būta into a localized religious hierarchical structure defined by a Brahmanical vantage point. Some būta were overtly incorporated into this structure by being made subordinate bodyguards to Brahmanic gods. These būta were treated as ritually inferior by Brahmans who placed their shrines outside the temple yard. Būta of particular importance were given Brahmanical ascription vis-a-vis identities as avatāra of Shiva, Vishnu, or Devi. In other words, these būta were elevated or co-joined with Brahmanic gods, or Brahmanic gods were thought to have descended to the realm of būta. In some cases these deities were offered both būta and dēva types of rituals.

The overt coupling of local and Brahmanic deities and the Sanskritization of ritual has not caused thematic or value alteration to occur in the minds of non-Brahmans. Non-Brahmans acknowledge the claims of Brahmans that feudal type service relationships exist between būta and Brahmanic dēva, but they do not consider local gods to be impure or dependent upon Brahmanic deities. Non-Brahmans have accepted and indeed mimic impressive Brahmanic

ritual techniques, but have interpreted Brahman conceptualization within an indigenous socio-religious framework based upon ancestor worship and obligation to the dead, as opposed to a conceptualization of rebirth. For example, the terms karma, mōksha, joga, and māya have been assimilated by non-Brahman villagers, but the meanings of these words have taken on a distinctly non-Brahman character. The term mōksha is used by non-Brahman villagers when interacting with Brahmans, but each maintains a separate interpretation. A Brahman astrologer may say to a non-Brahman villager, "You have such and such problem because two of your ancestors have not reached mōksha." The non-Brahman villager will interpret this to mean that two of his ancestors are wandering in flux without a living space and have not been joined to the ancestral line. The non-Brahman may then employ Brahman tantri to perform a rice offering ceremony for him in accord with Brahmanic custom, shastra. He may alternatively approach a non-Brahman mantravādi if he suspects that a wandering būta has captured the ancestor spirits and ask him to perform a būta chasing ritual. After either of these two rituals have been performed the non-Brahman villager will consider that the spirit has been joined to the ancestral line.

The term 'past karma' may also be used by an astrologer when telling a non-Brahman villager why a disease has come to his body. The villager may take this to mean that an ancestor's vows to a būta or dēva are outstanding and are causing trouble to the family unit. In this case, offerings will be made to appease the deity in question. To the non-Brahman, karma does not imply rebirth, anymore than mōksha implies union with a transcendental Brahma or atma. The term joga is used by non-Brahmans to speak about power which is unseen but which appears in some shape or form. The term māya is juxtaposed to joga to imply that which is unseen but felt and the term is used to describe a būta's unseen effect and presence. This is a far cry

from the literary rendering of maya as illusion and joga as union.

The non-Brahman does not consider būta and dēva as having anti-pathetic qualities or contrasting specialized functions (Claus, 1973, 232). He does not ascribe dēva and būta with distinct transcendental and pragmatic functions, and in fact he does not distinguish between these two functions. Būta and dēva are both propitiated impromptu by kōla, ageḷu and tambila in times of individual need. Nēma or kōla are performed at least once yearly to insure general welfare and prosperity.

Non-Brahmans consider all embodiments of power to have similar potentiality although they may take on different characteristics. A non-Brahman is more interested in the way in which a particular deity is worshipped and its ascribed power in a particular area, than its name or the class of deity it is. In order to elaborate this point, I will briefly discuss two themes implicit in ancestor worship, the most rudimentary form of Hindu religious activity. I will then describe a process of transformation whereby ancestor spirits may become būta. By an understanding of this process, it will become evident why a Brahmanic reordering and renaming of deities has been accommodated by non-Brahmans without causing ideological conflict or changes in existing beliefs.

### Ancestor Worship

On the 7th, 10th, 11th, or 13th day after the death of a Shudra villager, a feast is conducted in his honour. Ten or sixteen banana leaves representing the collective ancestors of the lineage will be spread in a line, each containing the favourite food of the deceased. Another leaf, specifically for the new dead spirit will be placed at a small distance from the others. Until this feast is conducted the new spirit of the dead is thought to wander outside the house and is fed near its grave or funeral pyre.

During the feast, the spirit is invited into the house, and its separate leaf is joined to the leaves of the collective ancestors, indicating that the deceased has entered the fold of the lineage ancestors. There are variations between castes and elaboration of this ritual exist but the theme remains the same.

Ancestors are given a place in the family house, and this place is demarcated by a hanging plank on which a copper tumbler of water is kept. Food is momentarily placed on the plank before meals, and new clothing is placed on the plank prior to being worn to festive occasions. Ancestors are offered food at all important family life-cycle functions and among some castes a partial fast is observed on the new moon day of each month in recognition of the obligation of the living to the dead. During the month of Āti, which corresponds to June-July, a special feast is given to all ancestors of the lineage. On this feast day, during times of family difficulty, or on the occasion of a wedding, it is common among non-Brahman castes for a family member to receive the possession of an ancestor spirit who may bless the family as well as influence and guide its decisions.

The villager is controlled by his obligations to the dead, as well as his responsibility to living lineage segment members. Ancestor spirits monitor family activity and are considered to become easily angered and be capable of causing illness and misfortune if displeased. Rituals to these spirits emphasize the collective responsibility and mutual obligations of lineage segment members to the dead and each other. Gough ( 1959 ) has pointed out that the fear of the dead to some extent offsets the expression of direct and overt aggression between lineage segment members, for the dead may seek revenge.

Numerous varieties of angry and dissatisfied spirits of the dead are thought to exist and are greatly feared. These spirits may be controlled

if proper gifts and rituals are performed for them or they may be chased away by mantravādi. If rituals are performed to satisfy and control these spirits, they may be transformed into allies - but allies with a capricious nature to which one is continually obliged.

Two important themes essential to an understanding of būta, and qualitative power in general, emerge from this brief discussion of spirits of the dead. The first theme is that those who have a particular power, character, or desire while living, are thought to retain it in death. The second theme is that this power is qualitative and reversible. Even a malevolent, dissatisfied spirit may be made into an ally if proper rituals are conducted. I may present three examples to illustrate how these two themes are basic to a notion of transmutation which underlies the non-Brahman conceptualization of būta. These examples will describe how ancestor spirits may be transformed into būta having spheres of influence larger than those enjoyed by an ancestor spirit.

#### The Transformation of an Ancestor Spirit to Būta Status

At a particular shrine of the female būta, Bhagavati, it was noted that her ritual rice offering, naivēdya, was polluted on a number of consecutive occasions. One instance involved a girl who was bringing naivēdya prepared at her house to the sthāna. On the way, due to no apparent or visible cause, the pot fell from her hands and touched the ground, thus becoming polluted and unfit for offering. An astrologer was consulted and he postulated that:

1. The spirit of a deceased Brahman tantri (a brahma rakshasa) was playing the mischief.
2. A spirit, yakshi, who lived in a tree near the sthāna had been misplaced when the tree had fallen in a storm.
3. The spirits of two former non-Brahman būta priests, pātri, who had died, desired places in the temple and were the major cause of the havoc.

The astrologer stated that a special ceremony could be performed which would set right his second finding without much difficulty. However, the first and third findings required a decision by community members. A meeting was called and two possible solutions were suggested. The spirits could either be driven away or they could be installed and worshipped in the sthāna. If the spirits were driven away, there was no assurance that in the future they would not come back and create similar problems. Therefore it was decided that the best thing would be to install a bronze idol, mūrti, of the former tantri and the two pātri and to offer regular pūjā to them. Two years after the occurrence villagers were already calling these spirits of the dead būta. It may be noted that the incident occurred at a time when pātri were needed for the sthāna, and reaffirmation of respect for the pātri role might make recruitment easier. This idea was suggested to me by an informant who was involved in the political aspects of the sthāna.

The second case concerns a Brahman landlord and a Shudra worker who was employed by the Brahman family for a number of years. The worker, a migrant from another District, had requested that the landowner retain a portion of his pay each week for safekeeping. The worker suddenly died leaving the whereabouts of his family unknown. A few months later, the members of the Brahman family suffered from high periodic fever and one of their buffaloes suddenly died. Upon consulting a local astrologer, they were told that the worker had become a būta because his pay was withstanding and his desire for it was great. The Brahman was told that he must offer a meal for the būta yearly, under a designated strychnine tree. Local labourers have begun to worship this būta and present it with offerings for various reasons.

The third case occurred just as I was leaving the District and is perhaps the most dramatic. A Shudra villager of a patrilineal caste was

having numerous fights with his brothers, sisters, and their husbands over the partitioning of family property. One day he informed me that he was performing an elaborate ceremony, known as Narayana bali. The purpose of this ceremony was to transform the spirit of his deceased virgin brother to būta status. He wanted to do so in order to gain control over other troublesome house spirits who he said had been bribed by other family members and his affinal relations. Following the Narayana bali ceremony, the new būta would become the chief būta of the family, and its allegiance would be to the ancestral house where būta rituals would be performed.

My informant hoped that peace would be restored to the family by way of its fear for the new būta. I asked him why the spirit needed to be a būta and could not act on behalf of the family as an ancestor spirit. He replied that if his brother remained an ancestor spirit, he could not act on the behalf of one family member against another without displeasing the collective ancestors. However, as a būta, with other spirits under 'its' jurisdiction, the new būta could direct actions against troublesome family members, if not directly, then indirectly.

These three cases concern men who died in a state of accentuated desire and who have become būta after their death, either by their own efforts or by the efforts of others to utilize their power. The examples portray a conceptualization of power which is at once qualitative and transmutable. An examination of local būta myths indicates that different būta have been described as once being virtuous ancestors or heroes, spirits of those who were unvirtuous or who died with great desire, or forms of dēva who have taken būta form. In other words, ancestors or dēva may become būta by a process of transformation and būta may become dēva by a process of coupling akin to transformation.

## Power

A conceptualization of transformation is based on the idea that power is qualitative and capable of manifesting in different forms. What villagers worship is a source of power, shakti, in any form, because through worship this power may be controlled and manipulated toward benevolent ends. Moreover, this power may be increased or decreased by ritual techniques. What is important to the villager once a manifestation of power is recognized is how to direct and control it. Two methods are employed to accomplish this end.

The first method is to provide an environment which stresses order and control expressed by the idiom of ritual purity. Būta and dēva rituals and ritual possession take place in an environment of purity and the elaborate details of ritual procedure stress order. A low caste būta dancer is often restricted from eating meat, drinking liquor, having intercourse with his wife or coming in contact with impure substances prior to ritual būta possession<sup>1</sup>. Before possession he must take an oil bath signifying his purity. The dancer's personal purity and the purifying rituals performed prior to possession orientate and control the shakti called into presence. Purity may furthermore be viewed as a radiating protective field (Harper, 1967, 188).

The second means of establishing control is by ritually feeding toddy, the blood of a freshly killed fowl, or rice coloured by red kumkum powder symbolizing flesh, to a būta. The control stressed here is control

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<sup>1</sup> Purity is stressed to such an extent for the possession of some arasu būta that a dancer may be required to undergo a ritual of symbolic death in order to dance for the būta. By undergoing this ritual he will exclude himself from the possibility of being contaminated by the birth or death pollution of a kinsman while he is possessed by the būta.



gained by the satisfaction of desire and the control based on a gift relationship. The būta is dependent on devotees for food, and as long as the būta's power is recognized and it is fed, its power will be directed toward benevolent ends.

When the būta is satisfied and its power has been directed or controlled by purity, its power is benevolent. When a būta is angered however, its effect is malevolent. Local legends describe in great length how a būta may be angered by the slightest provocation, such as an unfulfilled vow. In many legends, the victim of a būta's anger may be a victim of circumstance as opposed to being a villager who has intentionally committed a misdeed. The point stressed is that power is unstable. Any form of power is capable of acting in opposite manners, i.e. towards good or bad ends. This conceptualization that power maintains opposite aspects is further demonstrated by the worship of the Brahmanic deity Tirupati Venkatramana in South Kanara. This dēva is worshipped as both the būta Mūditaya, literally the one from the east, and as Kāḷa Bairava, or black Bairava. The former is considered rajasa and mild and the latter tamasa and cruel. Thus, two possible aspects of the dēva are accentuated. Another example of the contingency of the good and bad aspects of power may be noted in local legends. The term shapa, meaning curse, and vara, meaning blessing, are commonly interchanged and used to imply their opposite meaning. This lays emphasis on the fact that curse and blessing are dual characteristics of power.

### Būta Classification

I may now briefly turn my attention to a critical examination of possible būta classification. A tentative classification would be to group būta according to their dominant characteristics. Tamasa, or būta

described by informants as wild, dark and fierce could be juxtaposed to rajasa or kingly būta. The būta who are most often described as tamasa are said to be incapable of becoming kingly būta and do not wear an elaborate headdress, nor do they paint their faces completely with turmeric powder during possession rituals as kingly būta do. They are often controlled by mantravādi, who are said to capture them, utilizing them to invade regions of social space to carry out mercenary missions. Furthermore, tamasa būta are danced by the Nalike caste, the lowest caste among the three castes of būta dancers.

This manner of speaking about būta is useful in some contexts but as a categorization it leads to difficulties. Kingly būta may also come under the influence of a mantravādi<sup>1</sup> and in some locations, Nalike būta dancers are possessed by kingly būta. In one village, for example, a Nalike būta dancer becomes possessed by Jatadhari būta, a kingly vegetarian būta said by Brahmans to be a direct incarnation of Shiva. Furthermore tamasa is a term applied to some būta who have shrines as well as other uncontrolled būta who have no shrine and wander aimlessly.

It might appear tempting to apply a tripartite classification to deities of the village pantheon as Harper (1959) has attempted in Shimoga. Tamasa būta could be treated as subordinate to kingly būta and kingly būta

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<sup>1</sup> Data I collected on witchcraft in South Kanara and northern Kerala did not substantiate material presented by Gough (1959). Gough claimed that high castes primarily suspect low caste members of witchcraft, that witches are solely of low castes, that spirits used in witchcraft are ritually polluted like low castes and that witchcraft is monopolized by low caste specialists. Būta used for witchcraft may be either tamasa or arasu būta and non-Brahmans would certainly not consider these būta as impure. Furthermore, not all witchcraft specialists, mantravādi, are of low castes. On the contrary, several upper caste families are famous for witchcraft.

subordinate to Brahmanic dēva. This would establish a correlation between these deities, the Brahman, Shudra, and Harijan castes, and the three innate proclivities, guṇa, of satvika, rajasa and tamasa. Such a correlation was suggested to me by Brahman informants, but it does not reflect the way in which non-Brahmans view their deities. It would be misleading to surmise for example that arasu or kingly būta are thought to control tamasa būta. When two such deities exist in proximate areas, an arasu būta or Brahmanic dēva is not appealed to when a "tamasa būta" is divined by oracle to be the cause of misfortune. Rather, each deity exists in its own right, acknowledging allegiance to other area deities, be they Brahmanic dēva or local būta, as a sign of respect to these deities and their patrons.

#### Chapter Conclusion

Conclusions may be drawn which accord with the objectives of the chapter. First, it has been established that Brahmans and non-Brahmans do not view local deities in a like manner. Distinctions like pure-impure, malevolent-benevolent, and pragmatic-transcendental are essential to the Brahmanic view of būta and dēva, but they are not basic to the non-Brahman mentality and certainly do not dominate his relationship with būta.

For the non-Brahman, no clear-cut division of labour exists on the supernatural plane whereby būta and dēva are accorded specific and distinct functions in relation to pragmatic and transcendental ends. In fact, these ends are not distinct. Villagers turn to both dēva and būta in times of need. But, as in mundane life, the villager approaches a more familiar source of influence for his more personal problems which may need immediate attention. Local būta can be directly approached during periodic ritual processions, and

dramatic rituals establish the credibility of the būta's immediate presence. Fire walking, sword slashing and eating of live chickens, which are common features of various South Kanara būta nema, reaffirm the common man's devotion<sup>1</sup>.

A second area of concern was the process and extent of Brahmanization in respect to local būta customs. Different būta performances link the particular regions of social space in which the South Kanara villager functions. Kingly or arasu būta who appear at the centre of a local cosmos have often been coupled or upgraded to dēva. We may call such a process Brahmanization, but we must qualify this statement just as we qualified the villager's use of such terms as mōksha and karma. While it is true that some legends connect particular būta to Shiva, Vishnu, or both these Brahmanic deities, such ascription has not altered the non-Brahman villagers perception of these deities. The overt coupling of local and Brahmanic deities has not caused thematic or value alterations to occur.

A third intention of this chapter was to correlate the non-Brahman conceptualization of power to his attitude toward all deities. The non-Brahman treats all forms of divinity as pure, not for reasons of status, but for reasons of protection. Power is qualitative and transmutable. A būta is orientated and controlled by ritual technique which emphasizes order by the purity idiom and by multifarious details and procedures. Control is again emphasized by a second theme of mutual obligation. By satisfying the desires of a būta, it is made dependent on a man's offerings, gifts and praise. In the words of one informant:

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<sup>1</sup> It may be noted that of late, via a process of parochialization, Brahman temples have, with great success, begun possession rituals as a way of attracting devotees. This phenomenon is complementary to a rise in the popularity of bhakti movements which are centred on saints, such as Sai Baba, who perform miraculous displays of their powers to large audiences.

A būta is greedy for both fame and devotees, which are his food. To get his fame he must offer his devotees order. To appease a būta we give it what it wants but then it must help us. By offering us assistance in return for fame, the būta orders itself.

Būta maintain social institutions and uphold uncompromising principles (Claus, 1973, 239). These principles denote obligations to living and dead lineage members, sanction feudal relationships between landlords and tenants, stress the general themes of ritual hierarchy and caste interdependence, and support the ideal of kin relationships such as the relationship between brother and sister to which I briefly referred.

Būta represent principles basic to the non-Brahman and Brahman's conceptualization of self and society. The būta dancer, through his dramatization of power, ferocity, and desire, portrays the accentuation of co-existent guṇa or characteristics inherent in all men. We shall see in Section Two that the Brahman acknowledges this co-existence of guṇa in other ways, such as by dietary regulations which accentuate his satvika guṇa while tacitly recognizing his rajasa and tamasa guṇa potentiality<sup>1</sup>.

Būta are a magnified expression of what men are intrinsically capable of becoming<sup>2</sup>. By ritual appeasement, men order the personification of their own natural desires. The large būta ritual which takes place in a context of gambling and merrymaking portrays the joga and maya of the būta in men and the co-existence of instinct and order in their world.

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<sup>1</sup> Brahmans and non-Brahmans both recognize the co-existence of all guṇa as inherent in man. By accentuating one guṇa man may achieve dominance of other latent guṇa and thus particular capabilities. This point underlies Sankhya philosophy and the ayurvedic system of medicine. It is also a central point around which many bhakti movements are based and upon which low castes may base claims of achieved ritual purity after an alteration of their caste customs. The meaning of the term guṇa will be elaborated upon in the next section.

<sup>2</sup> I have used the word magnified because villagers use the term būta in a similar manner. An unusually large appetite may be spoken of as a būta in a man's stomach, a large or unusually featured plant or animal may be verbally linked in some way to a būta, and the recently introduced magnifying glass is called būta kannāḍi or būta mirror.

## PART II

THE BODY, MIND, HEALTH, AND DISEASE

This section will consider Brahman and non-Brahman conceptualizations of bodily processes, psychological states, health, and disease. It will also describe the way in which disease is named and spoken about in the vernacular. I will lay emphasis on the ideal of balance which underlies the villager's conceptual framework and pervades health ideology. An important expression of this ideal is vis-a-vis the complementary opposition of hot and cold. A number of anthropologists have noted the extensive use and importance of hot-cold terminology in India but apart from the work of Beck (1969) and Babb (1973)<sup>1</sup> on ritual, detailed analysis of the hot-cold principle has not been attempted. I will document various aspects and usages of the principle and demonstrate how it has served to facilitate communication and interaction between different strata of South Kanarese society and the heterogeneous medical cultures which function within it.

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<sup>1</sup> Beck's study of the control of heat in a ritual context is admirable and Babb has confirmed and elaborated upon her exegesis. As South Kanarese data by and large supports their conclusions I will focus my attention on the importance of hot and cold in other areas of social life.

## CHAPTER FIVE

THE BODYNon-Brahman Conceptualization

It is difficult to elicit a description of the body and its processes from non-Brahman layman. The layman in any society rarely turns his attention to his body or its processes until one of these processes malfunctions or seems to have done so by cultural criteria<sup>1</sup>. When I first interviewed informants in order to gather information about the body, I found that they had difficulty in speaking about processes in abstraction. On occasion, I questioned informants when they were slaughtering chickens and found that they did not regard the organs they removed as definitive parts of a system of life support. They did know, however, the names for most important body organs. This type of observation is common in anthropology. As Needham has noted "... not all members of a society have a clear or comprehensive view of the collective representations that they recognize and express, and none may have an abstract relational conception of their classification as a scheme of order" (1973, XXXI).

I was only able to gather data about collective representations pertaining to bodily processes by being present when patients described their symptoms to indigenous medical specialists. I noted down their descriptions and later discussed them with other informants. In the following paragraphs, I will give an account of the more prominent descriptions I recorded. It will be shown that the non-Brahman's conceptualization of bodily heat is of paramount importance.

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<sup>1</sup> As Fabrega noted of the Zincatan, villagers usually give prominence to concepts of disease causality and not systematic ideas about the structure and function of bodily processes. An understanding of the nature of the body and its processes are generally left to the curer, considered difficult to comprehend and by and large constitute a domain of specialized knowledge. See Fabrega (1973, 87).

The lungs are bags of wind, vayu, filled at the time of a baby's birth by God, referred to by different informants as Devi, Narayana, Shiva, or Brahma<sup>1</sup>. The lungs remain full of breath or wind until a man dies. During sleep, however, breathing ceases and the lungs merely remain full of air for the night. About half of my informants attributed the lungs' function to circulating the wind throughout the body. I use the term 'circulate' here in a loose sense; for most informants did not conceive of wind continuously circulating. A few informants thought that wind was the motivating force which carried blood throughout the body.

Informants did agree that the lungs must remain full of wind and that phlegm, kapha, must not be accumulated in the chest or else it would become difficult to keep the lungs full of wind. For this reason, phlegm must be eliminated whenever possible. In accordance with this idea, villagers will forcefully eliminate mucus from the chest and mouth when they arise in the morning and whenever phlegm accumulates.

The heart is like a well of blood. One informant stated that just as water spreads underground through channels surrounding a well, so blood travels through the channels of the body. Most villagers only had a vague idea of the location of the heart and many made no distinction between the heart and the lungs. Specific complaints about the heart are rare among village illiterates, and chest pains are said to be the curse or touch of a būta.

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<sup>1</sup> No contradiction was presented by the use of different names for God in relation to breathing life into man. As Evans Pritchard noted (1940, 316), "A theistic religion need not be either monotheistic or polytheistic. It may be both. It is a question of the level, or situation, of thought rather than of exclusive types of thought ... these conceptions of spiritual activity are not incompatible, they are rather different ways of thinking about the numinous at different levels of experience."



A single word, narambu, is used to denote veins, arteries, and nerves. Narambu are described as rivers running throughout the body. When a man's body shakes or trembles, a condition called kai-kālu naduka, a narambu weakness, or bloodlessness, is assumed. In general, any unusual movement of the limbs is linked to narambu debility. It is often thought that narambu have become clogged by undigested food or bodily poisons. To rectify this, a villager may alter his diet and take a purgative and a blood purifier<sup>1</sup>.

In more extreme cases of narambu weakness, a villager will brand himself with a hot iron or apply rubefacient and caustic medicines to the afflicted area. Both these procedures catalyze a reaction, shakti, in the body. This reaction quickens the blood circulation and the narambu are cleared of blockage and filled with fresh blood. The branding of children, a practice gradually losing popularity, is performed for a similar reason. Mothers will have a child branded within its first six months of life as a preventive measure against impaired movements of the limbs, lameness, and breathing troubles. Branding sets the body's shakti in motion. On one occasion, I witnessed a woman brand a one month old child near the sternum because of the child's shallow breath. Her reason for this action was that the child's lungs were "closed like the petals of a flower", and she applied heat to make them expand. Other informants I knew branded their babies to increase their shakti against illness, i.e. their power of resistance. Branding of a baby's fontanel is also practiced, but this is to close an orifice through which unwanted forces or spirits can enter. Another time

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<sup>1</sup> Many illnesses are attributed to bad blood, bloodlessness, or a lowering of the quality of one's blood. Certain foods, such as milk, raise the quality of blood whereas other foodstuffs such as brinjal, drumstick, or mackerel are said to aggravate the toxins in the body causing them to be active and surface. This subject will be taken up in detail later.

branding may be done is if a breast-feeding mother has poison in her milk, visha hālu. In such a case, her breast will be branded as an act of purification and to induce her body to eliminate the poisons by drawing them to the surface in the form of a boil.

The centre of the body, i.e. that part which controls life processes is the stomach. After having been chewed, food descends through the mouth of a single, long necked pot into the stomach. Villagers describe the stomach metaphorically as a buttermilk churn. Food is churned and mala, waste, is separated from the food and pushed out the anus by vayu. Another popular description is that the stomach and intestines act like a sugar cane squeezer which squeezes out the essential juices of food.

A symbiotic relationship between man and a limited number of thread-worms is thought to exist enabling digestion to take place. Body worms known as jīvana da huḷa, worms of life, live in the gut under the leadership of a yaJamāna or leader worm<sup>1</sup>. Some villagers claim that this worm is passed on to the child at birth by the mothers breast milk, whereas others think the worm is present as a prerequisite to life itself. These worms play an instrumental role in the breaking down of food substances in the stomach. Some informants told me that these worms produce a substance known as jīvana oshadi, life medicine, which directly assists in the churning process.

The number of body worms will increase above an optimum range if an excess of jaggery sugar is consumed or if undigested food or phlegm accumulates. Informants have observed that children above the age of one and below the age of ten often have a greater accumulation of worms. In their

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<sup>1</sup> Ackerknecht (1946) and Saunders (1954) have reported that the Thonga and Yap Islanders have a similar conceptualization of worms as essential to the digestive processes.

opinion, worms thrive on phlegm and phlegm is increased by the eating of sweet foods such as jaggery and by coming into contact with cold substances. For this reason, cold water is not given to a child and cooling cow's milk is mixed with a slight amount of heating coffee. The correlation of an increase in phlegm and an increase in worms is substantiated by the incidence of night cough in children caused by *Ascaris lumbricoidis* or *Necator americanus*. The larvae of these worms cause a child to cough, and on occasion a child will actually cough up visible worms.

Folk healers and ayurvedic vaidya support this interpretation of worm overabundance by a slightly more sophisticated explanation:

When there is a fire in a house, there are no ants. Like that, if there is heat in the stomach there will be no worms. A child has more kapha and less heat in the stomach so it has more worms. A child sucks its mother's milk and eats only sweet foods. It cannot digest sour foods or pungent foods which increase the body's heat and reduce kapha. As a child grows older his heat increases and kapha decreases so worms cannot thrive so well.

Villagers are cautious about the purgation of worms. They will not purge worms when the body is weak, especially during rainy season and during times of illness and pregnancy. There are two reasons for this. According to indigenous ideology, the body should not be unnecessarily shocked during times of ill health, transition, or weakness<sup>1</sup>. Traditional vermifuges are violent purgatives. Secondly, it is thought that if an excess of worms are purged the digestive power will be weakened, thus making the person susceptible to further illness. For these reasons, the villager does not purge a child of worms until the age of two or three<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> A mode of treatment, such as branding, does not fall into this category.

<sup>2</sup> Roundworm infestation is common after the age of one but young children are not dewormed until they are three. One hundred roundworms consume about 28 grams of carbohydrate and 7 grams of protein a day. This practice of not deworming young children can mean a substantial loss of body nutrients and can precipitate kwashiorkor.

Villagers are observant of their faeces and urine, noting the smell, consistency and colour. An accumulation of undigested foods or substances causes illness by clogging narambu and causing an obstruction to the circulation of blood and wind. Furthermore, villagers think that such wastes constitute a poison which may obstruct the digestive process itself. I will consider the importance given to evacuation subsequently in a section on dietary customs.

Menstruation marks the monthly elimination of spoiled blood by the body. If menstruation ceases for a month or two, it is detrimental for the woman's health as impurities are accumulating. Lack of menses signals concern and family members will take the woman to consult a medical practitioner, if she is not thought to be pregnant. Menses is moreover a time of accentuated heat. Heating foods, such as chillies, are avoided because they increase a woman's menstrual flow. Due to her overabundance of heat during menses, a woman is forbidden to touch cooling plants. For example, she cannot touch betel leaf for her heat is so intense that to touch one leaf of the plant would wilt the whole vine. Elder male informants told me that a woman's heat is so great during menses that if a husband should touch his wife or even gaze into her eyes, his semen would dry up and he would lose his ability to reason and become mad.

A menstruating woman remains separate from house members for three days and then purifies herself by a ritual bath. After this time has elapsed she is purified and regains her social role. Even if menstruation continues, her blood is pure and she may cook or go to a shrine.

During pregnancy, a woman's womb is full of blood and heat. A woman's body should not become too hot or cold during this time or she will abort. For this reason, she is not allowed to eat extremely heating, cooling or gaseous foods. However, a pregnant woman is regarded as having many desires

which are heating. These must be metaphorically cooled, i.e. fulfilled, by a ceremony known locally as bayaketa-madime, the marriage of desires. During this ceremony, held during the seventh month of pregnancy, the woman is offered sweet foods as well as a new sari and ornaments, if the family can afford it. All castes perform such a ceremony. It is generally believed that if a woman's desires are not fulfilled her baby will be misshaped, deaf, or lame. A pregnant woman is furthermore not allowed to attend any social event such as būta kōla, where she may become frightened or excessively excited. Such emotions would cause the body to become overheated, possibly resulting in miscarriage<sup>1</sup>.

The womb is a pot in which a baby grows. This pot is situated in the stomach region and as far as I could determine, no differentiation was drawn between the stomach, the womb, and the intestines. Knowledge about female anatomy is vague. For example, during one delivery witnessed by my wife, confusion arose over a case of prolapse of the uterus. Elderly females present thought that the woman's intestines were coming out.

In recent years, villagers have been saturated with family planning propaganda. When it was first introduced on the village level, the prevalent opinion of what transpires during the family planning operation was that a woman's womb pot was turned upside down so that a baby could not grow in it.

A woman who has just delivered, bānanti, is isolated from other family members for forty days. During this time, she does no work at all, and the new-born child, except for during feeds, is looked after by the bānanti's mother or mother-in-law. Complete rest is needed as her body is in transition and her resistance is low. She is open and vulnerable to

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<sup>1</sup> Moreover, a pregnant woman, should she go into labour, would pollute the temple.

attack by external forces of the spirit world. As her body can easily become nanju, internally poisoned, a special diet must be followed the content of which will be outlined in Part Three. Moreover, her water intake is restricted for the first week after delivery as water is thought to swell the stomach and uterus and prolong the recovery process.

Villagers are aware that intercourse causes conception. However, notions exist which underplay the male's role in producing progeny or at least progeny having his characteristics. One notion encountered both in folk tales and in everyday life concerns a woman directly after her third day bath following her menses. Following her purification bath, a woman's fertility is augmented and it is said that if she has great sexual desire the first man she sees will bear resemblance to her next child if she conceives in that cycle. I asked numerous villagers about this conceptualization and received no clear answer as to why this should be so. The only answer I received was that at this time a woman is in a state of transition and is full of blood. If she is heated by desire, the shape of the baby could be determined by the conforming of her uterus to the shape she saw or imagined. The same is true of intercourse, if she thinks of another man. Another notion is that a child will resemble a lineage ancestor if that ancestor has a particular desire for and interest in a child. Both these notions diminish the importance of the father in an area predominated by matrilineal castes<sup>1</sup>.

A final note may be made in respect to the importance of maintaining an optimum amount of heat in the body. A concern for the control of body heat underlies many health customs such as those just referred to during and after

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<sup>1</sup> This notion supports the tenets of the matrilineal descent system and is as much a social statement as an apperception of a physical process.

pregnancy. I shall stress the balancing of heat in the body with respect to diet shortly. At present I may emphasize that the digestive process and the maintenance and control of heat in the body are the villager's two chief concerns of health.

### Brahmanic Conceptualization of the Body

Brahman and non-Brahman villagers share a common core of folk-knowledge about the body. For example, many Havik and Shivalli Brahmans maintain the idea that worms aid in digestion. However, the Brahmanic cognition of the body is underlaid by a systematic account of body humours and digestive and metabolic processes described in ayurvedic texts<sup>1</sup>. Ayurveda views man as a microcosm of the universe. Before exploring the homologous relationship between the body and universe however, let us briefly outline the basic aspects of humoral ayurvedic pathology. I will not delve into the intricacies of the ayurvedic system at this time because few Brahmans understand anything more than the basic presuppositions of the system. A working knowledge of these terms and principles will facilitate more detailed discussion of ayurveda to be taken up in Part Three.

### The Tridosha

The body and all life is governed by three substantial forces, dravya, called vata, pitta, and kapha. When these forces are in equipoise they are known as dhatu and when out of harmony they are called dosha. In order to understand these dhatu it is necessary to establish their composition.

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<sup>1</sup> Ayurveda, the science of life, is the classical system of Hindu medicine. I will use the term humour as a descriptive aide in explaining how the system works. I do not mean to infer that ayurvedic dosha ideology is equivalent to Greek or western humoral ideologies.

Five primary states of matter called pancha b̄ta constitute all substance. Each of these pancha b̄ta while in its gross state, is made up of structurally ideal units called paramana. Within each unit, one pancha b̄ta predominates the other pancha b̄ta which are present. The following are the names of the pancha b̄ta, the gross states of matter they comprise, their basic characteristics and the senses through which they are perceived.

Table 7 The Pancha B̄ta

| <u>B̄ta</u>                     | State of Matter    | Characteristics                           | Sense  |
|---------------------------------|--------------------|---|--------|
| <u>prithvi</u>                  | solid              | heavy, gross, static                      | smell  |
| <u>ap</u>                       | liquid             | fluid, cold, heavy                        | taste  |
| <u>vayu</u>                     | gas                | dry, clear, light                         | touch  |
| <u>agni</u><br>( <u>tejas</u> ) | light,<br>radiance | dry, hot, subtle,<br>radiation, digestion | vision |
| <u>akasa</u>                    | ether              | subtle, clear, light                      | sound  |

A Brahman invokes these pancha b̄ta daily during the performance of his obligatory p̄jā. The following mantra and ritual materials are employed to represent the pancha b̄ta in Brahmanic rituals which symbolically recreate the universe which exists outside of the body and within the body.

Table 8 The Form and Ritual Representation of the Pancha B̄ta

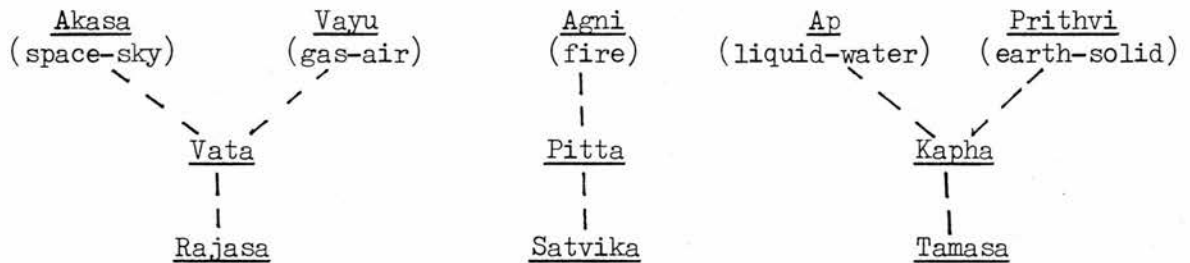
| <u>B̄ta</u> (gross form)  | <u>Mula mantra</u>                              | Ritual material        |
|---------------------------|---|------------------------|
| 1. earth - <u>prithvi</u> | la  | Sandalwood paste       |
| 2. sky - <u>akasa</u>     | ha (space)<br>ka (inside or<br>localized space) | flowers                |
| 3. air - <u>vayu</u>      | ya  | incense                |
| 4. fire - <u>agni</u>     | ra  | <u>dipa</u> (lamp)     |
| 5. water - <u>ap</u>      | va  | water, <u>naivedya</u> |



Each of the three dhatu and its constituent pancha b̄uta have dominant substantive qualities called guṇa. There are three fundamental, interdependent guṇa as well as twenty subsidiary guṇa. The primary guṇa are satvika, rajasa, and tamasa. Satvika is a term denoting reflection or illumination and it is associated with the process of analysis. Rajasa denotes the manifestation of kinetic energy and motion. Tamasa denotes inertia, stability and mass.

The following dhatu, b̄uta and guṇa are correlated:

Diagram II The Relationship Between the Tridhatu, Pancha B̄uta and Triguṇa



According to Brahmanic conceptualization, all existence is substantial and the universe is pervaded by similar processes, principles, and elements arranged in different configurations. Each of the three dhatu, b̄uta and guṇa co-exist in every manifestation of life in varying proportions, causing the pronouncement of distinct characteristics. For example, man's general constitution is construed as being dominated by vata, pitta, or kapha or a combination of two dosha<sup>1</sup>.

In Table 9, the attributes of vata, pitta and kapha constitutions have been summarized. These attributes were collected from five Havik Brahman informants.

<sup>1</sup> Individuals of vata, pitta, or kapha constitutions are prone to dosha imbalance of their dominating tridhatu. In other words, they have a latent tendency toward the manifestation of a set of symptoms associated with this dosha.

Table 9 Signs of Vata, Pitta and Kapha Constitutions

| <u>Vata</u>   | <u>Pitta</u>   | <u>Kapha</u>                  |
|---|--|-------------------------------|
| shortlived (bursts of strength but a short life)      | average lifespan                                       | longlived                     |
| small sized body, lean, dry skinned                   | average body strength                                  | smooth, oily body             |
| restless  | dry body   | mildness of manner            |
| quick in bodily movements                             | incapable of bearing heat                              | slow in action                |
| talkative   | delicate features, freckles, great hunger and strength | not quickly upset or agitated |
| hasty in making decisions and forming opinions        | easily excitable                                       | enjoys intercourse            |
| quickly inspired                                      | tendency to bald                                       | many children                 |
| fearless  | smaller number of children                             |                               |
| unable to bear cold                                   | incapable of bearing pain                              |                               |
| rough and brittle hair, beard, nails, palms and soles | raw body smell, heavy perspiration                     |                               |

The tridhatu may now be examined in relation to bodily process. I will, however, speak of these dhatu as tridosha in order to avoid ambiguity in a later discussion centring upon the seven dhatu or bodily tissues.

Vata is movement in the body and in each cell. According to ayurveda, vata is responsible for the initial differentiation of bodily organs and tissues in the foetus. In general, it is considered the initiator of all bodily actions. The other two dosha, pitta and kapha, are lame and incapable of action without motivation provided by vata.

Vata is responsible for respiration, blood circulation, excretion, sensory experience, nervous activity, speech, mental processes and the stimulation of the internal fire, agni, which facilitates digestion. There are five

basic types of vata, called the pancha vayu. The Brahman remembers these five bodily vayu each time he eats for he invokes them by mantra to assist in the digestion of his food. The following is a brief description of the five vayu:

1. Prana - The vayu of the breath, prana functions to send food downwards, to maintain respiration and heartbeat, to assist in the circulation of blood and to provide wind to the internal digestive fires. Prana is so essential to this fire that it is at times referred to as the fire itself. Prana is spoken of as man's spirit. The seats of this vayu are in the head and chest regions.
2. Udana - This vayu centred in the umbilical region and throat, controls upward movement of bodily substances and processes of speech and thought.
3. Samana - Located in the digestive tract, samana regulates the flow and secretion of digestive juices. It fans the digestive fire and assists in the separation process of essential food juices, rasa, from waste materials, mala. It is instrumental in pushing mala into the intestinal regions.
4. Apana - Located in the lower digestive tract and intestinal regions, it pushes downward unwanted mala through the intestines and out the anus and urinary tract. It is instrumental in controlling the flow of semen and menstrual fluids and holds the foetus in position inside the womb aiding in its expulsion at the time of birth.
5. Vyana - This vayu functions as the primary motivating force of the body's circulatory system. The rasa of foods is carried to the various bodily tissues via this vata. Moreover, it is essential to the body's perspiration process. One of my more educated informants described it to me as the cellular vata.

Pitta is the material manifestation of the internal bodily fire, agni. Agni, in the form of pitta is responsible for hunger, thirst, all digestive processes, heat production, absorption, tissue metabolism and transformation, intelligence, various emotional states, and visual perception.

Pitta has both gross and subtle forms:

1. Pachaka pitta is centred in the stomach and serves to break foodstuffs down into usable rasa and unusable mala. This pitta is co-extensive with the digestive fire of the stomach, kaya agni. It is of paramount importance to man as his health is contingent upon its proper functioning. The strength of this agni and its action determines the quantity of gross heat produced in the body and affects both man's bodily processes and mental capacities.

2. Ranjaka pitta is located in the spleen and liver and gives blood its characteristic red colour.
3. Bhrajaka pitta is located in the skin and gives colour to the complexion.
4. Sadhaka pitta is subtle and is involved with the capacity of the mind for thought and memory.

In addition to these forms of pitta agni, there are a number of other agni in the body. Five agni facilitate the transformation of the five principal pancha buta, and seven agni govern the transformation of food rasa into nutrients acceptable to the seven bodily tissues. I will explain this process subsequently.

Kapha is instrumental in the bodily processes of conservation, preservation, and healing. In the viscid form of mucus secretions, it cools and protects the body. This secretion is especially located where heat and friction are experienced, i.e. in the mouth, nose, eyes, stomach, and joints. Kapha is involved with general body maintenance and digestive cycle. Bodhaka kapha, located in the mouth, moistens food and facilitates the sensation of taste. Kledaka kapha is present in the stomach and mixes with and moistens food facilitating digestion.

Each of the dosha is attributed to a general bodily sensation in everyday speech by Brahmans and non-Brahmans alike.

Table 10 Symptoms Referred to by the Layman's use of Dosha Terms

| Dosha        | Implied Sensation                |
|--------------|----------------------------------|
| <u>Vata</u>  | aching, swelling                 |
| <u>Pitta</u> | burning                          |
| <u>Kapha</u> | itching, coughing, excess phlegm |

The three dosha are thought of and talked about in reference to common symptoms. Complex symptom states, such as swelling and fever, are further differentiated into subtle categories, associated with the vitiation of one dosha or two or three dosha simultaneously. For example, there are three types of swelling described by different dosha.

Table 11 Types of Swelling Related to the Tridosha

| Sanskrit name | <u>Dosha</u> | Description   |
|---------------|--------------|---------------|
| <u>shopa</u>  | <u>kapha</u> | watery        |
| <u>shota</u>  | <u>pitta</u> | spongy        |
| <u>shule</u>  | <u>vata</u>  | pricking pain |

#### The Seven Dhatu

The seven dhatu or bodily tissues occur as a result of the sequential transformation, pāka, of food nutrients, rasa. The transformation process, dhatu posana, of each tissue is initiated by its specific cellular fire or dhatu agni. The entire process of tissue transformation was described to me, metaphorically, as a bodily 'cooking' process. A classical comparison between dhatu metamorphosis and the preparation of ghee was repeatedly cited to me by Brahman informants. This analogy states that milk is churned yielding a quantity of butter, and ghee is made from cooked butter. Similarly, food is churned yielding rasa, and the various dhatu are made by the cooking of rasa by each of the seven tissue fires<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> This view of successive tissue transformation is known in ayurvedic texts as 'kshria dadhi nyaya' and is found in the writings of Charaka, Sushruta, and Vaghbata. The view was rejected by later ayurvedic commentators such as Chakrapani who pointed out that a man who fasts does not undergo

As this conceptualization of dhatu transformation is well known I may briefly outline its steps:<sup>1</sup>

1. Rasa dhatu: This is the digestible derivative of food which contains the pancha buta elements and is necessary for the formation of all bodily tissues. This rasa joins the blood and is converted to blood, rukta, by the action of the rukta agni and localized vata.
2. Rukta dhatu: Derived from rasa dhatu, rukta flows through the body and is converted to mamsa, muscle, by an agni and vata specific to muscle tissue.
3. Mamsa: Muscle is converted from rukta to madhas.
4. Madhas: Fat is converted from mamsa to asti.
5. Asti: Bone is converted from madhas to majja.
6. Majja: Marrow is converted from asti to shukra.
7. Shukra: The vital reproductive element as well as the primary source of bodily vitality. It is the result of majja transformation.

Shukra is not synonymous with semen. Shukra and its finer form ojus are present throughout the body, although concentrated in the seminal fluid. Ojus contains the essences of the seven dhatu and functions to control and structure the various tissues by controlling their respective tissue fires. A loss of ojus causes the wasting away of bodily tissues as well as uncontrolled heat (fever) in the body.

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successive transformations of his lower dhatu yielding an end result of only higher dhatu. He offered another metaphor known as 'kedari kulya nyaya' to explain dhatu subsistence. This metaphor depicts nutrients supplied to various tissues as similar to water supplied to various plots of a rice field by an irrigation system comprised of different sized channels. This later view was known to only one of my educated informants who compared the first metaphor to a general process of anabolism and catabolism and the second to a theory of osmosis.

<sup>1</sup> Opinions vary as to how long the entire process of tissue metamorphosis takes from rasa to shukra. Some informants described the process as taking seven days, others a month, and a few informants considered the process to be continual, its speed being dependent upon the strength of the particular man's body.

Upadhatu and Mala

The body's constitution is made up of dhatu as well as upadhatu, dosha, and mala in different forms. Upadhatu are subsidiary dhatu. Breast milk, for example, is a subsidiary of the rasa dhatu in lactating women. Varieties of skin and cartilage are other upadhatu as is menstrual fluid; an upadhatu which various informants stated was of a bone or blood dhatu origin.

Mala may be distinguished from upadhatu. Mala and upadhatu are bodily discharges. However, mala discharges are tissue by-products or gross bodily waste products resulting from the primary stages of digestion. Some tissue by-products have structural functions in the body and others are gross forms of the tridosha themselves which are replenished or increased by the digestive process.

Table 12 Tissue By-products of Structural Importance

| <u>Origin</u> | <u>Mala</u>                       |
|---------------|-----------------------------------|
| <u>rasa</u>   | <u>kapha</u>                      |
| <u>rakta</u>  | <u>pitta</u>                      |
| <u>mamsa</u>  | secretion of eyes and nose        |
| <u>medas</u>  | sweat                             |
| <u>asti</u>   | hair, beard, nails                |
| <u>majja</u>  | secretion of eyes and oil on skin |
| <u>shukra</u> | no <u>mala</u>                    |

If waste products are not eliminated they block the normal functioning of the dhatu transformation process and the flow of nutrients in the body, and become viable causes of disease. I will explicate this important conceptualization in respect to the cause of disease later.

### The Body- Universe Homology

I may emphasize two points before concluding this brief introduction into the Brahmanic conceptualization of the body. I may first stress the homologous relationship which exists between the structure and processes of the Brahmanic universe and the body as a microcosm of this universe. Secondly, I may say a few words about the Brahman's use of analogical reasoning in creating and interpreting myths and rituals as expressions of universal cum bodily principles.

Brahman ideology has traditionally used the body as a metaphor for the universe and the sun cycle as a metaphor for human development. The sun's passage through twelve solar divisions, rāshi, is described metaphorically as an ascent through a great cosmic body divided into twelve sections. Accordingly, the Artha Veda described the year and body as cycles, chakra, having 360 days and 360 bones respectively. As the year had twelve sectors, pradhayak, so the body had twelve organs. As the body had three divisions nabhvani, namely the head, trunk, and legs, so the year had three basic seasons (Karambelkar, 1961, 80-90). Moreover, just as man evolved through four stages of the socialization process, ashrama, so four yuga, qualitative ages, comprised each macrocycle of the universe.

According to Brahmanic thought, man is a microcosm and a mirror image of the universe. In the Mahabharata, man is compared to the Ashvata (Ficus glomerata) tree because both appear inverted, that is with their roots growing upwards and their branches downwards. The ideas of inversion and of man's



life cycle being complementary to the sun cycle find expression in tridosha conceptualization pertaining to dosha dominance. I may represent this by the use of two diagrams which summarize data supplied to me by a Havik Brahman ayurvedic pundit<sup>1</sup>. Diagram three illustrates dosha dominance in the universe during each of the three primary seasons. Diagram four illustrates dosha predominance within man during the three major divisions of the day and his life cycle. Man's life is said to be a day in the cosmic cycle.

The principles underlying dosha dominance in the universe and in the body follow a basic law of nature. When too much heat is present in summer, a cool wind blows. When this wind mixes with the heat, condensation occurs, causing clouds and eventually rain<sup>2</sup>. In the body, this heat is pitta, the wind, vayu, and the rain, kapha.

A concordance between the body and the universe also exists in respect to ideology pertaining to the flow of heat and vayu in the body of males and females. To explicate a conceptualization of maleness and femaleness associated with the binary opposition of right and left, I shall briefly examine the Brahman orientation in the universe with respect to the cardinal points. East is the rising point of the sun, the bringer of light and time<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> This informant's idea are a variant of ayurvedic theory and not a representation of classical theory which divides the year into six seasons. His model was posed in respect to the South Kanarese universe and its specific seasonal changes. The model was understood by other ayurvedic practitioners with whom I worked and was generally but not completely accepted. Other practitioners offered me considerably more complex models taking into account inter-seasonal changes in dosha predominance.

<sup>2</sup> The point in February-March where overheat causes a cooling wind to be generated is marked by a ritual known in South Kanara as Kedvasa and in Kerala as Erupalhaltu ushalu. Astrologers in Kerala determine the onset of the oncoming monsoon by dangling a string in an open space at noon on this day. They then note when a wind blows the string. On this day the earth is said to be menses.

<sup>3</sup> The term m̄udu is used to denote the east and by extention is utilized to mean 'rising'. Hottu is a term which is used both to indicate time and the sun.

Diagram III Seasonal Dominance of Dosha

new year: Aries, the head of the cosmic body

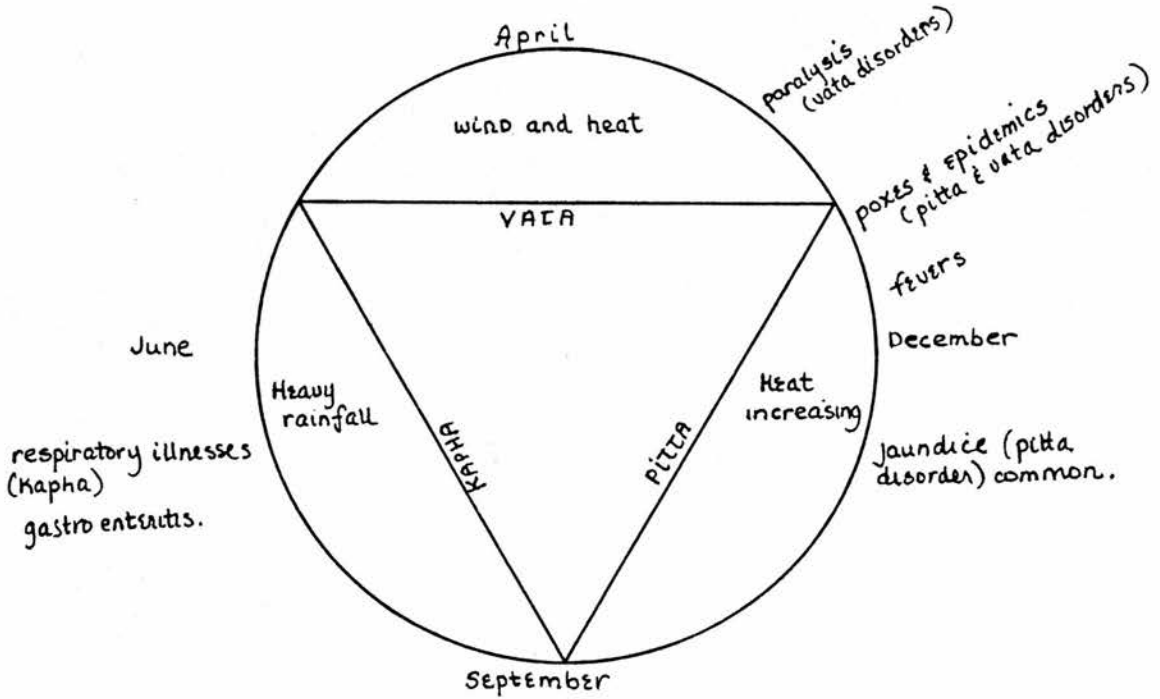
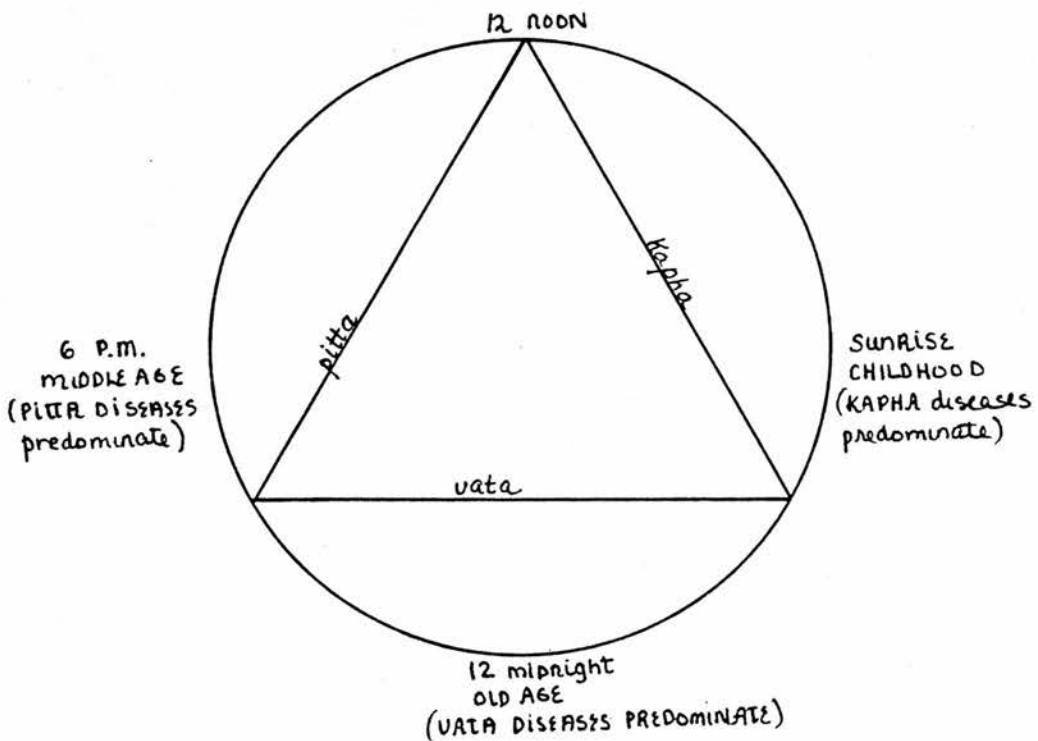


Diagram IV Time, Age, and Dosha Dominance



The sun is the first deity worshipped by the Brahman and the east is faced when auspicious rituals are performed. The sun and the east are the Brahman's primary reference points. Placing oneself in the position of the sun, the east, the north lies to the right and the south to the left.

The passage of the sun, time, to the north is known as uttarāyana and during the sun's northern passage summer occurs. Uttarāyana is a time when water evaporates and likewise a movement to the north indicates a flow upwards. It is for this reason that a Brahman will not sleep with his head to the north, for to do so would be to cause his blood to be drawn to his head thereby creating dosha imbalance. For similar reasons, ayurvedic texts state that a man should not eat facing north. Furthermore, if a Brahman dies during the sun's northern passage it is taken as an indication that he will reach moksha, thus escaping rebirth<sup>1</sup>. The Brahman death ceremony itself is called uttara kriya, stressing the ascent of the dead's spirit upward.

The sun's southward passage occurs during rainy season. The flow south is associated with a flow downwards and descent. The family of a Brahman who dies during the sun's southern passage must perform special compensatory rites, vrata, for the deceased to prevent his rebirth, the descent of his spirit. Less extensive vrata are also prescribed for those who die between noon and midnight, the time of the sun's daily descent, and for those who die during the dark half of the moon cycle<sup>2</sup>. Collective

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<sup>1</sup> Underhill (1921) has noted that the Mahabharata supports this notion in the story of the sage, Bhisma. Bhisma is mortally wounded in combat but remains alive for fifty-four days until the sun makes its northward movement so he may reach moksha.

<sup>2</sup> According to Hindu shastra<sup>2</sup> a human year is a day and a night of the gods, the northern passage of the sun is the day and the southern passage the night. (See the Taittiriya Brahmana III 19,22,I. or Manu 1,67). It may also be noted that a vrata must be performed if a Brahman dies on the dark half of the moon's cycle, Krishnapaksha. According to South Indian astrology, a month begins the day after new moon and ends the day after full moon. The moon and sun cycle are complementary and by analogy Krishnapaksha corresponds to dakshinayana, the sun's southern passage.

ancestor rituals are performed facing southward and do not begin until after 12 noon, a time of descent. Such rituals are performed during the months of July to September, a time when the sun is travelling in a southerly direction.

By their association with the north and south, the right and left take on the attributes of ascending and descending. This conceptualization has influenced ideas pertaining to the body, the macrocosm of the universe. According to Brahman informants, the pitiraka shakti found in the right half of the body flows upward toward the head, whereas the matrika shakti which flows in the left hand side of the body flows downward. Men have a stronger pitiraka shakti and because of the upward flow of their energy, their heat may be more readily turned toward thought. A woman's matrika shakti is greater and this downward flow of shakti towards the womb facilitates pregnancy and delivery.

Ritual and curative techniques follow this orientation of shakti in males and females. Vaidya take a man's pulse from the right side of his body and a woman's from her left side. Palm readers read a man's right palm and a woman's left palm. It is said that a man should conduct important activities requiring clarity of thought while air passes through the right nostril. A Brahman woman will sit on the left side of her husband when taking an active part in ritual (such as the receiving of blessed rice, mantraakshata, at a pūjā) and on the right when her role is passive. During a pumasavana pūjā, a pregnant woman is given ritual medicines to influence the sex of her child. Inhaling these medicines through the right nostril will ensure a male child<sup>1</sup>. During delivery, a woman is sometimes given a piece

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<sup>1</sup> Pumasavana pūjā is performed between the third and fourth months of pregnancy. If a male child is desired, pumasavana is performed on a male day and a male star. The days of the week and the twenty-seven principal stars have male and female attributes.

of the Shiva shakti flower (*Gloriosa superba*) to hold in the left hand. This plant is known for its heating effect on the body and its abortive, labour-inducing properties. It enhances her matrika shakti.

To the Brahman, any principle which applies to one domain of knowledge has relevance to all domains of knowledge. This attitude has fostered the proliferation of metaphorical expression in the arts as well as the sciences. Such expression is symbolic in the metaencyclopediaic sense; "knowledge about knowledge" (Sperber, 1976, 108).

Brahmanic seers have used analogies in order to express succinctly complex notions about universal processes. The same analogies, however, often are interpreted literally by other members of Hindu culture. In India, a devolution of themes from the elite to the masses has occurred and the aphorisms of wise men, rishi, have been translated into popular legends. Local legends have encompassed these aphorisms and they have utilized dominant symbols found in Brahmanic legend. In effect, this means that a common set of themes pervades much of Hindu mythology but these themes are interpreted differently by various members of society in accord with their conceptual framework, level of understanding, and breadth of experience<sup>1</sup>.

Of present interest to us is the fact that vaidya and learned informants often interpret legends and rituals with respect to bodily processes. I received numerous interpretations with such an explanation in mind. For example, Brahman informants would point out to me that Suriya the sun god had a chariot with seven horses, that Agni, the god of fire, had seven tongues,

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<sup>1</sup> Saraf (1970) has shown how the trichotomous theme pervades several levels of Hindu thought and serves to emphasize an essential unity between these levels of thought and diverse frames of reference.

and that a sacrificial fire, yajana hōma, was offered seven sacrifices. These were then depicted as representative of the seven dhatu agni functioning in the body, said to be embodiments of the sun or fire in man. Other examples of this mode of cognitive construction were more complex. In some cases, analogies were drawn between sacred geography, rituals, and the body. I may illustrate one such example involving the kalasha pūjā described to me as a symbolic representation of dhatu transformation. I will first describe the pūjā and then give the informant's interpretation.

A Brahman seats himself before a bell metal, wide mouthed vessel called a kalasha pot. Through mantra, he chants that the neck of the pot is Rudra (Shiva), the body is Vishnu, and that the bottom of the pot is Brahma. In the middle portion of the pot, referred to as its stomach, all the seas, the seven sacred rivers of India, and seven islands are installed by mantra. The seven sacred rivers starting from the Ganges are referred to as the seven mothers. Then water, raw rice, and Tulasi leaf are placed into the pot. Sandalwood paste is stuck to the outside of the pot, and a coconut is placed over the mouth of the vessel and is covered by a white cloth or by areca-nut inflorescence. Kalasha pūjā have many variations in accord with the major pūjā for which they are performed.

The informant, a fifty year old Havik vaidya went on to interpret the ritual in the following manner:

The kalasha pot is the body of the universe and the body of man. In man, these seven rivers are the transformation of the seven dhatu. The seven islands are the seven bodily tissues. The seven rivers and seven dhatu are mothers to man for they nourish him. Raw rice represents pure food from which dhatu are formed and sandalwood paste represents earth and Shiva, while Tulasi represents life and Vishnu.

I may cite an example which will demonstrate the extent to which analogical reasoning is applied in order to emphasize a complementarity between man and the universe. A marriage is not permitted to take place if Jupiter, Guru, or Venus, Shukra, are in a setting position. According to astrology, these two planets are patron planets for the Brahman caste. In the course of conversations with a local Brahman scholar, it was pointed

out to me that Jupiter had male attributes and Venus had female attributes and, moreover, that Venus governed the flow of semen. He then drew an analogy between the orbit of Venus and pregnancy. He noted that according to astrology, the orbit of Venus took nine months (actually 274 days). He then stated that just as it took nine months for Venus to complete its yearly cycle it took nine months during pregnancy for semen to complete the development of the foetus.

## CHAPTER SIX

THE MINDIntroduction

A man of the Balyaya caste, reputed to know much about the curing of mental disorders described dreaming to me. He stated that in sleep the head was occupied by the shakti of the body's five vayu and the five pancha b̄uta. If the head was cool, this shakti, known as nidde Devi, was at rest. If however, there was too much heat in the body, caused by undigested or heating foods, desires, or worries then the pancha b̄uta became provoked. When provoked, the pancha b̄uta would, with the assistance of the five vayu, wander in the mind and enter different rooms, kōne, filled with the tridosha. Some kōne would be filled with pitta and if the pancha b̄uta entered a man would see fire or feel burning sensation in his sleep. Other kōne would be filled with kapha, and cause a man to see tanks of water, rivers, or the sea. However, cautioned the Balyaya, it is difficult to see another man's dreams for what they are. Dreams may be caused by spirits, indigestion, the eating of heating foods, or semen loss. In some cases they may be omens of events to come while in other cases they reveal events which indicate the opposite of what they appear to suggest.

The ideas expressed by this informant were more complex than those of the average layman, but they contain basic conceptualizations shared by all villagers. Before elaborating on these conceptualizations, I may first note that the informant's comments were a curious mixture of Brahman and non-Brahman ideology. In further discussions with the informant, it became apparent that he conceived of the pancha b̄uta, not as bodily elements, but



as personifications of man's instincts; the būta in man. He had made a homology between the internal Brahmanic pancha būta and the village būta in the external universe.

According to the informant, if man's body was in a state of balance, his pancha būta would lie dormant in his mind during sleep, for they would have no desires or provocations. If they were roused, heated, then they would wander in the mind and be attracted to dosha. This attraction would cause man to dream. The first point to be emphasized is that the informant cognized the body and mind as a continuum, a place inhabited by the same pancha būta and the same pancha vayu. An imbalance in the optimum range of bodily heat in this continuum could be brought about by physical substances such as food, or mental states, such as anger or desire.

A conceptualization of a body-mind continuum, responsive to man's total phenomenological environment is characteristic of both non-Brahman and Brahman ideology. Heat or dosha imbalance may have its genesis in either the body or the mind, but once imbalance is incurred, the whole continuum is affected. This conceptualization of a mind-body continuum will prove important to us for two reasons. First, it facilitates the expression of psychological vicissitudes by way of physical symptoms which are bodily expressions of mental proclivities. Body language may be used to express that which cannot be easily communicated directly in a social milieu, due to social sanction. In this sense, physical illness may be used as an idiom to express psycho-social disjuncture. Secondly, conceptualizations of a body-mind continuum means that the mind may be medically or ritually treated through the body and the body through the mind. An illness may be treated by different strategies which seek to influence the body-mind continuum by either manipulating mental-emotional states or by manipulating physiological processes via diet, medicinal herbs, breathing patterns, yoga asanas, etc.

Another point which accords with an emphasis on balance is the importance placed upon keeping the head cool. Villagers strive to keep the head relatively cool as a means to control their mental faculties. A number of cooling medicinal oils are applied to the head whenever the body is overheated or when the mind is in a state of confusion or complexity. The head may be seen as the body's centre of balance and the most sensitive point in the body-mind continuum. It may be metaphorically described as the body's thermostat as well as the abode of the spirit. Moreover, the head is man's central point of contact with the universe. For this reason, it is protected against the heat of the sun by cooling oils and from the coolness of night dew and the full moon. At night, and especially under a full moon, villagers will cover their head with a cloth, lest the cool moonlight give them a headache or the symptoms of a cold.

It may also be noted that semen is associated with man's capacity to control bodily heat and mental heat in the form of emotions. As I have already indicated, Brahmanic ideology places great emphasis on ojus and the retention of semen. Non-Brahmans do not have a complex ideology in respect to semen, but recognize that its loss is associated with reduction of one's virility, bodily strength, and the ability to concentrate and control one's emotions. I met few non-Brahmans who were overly concerned or anxious about losing semen through frequent sexual encounters. Semen loss only became an important consideration when one's faculties of thought or physical prowess seemed to be markedly diminishing. However, it must be kept in mind that semen is also a symbol of control; a Hindu ideal exemplified by the yogi and celibate brahmachariya. By extension, semen loss is associated not only with a loss of mental or bodily control, but with one's control over

his immediate environment including his social relationships<sup>1</sup>.

A final point which I may highlight before actually examining the interpretation of dreams, is the fact that villagers recognize that bodily or mental phenomena may be caused by any one of a variety of factors. In this case, the informant noted that dreams may result from indigestion, eating of hot foods, anger, desire, a loss of semen, or spirit visitation. In other words, internal and external factors may cause a similar phenomena. This notion of the multi-causality of dreams will be shown to have a counterpart in the doctrine of the multi-causality of disease.

#### The Interpretation of Dreams

The Balyaya informant noted that dreams could be caused by bodily imbalances or that they could be omens of the visitation of ancestor spirits or būta. I decided to investigate further how he interpreted dreams as dosha imbalances and how dreams were generally interpreted as omens of events to come.

My queries into the informant's allocation of dreams to dosha imbalances revealed that the informant thought of dosha as substances produced by the eating of different foodstuffs and not as bodily processes as such. He associated the general characteristics of dosha imbalances with a small set of commonly encountered dreams. Flying or falling was attributed to vata imbalances, fire, fighting, and lust to pitta or overheat in the body, and bodies of water to kapha. These interpretations are in fact, commonly used by ayurvedic vaidya.

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<sup>1</sup> Carstairs (1955, 125) perceptively noted that semen loss and weakness were symptoms associated with more than concern over one's virility. He noted that weakness is an expression of chronic anxiety engendered by feelings of guilt and semen loss was often associated with the condemnation of one's elders. I found this association of semen loss to be more common among Brahmans.

An investigation into the interpretation of dreams as omens, shed light not only on the nature of dreams, but on the villager's conception of space-time and the flow of shakti in the universe. Over the course of my last ten months of fieldwork I collected the dreams and interpretations of a number of my closest Brahman and non-Brahman informants. I found that a general pattern of interpretation existed among my informants. Dreams were first classified as night dreams or early morning dreams. Early morning dreams were considered especially important because they indicated events which would happen or events which already were in the process of happening. Night dreams, however, were either viewed as signs of general times to come or more commonly as inversions of events to come. I shall briefly cite twenty dreams and their interpretations, collected from informants who considered them to be omens. In each case I have only noted the event in the dream considered most important by the informant (Table 13).

A question remains to be asked as to why night dreams are considered inversions of the truth and early morning dreams omens of events to come. Some informants simply stated by analogy that as light:dark so truth:deception (the inversion of truth). However, I was given a much deeper insight into the Hindu universe by asking a Brahman astrologer to explain to me the nature of dreams. The informant led me to consider the nature of time in relation to qualitative regions of space.

The informant began his explanation to me by drawing a frequently encountered analogy between one day and one year in relation to the sun's movement. He pointed out that night was analogous to rainy season and early morning was analogous to spring. Furthermore, night and by extension, rainy season, occurred when the sun was in the southwest and early morning occurred when the sun was in the southeast.

Table 13 Twenty Dreams and Their Interpretations

| Dream   | Interpretation                 | Time          | Informant's Caste |
|---|--------------------------------|---------------|-------------------|
| <u>Inauspicious Dreams</u>  |                                |               |                   |
| 1. Taking an oil bath   | Bad times will come            | night         | Shudra            |
| 2. A dead man coming to life  | Trouble to family              | early morning | Brahman           |
| 3. Crossing a river in a boat, flying in air, loosing one's path in a dream | Expect to have to travel       | early morning | Brahman           |
| 4. Receiving gold   | Poverty                        | night         | Shudra            |
| 5. Tank without water   | An argument will arise         | night         | Brahman           |
| 6. Falling building   | Harm to women and children     | morning       | Shudra            |
| 7. Taking medicines and hot water   | Sickness will come             | night         | Shudra            |
| 8. Big feast  | Less food in the future        | night         | Shudra            |
| 9. A crow<br>(a crow is the messenger of Saturn and the ancestors)          | Sickness will come             | night morning | Shudra, Brahman   |
| <u>Auspicious Dreams</u>  |                                |               |                   |
| 1. Copulation with sister   | She will give birth to baby    | morning       | Shudra            |
| 2. Dream of vegetables and fruit  | Child will be born             | morning       | Shudra            |
| 3. Sex with an unknown woman  | A good meal will be enjoyed    | night         | Shudra            |
| 4. Ghee eaten   | Disease cured                  | morning       | Brahman           |
| 5. Milk and curd  | Happiness will come            | morning       | Brahman           |
| 6. Falling into tank and being saved  | Enemy will stop giving trouble | night         | Shudra            |

Table 13 (Cont'd)

| Dream   | Interpretation       | Time    | Informant's Caste |
|---|----------------------|---------|-------------------|
| <u>Auspicious Dreams</u> (Cont'd)   |                      |         |                   |
| 7. Burned by fire   | Long life            | morning | Brahman           |
| 8. Eating faeces, or eating chicken   | Good times to follow | night   | Shudra            |
| 9. Gods and Brahmans  | Generally auspicious | night   | Brahman           |
| 10. Flying in the air and reaching a safe destination, seeing a constellation | Good times to follow | night   | Brahman           |
| 11. Dead body   | Long life            | morning | Brahman           |

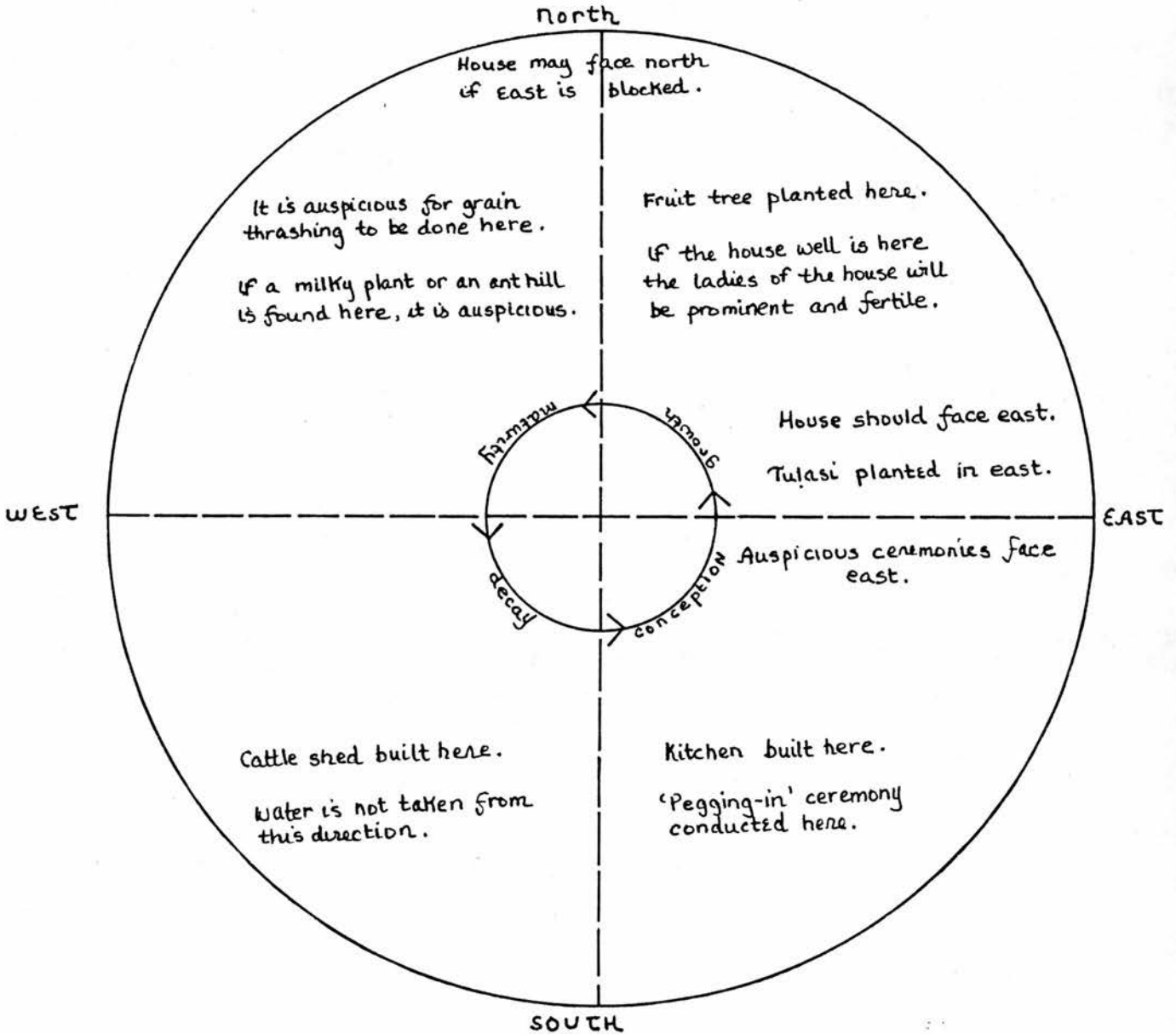
night : early morning  
 rainy season : spring  
 sun in southwest : sun in southeast

The informant then told me that if I wanted to understand night and morning dreams, I must acquaint myself with the attributes of the directions southeast and southwest. To become familiar with these attributes and the attributes of the other cardinal points, he suggested that I study the Vastu Shulpa, a text on traditional civil engineering and house construction.

According to the Vastu Shulpa the orientation of a Brahman house or shrine should follow a prescribed structural formula. When a house is first to be constructed a ritual "pegging in" is conducted. A hole is dug in the southeast corner of the plot and three stones are fixed into position. At this location, the kitchen must be constructed and if this is not possible the kitchen may be located in any direction other than the southwest. Moreover, drinking water can not be taken from the southwest side of the house. To offset the inauspiciousness of the southwest, a cattle shed is built there.

A well is dug to the northeast of the house and it is said that this will make the ladies of the house prominent. A house may face any direction, but south. First preference is the east, and if such is not possible the second choice will be north. Brahmans generally look for a plot in which the south end of the property is blocked, by a hill or another structure which is higher than the house to be built. It is best if the southerly and westerly directions are closed and the northerly and easterly directions are open. It is a good omen if a milky tree is located in the northwest of the property and if one is not found one is often planted. In the northeast a fruit tree should be planted. The data cited, shown in Diagram V, will highlight the attribution of each spatial region.

Diagram V The Orientation of the Brahman House





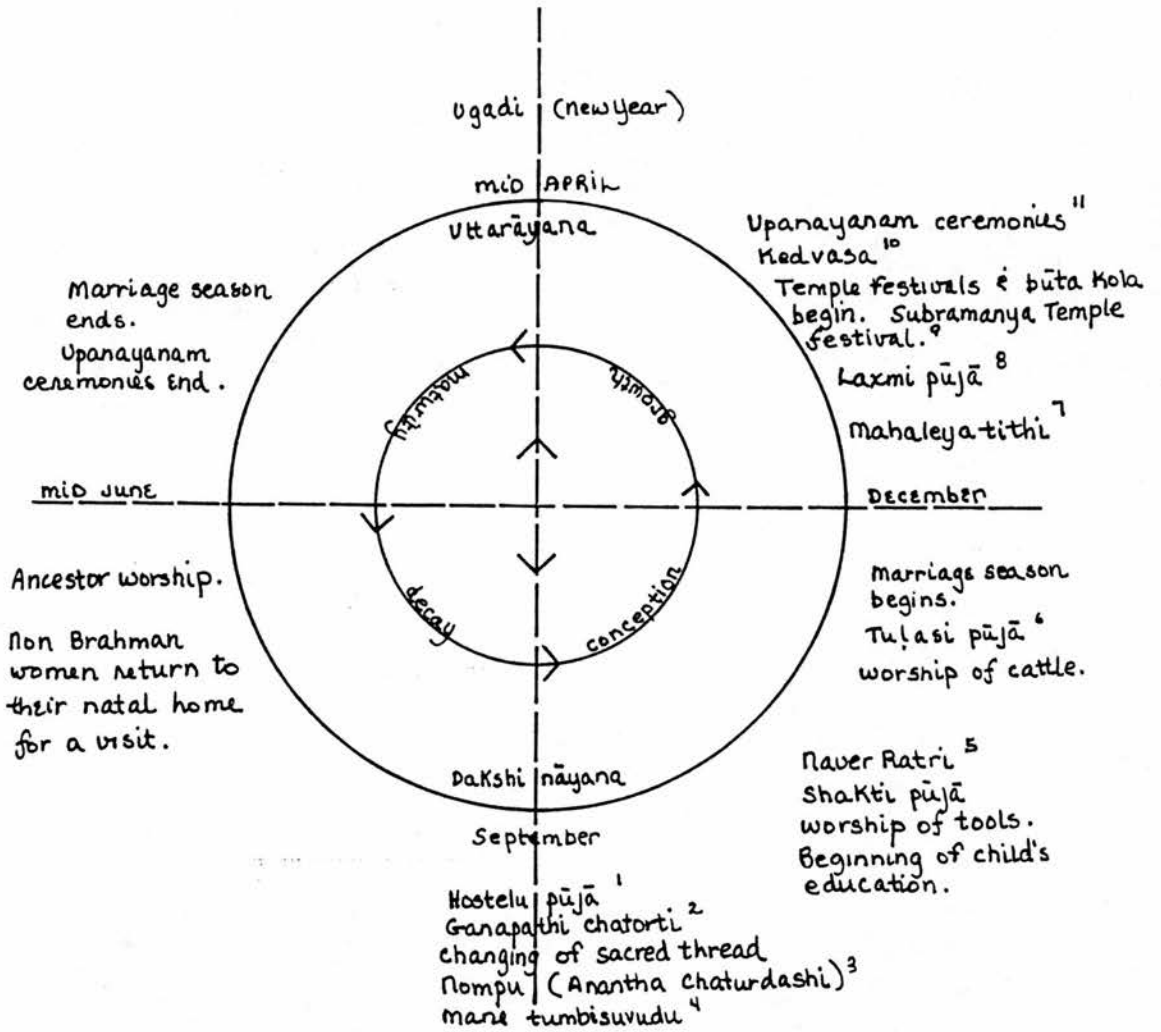
After mapping out the characteristics of these regions of space, it became apparent that the rituals performed in the seasons corresponding to these regions of space were in concordance with their characteristics (see Diagram VI).

Let us return to the subject of dreams. It may be said that night dreams are associated, not only with darkness, but a time of disjuncture, infertility, and decay. It may be noted that Niirite, the deity of the southwest, is a deity of death and decay. In opposition to night dreams, early morning dreams are associated with conception, establishment of alliances and development symbolized by the cornerstone of the house, the hearth, and rituals of fertility.

Dreams may also be interpreted as the visitation of spirits and such dreams may initiate or justify causes of action. If a villager dreams of a būta or pilgrimage shrine he considers this an incentive, or a warning, to either visit the shrine or put aside an offering for the deity in question. I found that villagers occasionally visited local mantravādi with such dreams and asked them what they should offer to the deity or temple in question. Dreams of cobra were common among women especially those who desired progeny or marriage. If such a dream occurred, offerings would be made to a cobra shrine and on occasion a special pūjā would be performed.

Devotees of various saints considered their dreams to contain special guidance to them from their guru. For example, devotees of the saint Sai Baba would discuss dreams during satsang gatherings. Dreams of Sai Baba were considered verification that the saint was present in their lives. Some devotees went so far as to follow the messages of these dreams in affairs of business, marriage alliances, travel, etc.

Diagram VI A Ritual Calendar



### Gloss

1. Worship of house threshold; this pūjā is linked to fertility.
2. This is a pūjā to Ganapathi, the god of all beginnings.
3. Nompū is a pūjā performed by the childless desiring progeny. The worship of wells is also performed on this day.
4. Ritual held subsequent to the first rice harvest. The bounty of nature is celebrated and placed in contact with symbols of social development.
5. Worship of mother goddesses.
6. This pūjā marks the beginning of the marriage season.
7. Collective ancestor worship by Brahmans; ancestors asked for their blessings.
8. Worship of wealth.
9. Temple renowned for fertility and nāga worship.
10. On this day, it is said that the water from within the earth comes to the surface due to the heat of summer season, which is beginning. For 3 days the earth is said to be menstruating and all ploughing and planting ceases.
11. Sacred thread ceremony.

### Brahmanic Conceptualization of the Mind

The idea that the body and mind are co-extensive is shared by all villagers. The Brahmanic conceptualization of mental processes is, however, complex and contingent upon dosha pathology and the principles of hot and cold. I will examine the principles of hot and cold in respect to the Hindu cosmogony and dosha pathology in respect to mental imbalance.

### Macrocosm and Microcosm

While I was living in Vitla I was encouraged by a number of my Brahman informants to visit a scholarly Havik Brahman in order to receive a knowledgeable explanation of the way in which the mind functions. I did so but in order to converse with him, it became imperative that I familiarize myself with the Nyaya-Vaishesika and Sankhya schools of philosophy. This was necessary for the informant's discussions often involved complex analogies based on philosophic conceptualizations and local customs. His analogical reasoning was structured into a generative model and to explain the working of the mind, he had to acquaint me with a basic set of principles which he understood to govern the universe. By utilizing this model, the informant was able to treat the entire universe as a system or process and the mind as a reflection of this system. I may briefly give an account of his conceptual framework.

The Nyaya-Vaishesika philosophic system is deterministic and mechanistic. According to this system, all substance is constituted of small elementary units of matter, paramana, which are perpetually in a state of combination and decomposition. The cause of these two complementary processes is the continual presence of heat and negative heat in the universe. The informant depicted the universe as pervaded by these two forces, one of which was centrifugal and endothermic and the other centripetal and exothermic.

The most basic example of the complementarity of these two opposing forces is contained in the pancha b̄uta, tejas, the substantial source of radiation in the universe. Tejas was explained to me as analogous to sunlight. The informant pointed out that tejas, like sunlight, was composed of both heat and light. He emphasized that if the sun was only heat it would burn the universe. The sun's heat must therefore be counterbalanced by light, a manifestation of the cold principle. To emphasize the two complementary aspects found in sunlight, my informant drew my attention to the difference between sunlight and moonlight<sup>1</sup>. Sunlight, he noted, was hot because it radiated more heat than light. Moonlight, on the other hand, was cold in comparison because it reflected more light than heat.

The informant's use of the terms cold and light was often metaphoric. He used these terms to imply the control or shaping of heat in any of its myriad forms. The informant called the light-cold principle the soma principle. He stated that the term soma referred to any substance or force which controlled heat in the body or in the universe. Various cooling plants, moonlight, and women were cited as manifestations of the soma principle<sup>2</sup>. For example, women were associated with soma because they controlled men. Moreover, during the act of sexual intercourse they shaped the heat offered to them by men. The informant described the seed of man as condensed heat and the egg, bimba, of woman as a shape or container.

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<sup>1</sup> This informant's statements are an apt illustration of Levi Strauss's comment: "... we may say the same of the sun and the moon as we may say of the innumerable natural beings handled by mythology; mythology does not seek to give them a meaning; it expresses its own meaning through them" (1970, 339).

<sup>2</sup> It may be noted that the moon is of a feminine gender.

After drawing my attention to the complementary opposition of hot-cold as a fundamental principle structuring the universe, the informant slowly began to approach the subject of the mind and its processes. First, he highlighted the Sankhya philosophy's use of the terms prakriti and purusha. These terms are utilized by the Sankhya school to describe the psychosomatic processes. Prakriti is man's gross material being and purusha is the reflected mental process which organizes and orientates prakriti. The informant interpreted prakriti as a manifestation of the heat principle and purusha the cold principle.

The informant made a point of emphasizing that purusha was not consciousness; for consciousness is a process which involves the interaction of physiology and psychology. Purusha is rather that which is behind consciousness; that which remains the unchanged design of an individual being. Conscious experience involves two processes which the informant again explained by the hot-cold metaphor. The mind was depicted as having two aspects, manas, that aspect of the mind responsible for desire, and buddhi, that aspect which manifests intelligence. Manas is provoked by heat through sensations received from the sense organs, indira, but it is incapable of acting without a plan. Buddhi supplies a plan of action. Buddhi, the informant noted, was found throughout the body in the gross form of ojus. Ojus controlled body heat and desire just as buddhi controlled manas and cold controlled heat.

|                |                 |              |
|----------------|-----------------|--------------|
| <u>tejas</u> : | light:          | heat         |
| body:          | <u>ojus</u> :   | body heat    |
| mind:          | <u>buddhi</u> : | <u>manas</u> |

The informant placed great emphasis on the maintenance of an adequate supply of semen and ojus in the body. He described ojus as stored in the head, shikka brahma, and secreted by a gland known as manduka. Manduka, a variety of frog, has the peculiar characteristic of urinating whenever it is touched.

In such a way, ojus is thought to be secreted from this gland whenever heat arouses it. The informant stressed that the greater the quantity of ojus that one had, the greater his capacity to control heat and his emotions. The less the quantity of ojus, the less his capacity for bodily control. A sub-optimal supply of ojus, in fact, meant that one stood the chance of developing abnormal symptoms manifest by uncontrolled heat. Mental symptoms such as the inability to reason or control one's anger, and physical symptoms, such as fever or decreased strength could result from inadequate ojus. I was told time and again that if a man lost his ojus reserve he would become fearful of the world, would withdraw from social interactions and would be prone to many illnesses. Ojus was not merely linked to a man's virility in the form of semen but was associated with disease resistance, mental stability, and overall bodily balance.

This point was impressed upon me by two other informants. On one occasion I came down with a fever after visiting a forest area at the foot of the ghats. I had not seen my wife for ten days and she had been staying at the house of a well-known vaidya. When this vaidya gave me medicine for my fever he cautioned me not to engage in sexual intercourse with my wife for the next ten days. I thought this to be an unusual comment and questioned him about it. His explanation was that the fever had made my ojus reserve low. If I lost more ojus, in the form of semen, I could cause my fever to flare up and my shikka brahma to become dry. This would result in possible unconsciousness, hallucinations, or an inability to reason.

On another occasion, the importance of ojus was impressed upon me in the course of a conversation on tapas. Tapas, techniques of heating the mind by the chanting of mantra, are performed for the purpose of gaining powers of manipulation in the physical universe. I asked my informant, a Shivalli mantravādi, to explain to me what was the difference between tapas and fever

if both involved the heating of the body. I shall paraphrase his answer:

The difference between fever and tapas is the difference between the evil eye, driṣṭhi, and the inner eye. The evil eye and fever are caused by uncontrolled heat in the body and uncontrolled desire in the mind. Tapas is the building up of controlled heat in the body. Tapas requires chastity, brahmachariya, for all of one's ojus is needed to control the heat produced. Heat must be directed upwards so as to highly excite one's manas causing buddhi to react. The reaction of buddhi to this heat yields great wisdom if it is directed to a problem. By tapas one can clearly see a problem and through the third eye, one can see its solution.

Buddhi however necessitates ojus. Without ojus, the heat produced by tapas will either cause mental imbalance, fever, or it will be sent downwards exciting one's sexual desires. For this reason, it is advantageous to perform jappa, mantra recitation, while sitting in a tank of cold water, as a heat controlling measure. It is also necessary to undertake a restricted light diet so as not to centre too much heat on the stomach. Moreover, ghee should be consumed to increase ojus. This is why swamijs are fed with large quantities of ghee with the aim of improving their buddhi. Furthermore, it is necessary to empty the bowels because vata must not become blocked. If the bowels are blocked heat may be misdirected by vata and displaced elsewhere in the body. This is the reason that puja and tapas may only be performed after ablutions have been completed.

The informant's statements become easier to understand if we extrapolate his basic ideas and present these ideas as a series of analogies. While doing this I may, furthermore, demonstrate how an analogical mode of thought, based on the root metaphor of hot-cold, pervades the Hindu conceptual universe fusing separate realms of experience and modes of consciousness into a coherent world view. I will lay emphasis on the wide usage of the hot-cold metaphor and its speculative power, and in the remainder of this thesis I shall stress the vital and ongoing importance of the hot-cold principle in the domains of health and curing.

#### The Hot-Cold Principle and Analogical Reasoning

Uncontrolled heat, like an uncontrolled būta, is potentially dangerous. Manas, the informant once told me, is the būta in man, and shastra and pūjā are his buddhi. Hindu shastra, myth, and medical ideology stress

an ideal of balance and the control of man's instincts and innate power. The various paths of yoga, from bhakti to tantra, are methods toward this end. Tapas, the object of tantra, is the control of accentuated heat. The control of heat and desire allows an initiate to channel and augment his power, enabling him to manipulate the physical universe toward malevolent or benevolent ends. It moreover yields inner vision. Dristhi, the evil eye, is the symbolic antithesis of tapas. Dristhi is concentrated but uncontrolled desire (heat) whereas tapas is concentrated and controlled heat. These binary oppositions, apparent in the informant's monologue, may be represented in the following manner:

|  |  |
|--|--|
| uncontrolled desire:   | controlled desire  |
| accentuated, uncontrolled heat:  | accentuated, controlled heat   |
| <u>dristhi</u> :   | <u>tapas</u>   |
| externalization of heat:<br>(the exterior of the body is heated, i.e. fever, red skin rashes; the effects of evil eye) | interiorization of heat<br>(the exterior of the body is cold as heat has been directed to the interior; the ideal of the <u>yogi</u> ) |
| mental upset, fever, uncontrolled sexual desire:   | ability to reason  |
| inadequate semen:  | adequate <u>ojus</u> (semen)   |

The informant noted that ghee is consumed medicinally to increase ojus. A pervasive theme in Indian medicine is the use of substances which are complementary or analogous to substances needed by the body to replenish deficiencies<sup>1</sup>. Ghee is analogous to ojus:

<sup>1</sup> Another example of X substance being used to replace Y substance because it has complementary characteristics may be cited. When a man's shikka brahma becomes dry, when he is having hallucinations and a high fever, the unctuous seeds of brinjal which accord with the attributes of kapha and ojus are administered through the nose to reach the shikka brahma and cool it.



|  |   |   |
|--|---|---|
| child  | : | man   |
| milk   | : | food (rice)   |
| end product of milk-<br>transformation   | : | end product of food ( <u>rasa</u> )<br>transformation |
| <u>ghee</u>  | : | <u>ojus</u>   |
| cool to taste and in<br>action in stomach.<br>However, ghee is a<br>concentrated fat, which<br>when burned in ritual <u>homa</u><br>produces an intense<br>flame | : | concentrated controlled<br>heat                       |

Analogies which accord the opposition of dristhi: tapas are prolific in other domains of Hindu thought and custom. For example, let us take a theme commonly found in local legends. This theme involves a chaste woman who mobilizes incredible powers as a result of her control of desire. In these legends the chastity of this heroine is questioned. She is made to prove her virtue by a trial by fire, i.e. taking a bath of boiling oil. In the end, the heroine is not burnt, proving her virtue, purity, and control of heat and desire. The following contrasts are generated:

|                   |   |                                      |
|-------------------|---|--------------------------------------|
| desire            | : | control of desire                    |
| sexuality         | : | chastity                             |
| uncontrolled heat | : | control of heat<br>(control of fire) |

The heroine can be viewed as the antithesis of a preyta, ancestor spirit, who troubles man because of its unsatisfied desires. When such a spirit possesses a man or woman, it demands huge quantities of water to quench its insatiable thirst.

|                    |   |                           |
|--------------------|---|---------------------------|
| desire             | : | control of desire         |
| <u>Preyta</u>      | : | heroine who controls fire |
| exaggerated thirst | : | non-exaggerated thirst    |

This last contrast exaggerated thirst: non-exaggerated thirst, may serve as a rationale for the importance Hindus place on giving a dying man a final drink of water and a last free breath. A dying man is given water and Tulasi leaf (*Ocimum sanctum*), and if such is not available he will be given water and honey. According to informants, Tulasi or honey are given to clear a dying man's throat of kapha which might otherwise prevent him from having a last free breath of air. This is not as farfetched as it might seem; for both Tulasi and honey are widely used as kapha expelling medicines. These substances are both considered pure and assume sacred status.

The contrast of heroine:preyta has a similar counterpart in Brahmanic thought. A Brahman widow, particularly a young Brahman widow, is a representation of uncontrolled heat. It may be noted that her dristhi is especially feared. However, traditionally, if this widow jumped into the funeral pyre of her husband, she was treated as virtuous and was worshipped at sati shrines.

uncontrolled heat : controlled heat

dristhi : tapas

living widow : widow who commits sati

The structure of Hindu ideology is based upon such analogical reasoning. In order for the cycle of the universe to exist, opposition must exist. Without opposition, transition could not come about and a state of inactivity would result. The Brahmanic myth of Vastu portrays total inactivity as demonic. Vastu, a demon by virtue of his inactivity, filled all of space and obstructed the processes of transmutation and metamorphosis. In order for the gods to be able to act and react they were forced to kick Vastu to earth where he now lies dormant. The moral of the story is that transition must take place and thus it is necessary for men

and gods to have dualistic natures. Wendy O'Flaherty's analysis of Siva (1973) further supports this exegesis. She points out that in order for the dance of life to continue, Siva must have an aesthetic and sexual aspect. I have portrayed the potentiality of būta and man as dualistic, and shakti as qualitative and transmutable. Because of its instability all forms of shakti are worshipped, but at the same time suspect, for even the slightest mistake in a ritual can turn a būta's benevolence into mal-  
 evolence. Likewise, a tantri's tapas may easily be turned to desire or lust and villagers fear tantri as well as respect them for it is said that 'their umbrellas turn with the wind'.

#### The Mind, Dosha, and Guṇa

According to Brahmanic ideology each man has a constitution predominated by one or two of the tridosha. I have already indicated in Table 9 that a dosha predominance is evident by a set of physical as well as mental characteristics. When a dosha becomes overly accentuated the physical symptoms listed in this table are likewise accentuated. For example, a kapha vitiation will be visible in a patient's skin which will begin to feel oilier, whereas vata vitiation will be indicated by the skin becoming dry. Pronounced dosha vitiation is also evident in specific psychological vicissitudes. I will list the signs of dosha vitiation in respect to mental states in Table 14.

A man's mind is described as dominated by one of the three guṇa. Informants cited caste, food habits, and stars as influencing one's dominant guṇa. Satvika persons are calm and intelligent, rajasa individuals are active and fiery, and tamasa individuals are slow and dull. Brahmans view themselves as the representatives of satvika guṇa, view Shudra-Kshetriyas as rajasa

Table 14 Psychological Symptoms Indicative of Dosha Imbalance

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|              |   |
|--------------|---|
| <u>Vata</u>  | wandering<br>froth from mouth<br>incoherent speech<br>difficulty to maintain<br>one's train of thought<br>overtalking<br>insomnia<br>negative attitude to life<br>auditory hallucinations                           |
| <u>Pitta</u> | anger<br>over excitement<br>mania<br>irritability<br>aggressiveness<br>violence<br>nakedness<br>tearing clothes<br>desire for cooling substances<br>and cool places<br>unquenchable thirst<br>visual hallucinations |
| <u>Kapha</u> | depression<br>introversion<br>muteness, dullness<br>ambivalence to food or work<br>desire to sleep continuously<br>excessive salivation<br>lack of desire   |

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and Harijans as tamasa<sup>1</sup>.

Brahmans entertain stringent rules in order to accentuate their satvik guna state and de-emphasize the other guna co-existent in their constitution. To this end, a complex system of food classification and dietary laws has been developed. The system denotes the effect which various foods have on the body-mind continuum in respect to dosha and the Brahman ideally attempts to structure his diet so that his body and mind will be dominated by the satvik guna. I will describe dietary regulations shortly.

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<sup>1</sup> Brahman informants do recognize theoretically, at least, that a lower caste member can achieve a different guna state by bodily or mental manipulation. For example, I once heard an educated Govda referred to as being very satvika because of his scholastic reputation, mild manner, vegetarianism, and membership in a bhakti cult. This type of reference is, however, rare.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

HEALTH

The writings of Valabrega (1962) and Herzlich (1973) have emphasized that health is a pluralistic conception. Herzlich's study of popular notions of health in France led her to postulate that three primary conceptualizations of health coexist. These are:

1. Health in a vacuum - the absence of illness, the state of "being" healthy. Health is destroyed by illness.
2. Health as a reserve - the personal control of health and resistance to illness, the positive assertion of "having" health based on one's judgement of his constitution, and his control over his environment.
3. Health as equilibrium - the approximation of psychosomatic equilibrium or a state of normality. This state can only be judged individually. Equilibrium is associated with one's reserve of health as well as what one "does". As Herzlich notes:

Equilibrium is characterized by the fact that it goes beyond the purely organic level of the reserve of health and bears upon all aspects of the individual life, especially the psychosocial aspects. It indicates both the state of the individual and his mode of life; the organic state acted, experienced and used by the individual in his relation with his environment.

(Ibid., 61)

Keeping these pluralistic conceptualizations of health in mind, I will examine different cultural ideas which have influenced the form they have taken in India. I will lay special emphasis on the indigenous notion of 'health as balance' and give an account of how dietary customs have been affected by this notion.

### Health in a Vacuum

The villager lives in an ecosphere where various diseases and deficiencies are endemic. Some non-incapacitating diseases are in fact considered normal conditions of the body or constant features of the environment. For example, thread worms are endemic and the villager considers a limited number of these worms as normal and indeed necessary for digestion. Some skin ailments are treated with ambivalence because of their continual presence. Villagers accept, or at least put up with, skin conditions such as scabies, sores, and a visible leukopathic condition known as sibba. They will not seek treatment for these ailments unless they become seriously infected.

I observed several cases where a villager sought treatment for a case of constipation after three days duration while neglecting a festering sore or case of scabies which had been causing annoyance for weeks. The point to be noted here is that sores or rashes are considered of secondary importance to an overall state of health, whereas an upset of the digestive cycle is of primary importance. Villagers treat symptoms which involve essential bodily processes with more concern and anxiety than other ailments which may cause greater discomfort.

For this reason periodic semen discharge or a lapse in the menstrual cycle are treated seriously in India. They are associated with essential body processes affecting the whole body and not just reproduction or virility. A related point, which I shall later explicate in greater detail, is that due to the constancy of the villager's diet, alterations in the normal straw colour of urine or loose consistency of faeces are considered abnormal and indicative of ill health. Yellow urine, for example, is a sign of a pitta imbalance.

These points have far reaching implications. For example, villagers will consult a practitioner and report to him only those symptoms which he considers important. A villager with an infected wound may complain to a practitioner of fever, constipation, indigestion, and poor sleep, without initially referring to the wound at all. If he attends an out-patient clinic at a Government PHC, where consultation time is minimal, or if he requests medicine directly from a chemist, chances are high that his wound may go undetected. Likewise, the mother of a child suffering from periodic fits may initially consult a practitioner about the child's excess of kapha. Mucus spit from a child's mouth after its fits have commenced cause villagers to associate fits with kapha. Later in this thesis, I will depict the manner in which villagers report symptoms to practitioners and demonstrate how their descriptions are structured by cultural ideas about disease etiology as well as by individual expectations, and the patients' evaluation of a practitioner and his medicines.

#### Health as Resistance

There are two aspects of the notion of health as resistance. The first pertains to man's internal body resistance and the second to his immediate external environment; his extended phenomenological field which I will term his personal region of social space. The first notion of resistance has already been referred to in previous discussions on the importance of semen (ojus) in respect to bodily and mental heat control. The idea of internal body resistance also involves dietary considerations. Specific foods are consumed to improve the blood and increase ojus supply, and others are restricted because they contain toxic substances. I will discuss the importance placed on diet shortly. At present, I will focus my attention



on resistance in respect to man's larger sphere of influence, his extended personal space.

Ayurveda and native custom place emphasis on the prevention of illness and the maintenance of body equilibrium. The maintenance of equilibrium requires a sensitivity to one's personal space and the universe. The flow of energy in one's spatial-temporal environment is directly related to the flow of shakti in the body, engendering a state of health or illness. Resistance is a concept incorporating both the notion of a reserve of health (good blood, semen) and the control of one's immediate spatial-temporal environment in respect to a desired flow of shakti in the body. This notion of resistance is associated with both the closing of space and orientation of shakti. To understand this concept we must briefly examine the villager's perception of space and time.

Space is not construed by the villager as empty or homogenous. Space is heterogeneous and made up of qualitative regions or fields of action. The quality of a particular region is determined by whatever occupies it, as well as the directional orientations of its occupants, for as we have seen each direction has its own distinct qualities. Moreover, space is co-extensive with time<sup>1</sup>. Time is relative to events and is qualitative, heterogeneous and inseparable from the regions of space where these events are taking place. In fact, it might be more accurate to say that the villager thinks in terms of space-time rather than space and time in isolation<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Linguistically, spatial markers are also temporal markers. In Kannada, the morphemes i, this and ā, that, indicate proximate and remote relationships in space or time, e.g. īga (now), īlli (here), īvaru (proximate 3rd person plural), as opposed to āga (then), ālli (there), āvaru (remote 3rd person singular). The term for forward, munde, is also used to refer to the future, and the term for behind, hinde, also means the past or ago. Similarly, on top of, mele, means the future, and on the bottom of, kelage, denotes the past.

<sup>2</sup> A conceptualization of space-time is depicted in Advaita Vedanta philosophy.

The relationship between space and time becomes clearer in light of the villager's perception of open and closed space. Space may be either open or closed to the free movement of forces between regions of space. Villagers attempt to keep space closed by various ritual procedures, protective devices, patron deities, and by creating what Harper has aptly called fields of purity (1964, 188).

In order to protect a village from the intrusion of undesirable forces, village boundary būta are propitiated. House deities and protective devices, known as yantra, protect more intimate regions of space such as the house, cattle shed, fields, etc. Yantra may also be placed on the body to protect it against illnesses caused by spirits, witchcraft, the effects of stars, and other external causal factors<sup>1</sup>. In sum, the villager's region of personal space is a protective field, a buffer between man and extrinsic causes of illness.

We must also take into account that space opens to varying degrees when the universe or family is in transition. Times such as sunset, eclipse, new moon, the changing of constellations, etc., are times of transition. Personal regions of space open during times of childbirth, or during rituals of transition. A prerequisite to any ritual of transition is the creation of a mandala which establishes a closed, protective field of purity in which the ritual may take place. During a delivery, a house retains impurity so its space can not be closed by ritual but it is protected from spirit attack with strychnine leaves. Likewise during other transitional times protective measures are undertaken.

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<sup>1</sup> Special yantra, known as tale, may even be employed to check the spread of a disease, such as herpes, from one area of the body to another area.

All times of transition are considered dangerous for man is vulnerable to transformation and attack during this time. It cannot be categorically stated, however, that these times are malevolent in themselves. Advantageous as well as disadvantageous transformations may occur during times of transition. For example, an eclipse is a time when sickness can be easily contracted or cured.

Whereas non-Brahmans are aware of major points of transition, such as crossroads, and times of transition such as sunset or eclipses, Brahmins have devised an elaborate set of rules governing activity associated with lesser transitions. For example, according to shastra a Brahmin may not eat, drink, or sit on the threshold of a house. If one Brahmin is inside and another man is outside a room, he may not hand him an item over the threshold. When a Brahmin is sleeping another may not step over him, and if two Brahmins are walking together, a third may not walk between them. A prevalent custom is that if a Brahmin child sneezes, yawns, or gasps for breath after falling, a Brahmin mother will snap her fingers three times in front of its mouth thus protecting the child while its body is in a state of transition. As eating is a time of transition only light conversation will be made and arguments or a discussion of a mishap are forbidden. When a Brahmin leaves his house it may not be swept until a transitional period has lapsed.

The villager lives in regions of space which are relatively closed to and protected against the invasion of unwanted influences. Each villager seeks to protect his space against the forces at large. A man can control the forces of his being only when his personal space is closed. When a man's body or personal space is open, his shakti becomes vulnerable to other forces which may exert influence on his shakti in accord with their own characteristics and qualities. In other words, power, like space and time,

is qualitative and subject to the influences of its environment<sup>1</sup>.

Health is a state of controlled shakti which man may utilize toward desired ends. Shakti, be it the shakti of a būta or the shakti of a man's body does not have static qualities. Shakti exists only in relation to its orientation and may be altered, manipulated, or stabilized. In this sense, shakti is a diffuse term which takes meaning only in specific context.

A final point may be made about purity and the closing of space. By ritual, a protective field may be created which repels intrusion. Purity may be characterized as resistance. For example, a Brahman who is pure is immune from spirit attack unless he becomes vulnerable via an act of impurity. This is one reason, as I will explain later, why a Brahman attaches an element of guilt to particular diseases associated with specified external causes<sup>2</sup>. I may also note that a Brahman who performs acts of merit, punya, to gain greater purity is doing so not only to better his chance in a next life but to buttress his resistance in this life.

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<sup>1</sup> Abbott in his book, The Keys of Power, has utilized the conceptualization of qualitative 'power' as the key to understanding the Hindu universe. Abbott analyzed the Hindu ritual system as a set of rules framed in an effort to enhance and preserve for man his own power. He has portrayed the Hindu view of life to be a struggle for dominance between conflicting emanations of qualitative power. The extent to which this logic is applied may be demonstrated by the example that Abbott describes shadows transferring to the objects they overshadowed their own power and characteristics. Abbott's crude study of the Hindu universe suffers from reductionism and over-interpretation which prevents him from seeing other themes which effect village custom. Despite these shortcomings however, Abbott's emphasis on power and its control is noteworthy, and this monograph provides us with a valuable ethnography.

<sup>2</sup> This is also why the pollution of a shrine often involves an act of human impurity. A polluted shrine is often said to be caused by a menstruating woman, who has come into contact with it, thus allowing wandering spirits to enter.

### Health as Equilibrium

The villager attempts to keep his bodily heat and his tridosha in a state of equipose and he utilizes diet as a means towards this end. A routine digestive cycle is of primary importance to the villager's conception of body equilibrium construed either as a balanced state of heat or the tridosha. Villagers commonly speak about their health and general well being with reference to their appetite, diet, and defecation. Moreover, they attribute most common illnesses to improper food ingestion. Foodstuffs are classified by their effect on the digestive cycle via the hot-cold idiom and Brahmans ascribe the six tastes with the capability of aggravating or subduing the tridosha.

The theme of balance has significantly influenced the structure and content of village dietary patterns, particularly among Brahmans. I may illustrate these points by examining the rice digestive cycle, the classification of food, and Brahman and non-Brahman food habits. First, however, I may briefly note the utilization of food as an idiom wherein individual feelings, as well as group obligations, may be expressed.

### The Food Idiom

Food-talk in South Kanara is used as an opening to conversation. The most common greeting in Kannada is ūṭa āyṭu, (have you finished your rice meal?). This colloquial expression approximates the English 'what's happening?'. Food talking and food joking is essentially a way in which one person orientates himself to the mood of another. When asked about meals it is not so important to tell the truth as it is to give an answer which indicates a mood or a general state of being. A casual answer such as ganji, boiled rice with the rice water retained, to the question "What did

you eat", may be followed by "What curry did you have?" and an invitation is thus established to explain anything above the median which may have occurred.

Food may also be utilized as a medium through which feelings may be conveyed in contexts where they may not be expressed openly. This is particularly common among Brahmans. A Brahman wife living in a joint family cannot openly express her feelings towards her husband, or in-laws. She can, however, communicate her mood within the culinary sphere, by her maintenance of the family's routine of eating, or by her attentiveness in serving family guests or affinal relations. In fact, Brahmans judge the quality of a marital relationship by a wife's attentiveness in providing customary drinks and eatables to guests and relatives. The presentation of a particular food or drink involves a subtle kitchen politic and a guest or relative's status is carefully weighed in accord with family obligations before a gift of food is presented.

An exposition of the politics of food exchange is beyond the scope of this thesis. However, I would like to point out that the food idiom is often used to communicate schism. I observed that in Brahman houses where marital or inter-family relations were strained, a wife commonly let this be known by not paying due respect to her husband's friends or relatives. She would not upkeep the prestation cycle. In the Brahman caste, where feelings are suppressed and spirit possession is uncommon, the expression of feelings via the food medium is one of the only means a woman has of signalling anxiety in a manner not totally condemned by the culture. I will demonstrate later that illness is another primary means by which a Brahman woman conveys stress and anxiety.

### The Rice Digestive Cycle

An informant once summed up life for me by commenting, "Rice is breath and one's relatives are life." Rice is the medium of life in South Kanara. Cultivable land is measured by the amount of rice seed necessary to sow it, and the value of rice is the traditional basis of the economic exchange system. The rice crop is ascribed a sacred status and this status is explicit in the treatment of rice during planting and harvesting operations. When rice is thrashed, cleaned, or washed, not one grain of rice will be left uncollected and no villager will walk across a rice drying yard without first removing his sandals.

The villager's perception of health and strength is integrally related to the rice medium. An optimum amount of rice consumption is regarded as essential to the maintenance of good health. The importance of rice and the rice meal became apparent to me while working in the Panaje rice restricted area during a time of rice scarcity. Many informants attributed their general poor health to unavailability of rice, although other government subsidized grains such as wheat and maize, had been made available to them. Even with a ready supply of alternative government grains, villagers were eating less than before due to inflation and the fact that their supply of vegetables, fruits and forest foods had diminished. Although several factors were involved in a reduction of the villager's overall diet, these factors were always overshadowed by the fact that health was measured in terms of rice consumption and rice consumption had dropped from one kilo a day per adult male in 1965 to one-half kilo a day in 1975.

Villagers enjoy the feeling of fullness that eating rice gives them and consider the life giving value of rice to be higher than other grains. In fact, villagers say they have eaten a meal only when they have eaten boiled rice. This difference is accentuated linguistically by the fact that the

verb to eat rice is unnupu which is different than the verb tinnuvudu used to describe the eating of other foods, be it fruit or another grain. Likewise, a boiled rice meal is called ūṭa, whereas foodstuffs such as wheat chapati are called snacks, tindi.

The importance of rice consumption must be understood from a biological as well as a social vantage point for the rice digestive cycle constitutes a state of biological normality upon which a villager judges health. Rice is a bulk purgative with high cellulose content. Villagers who eat rice maintain a regular digestive and defecation cycle which functions like clockwork. Even when a villager is not hungry he is encouraged by family members to eat some rice, so as to maintain his digestive cycle. This ideology directly affected my own habits in the field. When I was carrying out a house to house survey in Panaje, I was often given tindi by informants and after having consumed several bananas, cashew nuts, and tender coconuts, I felt no desire to eat a rice meal. When I returned to the Brahman joint family with whom I was staying, however, I was literally compelled to eat at least some rice, so as not to unbalance my digestive cycle. This compulsion was for the sake of health and not hospitality.

A rice digestive cycle is an established state of normality and a backdrop against which villagers may judge the effect of other foods. Rice eating is furthermore a cultural identity. By this I mean that rice eaters share common ideas about the effects of different foods on the body which are not shared with wheat eaters or ragi eaters whose digestive cycles are different. Rice eaters consider high protein foods and alternative government grains such as wheat and ragi to be less desirable because when one is accustomed to a high carbohydrate rice diet, the eating of such foods causes constipation, burning sensation in the anus and stomach, and a change in urine



colour. These symptoms and the foods which cause them are heating. South Kanarese villagers say that heating foods are not readily retained by the body and each of the symptoms cited carries with it cultural significance<sup>1</sup>. This subject will be discussed subsequently.

When South Kanara villagers do eat wheat products, they do so, if they can afford to, with cooling dairy products, such as butter or ghee, to counter-balance the heating affect of wheat. A wheat eater from North India, however, considers wheat to be neither cooling nor heating. Wheat eaters I knew in Bangalore considered rice heating and not particularly good for health because of its affect on their digestive cycle.

Diet distinguishes members of the same caste living in different localities. For example, the South Kanara rice eater differentiates between parboiled and raw rice. Parboiled rice is consumed by most South Kanara villagers, who consider it better for health than raw rice which is heating in comparison. In terms of diet, a Panaje Havik Brahman stands in opposition to a Havik from Shimoga District because the latter eats raw rice. The point I am emphasizing here is that diet and food ascription tend to unite both caste members and all villagers of a particular region and afford them a shared identity<sup>2</sup>.

A final point may demonstrate the importance of the rice digestive cycle. Fasting marks occasions of transition in Hindu tradition. Times of transition in the universe such as an eclipse, require fasting for it is

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<sup>1</sup> Body time is an aspect that food technologists have sadly neglected. The point is not merely to supply people with a new nutritious food. Even if the food is programmed for taste it may be rejected because it is not in harmony with the particular biological cycle involved. Even if a villager learns to consume this new food, he will do so with a loss of identity in relation to body time.

<sup>2</sup> Villagers claim that white rice causes burning sensation in the stomach. I may note that after I had been on a parboiled rice diet for sixteen months I experienced this symptom myself when I visited friends in Shimoga who were raw rice eaters.

thought that when the universe is in transition man's body should be in transition. Fasting is also undertaken by a Brahman bride and bridegroom the day prior to marriage as a sign of their social transition. Fasting, however, means that a villager must only abstain from eating a rice meal. He may eat as much fruit, wheat preparations, or any other foods which he desires.

Fasting may also be undertaken as a social protest to signify renunciation of a role or relationship. If a quarrel occurs in a family, especially a Brahman family, a house member may refuse to take meals. This action, or inaction, makes the family member symbolically detached from a social unit, defined in part by a shared food cycle.

#### Food Taxonomy

The structure and content of Brahman and non-Brahman diet and the status each accords specific foods is determined by several criteria. These criteria are ecological, biological, and symbolic in nature and often these criteria converge as part of a cultural programme of survival. For example, Brahman food habits express social exclusion and caste identification as well as being based on conceptualizations of health and psycho-physical propensity. Brahman and non-Brahman programmes for survival are quite different although these groups share a common ecosystem. Harper (1961) has suggested that these differences may be related to the distribution of existing resources among different castes so as not to overburden a particular ecosphere.

Be this as it may, Brahman and non-Brahmans have their own ideas about which foods are desirable and health promoting. This distinction is not simply between vegetarian and non-vegetarian foods, but between foods

attributed to be heating or cooling and foods attributed to affect the body in specific ways. I will give an account of the classification of foods in respect to their effect on the body and note differences between Brahman and non-Brahman classification of particular foods.

Food is classified by its immediate effect on the body, or by its after effect. Sets of bodily symptoms are associated with heating and cooling foods and subsidiary classification have been assigned to foods causing specific symptoms such as wind or dizziness. I may stress three preliminary points prior to a description of food categories. First, ascriptions such as hot and cold are relative terms; markers on a continuum and not absolute categories. Two foods may be hot, but a small quantity of one may heat the body as much as a large quantity of another. A second point, which I shall demonstrate, is that food is classified in relation to other food and not in isolation. Thirdly, when I refer to a food as heating, ushna, I am referring to its properties in interaction with man's body. A cooked food may be hot, bisi, to the touch or taste not hot, ushna, in its effect on the body. Likewise, a food may be cold, shita, to the touch but not necessarily cold, tampu, to the body. I will note the symptoms associated with the ingestion of heating or cooling substances or the effect of heating or cooling phenomena.

Cooling foods: One of the most overt body signs which villagers take note of is the digestibility of a food and the effect it has on one's bowels. Dairy products coat the alimentary tract with a fat which digests slowly and feels cooling and soothing at sensitive points along the tract, especially after it has been irritated. When a Brahman has heartburn, cooling butter is consumed to relieve the heating sensation. Villagers state that butter and its concentrated ghee form are very cooling and that buffalo milk products are more cooling than those of cow's milk. Villagers emphasize that the excessive consumption of cooling foods, particularly dairy products, causes indigestion,

nausea, and constipation.

An accumulation of kapha or mucus, sudden chills, and headaches are also associated with the eating of cooling substances. Water is cooling and Brahmans, in particular, will not drink cold water without first eating a piece of heating jaggery sugar, especially if their body is already heated from walking. The sugar negates its cooling effect. Water is sometimes boiled and then cooled prior to drinking, as a measure to reduce its inherent coolness. This procedure is especially followed if the water is to be given to a villager with fever. It is thought that cold water may shock the sick person and cause a rise in his fever as well as cause kapha to be produced resulting in chills.

Headaches are attributed to the eating of cooling foods at improper times. Many of my Brahman informants blamed an afternoon headache on the ingestion of cool buttermilk on a hot afternoon. Another symptom associated with the overeating of a cool food is perspiration. Black pepper is hot to the taste but causes the body to sweat and cool off and therefore is considered cooling.

Heating Foods: Heating foods are not retained by the body to the extent that cooling foods are. However, this is not to say that they are more digestible. The overeating of heating foods may cause hard dry faeces, heartburn, diarrhoea, burning at the anus, backpain, burning eyes, mouth sores, rashes, and aspecific burning sensation in the body. Foods are generally categorized as heating by one of the following three criteria:

1. hot to the taste (chillies)
2. hot in its action in the stomach and digestive tract (e.g. wheat) or bowels (e.g. ginger)
3. creating a hot reaction in the stomach because of its extreme coolness (ice).

The third criteria for classifying a food as hot needs clarification. Ice

candy, a recent addition at village fairs, is so cold that it is said to produce a burning sensation in the stomach. This burning is due to the body's reaction of heat to the extreme cold nature of ice. This example, and the example of cooling water aggravating fever, illustrates a fundamental type of reasoning basic to the villagers conception of illness and strategies of curative technique. It is not simply the case that villagers or vaidya balance hot body states with cooling foods or medicines. Cold is qualitative and a substance which is too cold will cause the body to react in an opposite manner. For this reason, cold curds or coconut water will not be given to a villager who has a high fever for it will aggravate it by causing both an increase in kapha and an increase in heat.

A form of homeopathic logic governs many native cures and rejuvenation, rasāyana, medicines. At first I was baffled to find that many rejuvenation medicines were cooling yet supposed to produce heat in the body. I later found out that these medicines were administered to cause the body to react to their cold nature with a controlled amount of heat. I was told that if only heating substances were given to a man this would result in heating illnesses and not rejuvenation. Medicines must be directed to particular dhatu and both the homeopathic and allopathic medicines may be used toward this end in different contexts. These strategies are in fact used simultaneously in many medicinal decoctions, ayurvedic kashaya, to engender a balance in body heat. Ayurveda, as it is practised by the by the knowledgeable vaidya, is much like a form of medicinal algebra where factors such as a patient's age and bodily constitution figure significantly into the medical equation. In the science of ayurveda, Max Black's words find relevance: "Perhaps every science must start with metaphor and end with algebra." (1962, 242).

Subsidiary classifications:

Uri Shita: Foods which are cool to the taste, but hot to the stomach are called uri shita. Chakarppe, a type of cucumber which is available at the end of rainy season is an example. Chakarppe tastes cool but causes a burning sensation in the stomach when eaten in quantity.

Pitta: The ayurvedic term pitta is utilized by villagers to describe foods which cause dizziness, nausea and produce yellow urine. Foods contained in this category include the inner white of areca-nut, peanuts, and according to some villagers, chicken. The case of chicken is instructive. All villagers say chicken is a heating, shakti food. The use of the term shakti indicates that chicken has a dramatic effect on the body. This may or may not be a desirable effect and villagers who state that chicken is pitta are expressing an opinion that too much chicken eating will cause indigestion. Villagers in Panaje, for example, marvelled at the local PHC doctor, a Bant, who would consume one chicken per day. They joked about how much shakti he must have in order to digest that amount of chicken, and how difficult it must be for his wife to cope with it.

I may stress that pitta has a specific meaning in relation to food. In another context, the term pitta is used to describe the cause of diseases such as jaundice. The fact that villagers say that jaundice is caused by pitta does not mean that they think that the eating of peanuts or the chewing of areca-nut will cause the illness. The term must be understood in context.

Nanju: The term nanju is used to indicate a particular group of foods which are not only difficult to digest, but which aggravate or increase poisons already existing in the blood. Villagers who are ill will not consume these foods. Villagers say that nanju foods push latent poisons to the surface of the body or block a man's blood flow. Examples of nanju food include breadfruit, particular kinds of oily fish such as Bangara, (Indian mackerel), drumstick

(Moringa oleifera), brinjal, blackgram dhal, and jackfruit.

Nanju foods may be further qualified as either hot or cold. For example, brinjal is nanju and also cooling. One Brahman informant told me that this was so because it contained unctous juice, lōle, which cannot be broken down by any amount of cooking. Her opinion was that if the juice of brinjal could not be broken down by fire how was the body's fire capable of doing so? Drumstick, on the other hand, is nanju but hot. If one eats a large quantity of drumstick, a feeling of burning in the anus and constipation will result. The bark of the drumstick tree is considered so hot that it is used as an abortive by women. It is interesting to note that while cooking brinjal or drumstick, a small quantity of one is often combined with the other as villagers feel it will reduce the total nanju quality.

Vayu: Related to nanju, is the concept of vayu or gaseous food. In this category belong such foods as potato, jackfruit, and cabbage. Villagers tend to avoid these foods during sickness because they feel that the overall movement of the body's wind is disturbed by the gaseousness.

The character of vayu food is often judged by its ingestion in large quantities. For example, jackfruit is both nanju and vayu. The ascription of these qualities to jackfruit is usually followed by an informant's description of a villager who once ate a huge quantity of jackfruit and who suffered particular symptoms such as a noticeable wind or vomiting. This same sort of explanation followed the classification of fruits as heating. If a fruit is eaten in large quantity and produces mouth sores (e.g. pineapple), it is regarded as heating, while other fruits which do not readily produce such violent reactions are considered cooling in comparison.

Satvik , Rajas , Tamas : This taxonomic scheme is utilized by Brahmans to classify foods via their effect on the triguna. For Brahmans, other than the most devout, this scheme is only of importance on ritual occasions when

feasts have to be planned according to shastra. However, Brahman vaidya often prescribe special diets to patients taking into consideration the patient's dominant guṇa.

1. Satvik food is not overly cool or hot and in general indicates substances which do not arouse the dosha (and by extension psychological proclivities) in the body when eaten in moderation. Moreover, these foods are referred to in classical texts. The category includes rice, wheat, milk, unsprouted cereals, ghee, butter, fruits, etc.
2. Rajas foods provoke sex and action and include bottlegourd, drumstick, sprouted cereals, onion, garlic, palm fruit, alcohol in limited quantities, chicken, goat, fish, blackgram dhal, asafoetida, buffalo milk, and breadfruit.
3. Tamas foods dull the mind, and examples include flesh such as buffalo, sheep, wild pig, wild rat, fried foods (in oil, not in ghee), crude alcohols, and all spoiled foods.

Beck has maintained that the essence of a good diet is a proper balance between hot and cold foods (1969, 561). Most villagers would agree with this statement. However, it must be stressed that this agreement does not mean that villagers, be they Brahman or non-Brahman, consciously pick and choose among foods in an attempt to balance their everyday diet. Nanju foods, like brinjal and drumstick, and very ushṇa foods like chicken, chillies, or hot pickle, are not rejected but are rather relished by villagers. Notions as to which foods are hot, cold, nanju, vayu, etc., are most relevant when one family member is sick, in a transition stage such as pregnancy, or when a food is to be used in ritual context. We will see however, that the Brahman's diet has been traditionally structured with the ideal of balance in mind.

Before I turn my attention to the classification of specific foodstuffs, it is necessary to make three preliminary points pertaining to individual variations of classification, the comparative nature of classification, and



the metaphorical versus literal classification of foods. Beck has noted that general rules of food classification cannot be construed by simply observing the overt characteristics of food, i.e. colour, taste, texture, or the heat at which they are prepared. The proof of a food's qualities is determined by its consumption over a period of time. This means of classification might seem pretentious to a westerner living on a highly varied diet, but it is quite plausible to a villager living on a constant diet of rice. Furthermore, villagers recognize that everyone's body is different and therefore it is not contradictory if the same food is classified differently by various people. What is important is that food can be classified in relation to existing categories.

The second point is that food classification is often based on comparison, for foods are seldom considered in isolation or as abstract entities. For example, when I asked informants whether rice was hot or cold, many of my informants said that parboiled rice was neutral, sama, while others said it was cooling. When I asked how cooling, they replied that it was more cooling than wheat, raw rice, ragi, or sweet potato. In other words, rice was cooling in comparison to other grains. No villager would consider rice so cooling to the body that it could cause cooling illnesses. Moreover, villagers would think it quite ludicrous to compare parboiled rice to cooling butter or to the cool basale plant. Likewise, many informants told me that raw rice was heating. Some of these informants considered raw rice heating in comparison to parboiled rice, whereas others classified raw rice as heating because it upset their stomachs when they ate it.

The point is that the terms hot and cold are polysemous and may relate to a substance's effect on the body or to the substance's nature in comparison to other types of food. The hot-cold continuum may be compared to a musical

scale which may be played in different octaves. Each variety of food (grain, oil, etc.) may be seen as designating an octave. A food which is cool in the grain 'octave' does not correspond in pitch intensity to a food which is cool in the oil 'octave'. The body may be seen as an instrument through which physical and mental sensations are played in accord with internal and external stimuli<sup>1</sup>.

A third point concerns the symbolic use of food. One foodstuff may be chosen to signify another in ritual circumstance. For example, ash gourd is substituted for flesh at būta rituals where Brahman tantri officiate and during Brahman and non-Brahman death ceremonies it is a food offered to the dead. The reason ash gourd is chosen as a substitute for meat is because its fleshy pulp resembles meat after it has been rubbed with red kumkum. The properties of ash gourd are cooling, but some of my informants described ash gourd as heating because of its association with meat.

Tāmbūla provides an example of a food which has an ascription both in the social realm and in the food realm. Tāmbūla is a combination of areca-nut and betel leaf and is chewed by most villagers as a pastime as well as for its slightly narcotic effect. All villagers would agree that tāmbūla is heating when chewed, for its astringent taste creates a hot sensation in the body. However, when tāmbūla is exchanged at a ritual performance or between friends as a sign of respect, friendship, or mutual obligation, villagers describe it, metaphorically, as cooling. This is not to say that tāmbūla is cooling in all ritual contexts, however, for tāmbūla may not be

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<sup>1</sup> This statement is more than a convenient analogy, for healers exist who use mantra and attempt to influence the "sound" of the body in one point in time by an appropriate mantra.

offered to the Brahmanic deity Ganapathi because of its heating nature and propensity to excite latent sexual desires.

I may now summarize the results of a survey I conducted on the classification of common foodstuffs. Table 15 was compiled from interviews with fifty-eight Panaje informants on food classification. In each instance, the question asked was "If eaten in excess, what would be the effect of ... food?" As general agreement of opinion appeared among Brahman castes and non-Brahman castes, the two groups have been represented as blocks.

A breakdown of informants by caste is as follows:

| Brahmans     | Number | Non-Brahmans | Number |
|--------------|--------|--------------|--------|
| 1. Shivalli  | 11     | 1. Bants     | 8      |
| 2. Havik     | 17     | 2. Manyanis  | 3      |
| 3. Karadi    | 7      | 3. Ganigas   | 4      |
|              |        | 4. Billavas  | 2      |
|              |        | 5. Meyara    | 4      |
|              |        | 6. Nayakas   | 2      |
| Total Number | 35     | Total Number | 23     |

Table 15 demonstrates that only a limited number of foodstuffs are similarly classified by general consensus. These items include staples such as rice, wheat, banana, chillies, black pepper, coffee, etc. However, a number of common foodstuffs are diversely classified. In some cases, this diversity of classification appears to take on caste overtones, or at least biases. (See Table 16)

Table 15 The Classification of Fifty Two Foods \*

|                   | Hot    | Cold   | Nanju  | Vayu   | Pitta | Sama   | ? |
|-------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|-------|--------|---|
| Raw Rice          | 35     | -23    |        |        |       |        |   |
| Boiled Rice       | 1 - 1  | 18 -11 |        |        |       | 17 -11 |   |
| Wheat             | 31 -18 | 2 - 2  |        | 5      |       | 1 4    |   |
| Puffed Rice       | 10 6   | 11 7   | 4      | 1 4    | 0 3   | 9 3    |   |
| Blackgram         | 2 4    | 19 - 8 | 15 13  | 17     | 1     |        |   |
| Greengram         | 5 1    | 10 8   | 5 2    | 23 9   | 1 0   | 1 1    | 7 |
| Lentils           |        | 10 7   | 1 2    | 32 -10 | 1 3   |        | 3 |
| Cow Milk          | 6      | 18 7   |        |        | 1 1   | 17 -15 |   |
| Buffalo Milk      | 1      | 34 - 8 | 33 -16 | 2 1    | 1     |        | 1 |
| Buttermilk        | 1 1    | 17 13  | 7 10   | 7      |       | 12 -1  |   |
| <u>Ghee</u>       | 8      | 19 -14 | 1      | 4      | 6 2   | 10 6   |   |
| Banana            |        | 28 17  |        | 1      |       | 5 6    |   |
| Ripe Coconut      | 5      | 8 11   | 2      |        | 18 -5 | 4 7    |   |
| Jackfruit         | 8      | 5      | 24 -10 | 10 - 9 | 5 -5  |        |   |
| Pineapple         | 17 5   | 8 6    | 3 4    |        | 3 5   | 4 2    | 4 |
| Palm Fruit        | 27 5   | 6 11   | 1      |        |       | 3 2    | 3 |
| Lemon             | 15 7   | 10 6   | 2 1    |        | 2 1   | 7 7    |   |
| Cashew Fruit      | 22 13  | 1      | 1 1    |        | 4 2   | 10 -5  |   |
| Indian Gooseberry | 22 7   | 7 5    |        |        | 5 5   | 3 6    |   |
| Chilli            | 34 23  |        |        |        | 1     |        |   |
| Turmeric          | 13 7   | 5 4    | 1 2    |        | 4 2   | 9 8    |   |

\* The number on the left indicates Brahman response; the number on the right indicates non-Brahman response.

Table 15 (cont'd)

|                                    | Hot |    | Cold |     | Nanju |    | Vayu |   | Pitta |    | Sama |     | ?    |
|------------------------------------|-----|----|------|-----|-------|----|------|---|-------|----|------|-----|------|
| Black Pepper                       | 1   | 2  | 32   | 18  |       |    | 2    |   | 2     |    | 1    | 1   |      |
| Gingely Seeds                      | 2   | -2 | 27   | -19 | 1     |    | 1    |   |       |    | 4    | 1   |      |
| Mustard Seeds                      | 30  | 19 |      |     |       |    |      | 2 |       |    | 1    | 2   |      |
| Garlic                             | 31  | 19 | 1    |     |       |    |      |   | 1     | 2  | 2    | 1   | 2 -1 |
| Areca-nut                          | 8   | 2  | 3    | 2   |       |    |      |   | 22    | 20 | 2    | 5   |      |
| Jaggery Sugar                      | 28  | 9  | 2    | 2   | 2     | 3  | 1    |   | 2     | 4  | 2    | 5   |      |
| Coffee                             | 31  | 23 |      |     |       |    |      |   | 4     | 4  |      |     |      |
| Tea                                | 3   |    | 29   | 18  |       |    |      |   | 21    | 4  |      | 1   |      |
| Tapioca Tuber                      | 18  | 5  | 2    |     | 2     | 5  | 37   | 6 | 29    | 19 |      |     |      |
| Onion                              | 4   | 4  | 23   | 12  | 1     |    | 1    | 1 | 1     | 6  | 5    | 6   |      |
| Ash Gourd                          | 1   | 2  | 27   | 16  | 2     | 5  |      | 1 | 3     | 1  | 5    | 3   |      |
| Drumstick                          | 35  | 18 |      |     | 21    | 11 | 1    |   | 3     | 2  |      |     |      |
| <u>Kēne</u> (Tacca<br>pinnatifida) | 7   | 8  | 6    | 3   | 4     | 3  | 8    |   | 2     |    | 8    | 7   | 1 3  |
| Fish (in general)                  | 9   | 3  | 1    | 3   | 2     | 19 |      | 1 | 2     |    | 13   | -13 |      |
| Chicken                            | 21  | 22 |      |     | 1     |    |      | 1 |       | 16 | 3    |     | 10   |
| Sheep                              | 10  | 5  | 4    | 6   | 2     |    |      |   |       |    | 6    | 11  | 10 1 |
| Egg                                | 3   | 2  | 5    | 6   |       |    |      | 3 |       |    | 18   | 12  |      |
| Honey                              | 19  | 13 | 3    | 4   | 2     | 1  |      | 1 | 2     |    | 9    | 3   |      |
| Coconut Oil                        | 7   | 7  | 8    | 13  | 1     |    | 4    |   | 9     | 3  | 11   | 3   |      |
| Gingely Oil                        | 3   |    | 32   | -16 |       |    |      |   | 2     |    |      | 3   |      |

Table 15 (cont'd)

|  | Hot |     | Cold |     | Nanju |    | Vayu |     | Pitta |   | Sama |   | ?     |
|--|-----|-----|------|-----|-------|----|------|-----|-------|---|------|---|-------|
| Toddy  | 7   | 6   | 5    | 10  |       | 1  |      |     | 9     | 5 | 1    | 4 | 13    |
| <u>Kepala</u> Flower<br>( <u>Ixorea coccinea</u> ) |     | 3   | 28   | -13 |       | 1  |      |     |       |   | 5    | 7 | 5     |
| <u>Tagate</u> ( <u>Cassia</u><br><u>tora</u> )     | 3   | 6   | 18   | 9   | 2     | 1  | 1    |     | 1     | 3 | 2    | 3 | 8 -4  |
| <u>Tulasi</u> ( <u>Ocimum</u><br><u>sanctum</u> )  | 15  | 7   | 12   | 12  |       | 1  |      |     |       |   | 7    | 3 | 1     |
| <u>Busma</u> (ash)                                 | 22  | 4   | 5    | 4   |       | 1  |      |     |       | 1 | 7    | 5 | 1 2   |
| Sandalwood   | 10  | 5   | 22   | 13  |       | 1  |      |     |       |   | 3    | 1 | 3     |
| Areca-nut<br>Inflouescence                         | 4   | 2   | 22   | 14  |       |    |      | 1   | 5     | 6 | 3    | 2 |       |
| ( <u>Crocus sativus</u> )<br><u>Kumkuma</u>        | 24  | -17 | 4    | 3   |       | 3  |      |     |       |   | 2    |   | 5     |
| Asafoetida   | 28  | 17  | 3    | 1   | 1     |    |      | 2   |       | 1 | 3    | 2 |       |
| <u>Anabe</u> (mushroom)                            | 9   | 5   | 5    | 2   | 3     | 14 |      | 1   | 3     | 1 | 2    | 6 | 13 -3 |
| <u>Henda</u> (arrack)                              | 15  | 19  | 4    | 3   |       |    |      | 2 1 | 5     | 6 |      |   | 9     |

Table 16 Caste Bias and Food Classification

| Food   | Caste       | Classification |       |             |       |
|--|-------------|----------------|-------|-------------|-------|
| 1. Tea   | Brahman     | <u>Pitta</u>   | 60%   |             |       |
|  | Non-Brahman | <u>Pitta</u>   | 17.4% |             |       |
| 2. Tapioca                                       | Brahman     | <u>Vayu</u>    | 97%   |             |       |
|  | Non-Brahman | <u>Vayu</u>    | 26%   |             |       |
| 3. Palm Fruit                                    | Brahman     | Hot            | 7%    | Cold        | 17.4% |
|  | Non-Brahman | Hot            | 21%   | Cold        | 47.8% |
| 4. Indian Gooseberry<br>(Phyllanthus<br>emblica) | Brahman     | Hot            | 57%   | <u>Sama</u> | 8.6%  |
|  | Non-Brahman | Hot            | 30%   | <u>Sama</u> | 23.0% |
| 5. Ripe Coconut                                  | Brahman     | Cold           | 22.9% |             |       |
|  | Non-Brahman | Cold           | 56.5% |             |       |

Ambiguity and variance are not weakness of the food classificatory schema. In fact, the non-dogmatic nature of food classification may be considered one of its strengths. Individual opinion is not disregarded but rather rationalized within a conceptual framework which accords equal importance to an individual's prakriti, habitat, climatic environment, and work as well as to the innate properties of a substance. The interaction of these factors determines the classification of a food by a group of people. Vis-a-vis this reasoning all variances of opinion may be accommodated and apparent contradictions resolved. For example, many Shudras consider buttermilk nanju, but state that buttermilk is not nanju for Brahmans who drink it daily. Shudra informants remark that because Brahmans consume more cooling foods than they do, their capacity for the digestion of cooling foods is greater. Shudras, however, say that they are able to eat hotter curries and hotter foods without suffering after-effects.

The point under consideration will prove of importance to an understanding of the patient-practitioner relationship. A patient will always ask a practitioner, be he a vaidya or an allopath, which foods he should or should not consume in light of his particular condition. The patient expects the practitioner to advise him not only with reference to his symptoms, but also his bodily constitution. This is why a patient will ask a practitioner which foods he may and may not eat although he already has a good idea of which foods are hot, cold, or nanju. The patient considers the practitioner's judgement about diet to be a vital part of his treatment. A practitioner who fails to give such dietary advice in detail, will not be considered knowledgeable about the body, although he may be respected as having in his possession valuable medicines, injections, etc. I will investigate this subject in Part Three. We may now turn our attention to the way in which food classification and the ideal of balance has affected Brahman and non-Brahman dietary habits, which will be discussed in brief.

#### Brahman Dietary Habits

Brahmans follow a rigid schedule in regard to the eating of meals. A Brahman may not have a watch or be able to tell time by staring into a sunless sky during rainy season, but it is uncanny how accurate he can be in turning up exactly at the same time everyday for meals. This time sense is based on his sensitivity to a routine digestive cycle. I may briefly describe the culinary activities and dietary habits of a typical Brahman household and demonstrate how a Brahman's diet is influenced by health ideology.

The average Havik Brahman woman spends about seven hours per day engaged in cooking preparations. The wife of the youngest brother in a joint family will rise at 5.30 a.m., perform salutations, namaskāra, to the



threshold of the god's room, devaru kōṇe, and the Tulasi plant. She will then milk the family's cows and buffaloes. When she has finished, she will enter the devaru kōṇe where cow's curds has been kept from the day before and she will churn it to prepare buttermilk. Butter will be separated from the buttermilk to be consumed that day and extra butter will be stored and prepared into ghee.

Milk, buttermilk, butter, and ghee are essential to the Brahman diet. From a nutritional vantage point, these foods supply essential fats and vitamin D to the body. According to local ideology, they are important because of their cooling and ojus producing properties. A Brahman woman would not consider serving heating preparations, such as sweets or wheat products, if ghee or butter was not available to serve with them. Buttermilk is given special importance and is served as the last item at every Brahman meal as a digestive aide. Moreover, every Brahman household must have a supply of milk and buttermilk, since hospitality is measured by gifts of dairy produce. One of the biggest honours one can receive from a Brahman is to be offered a glass of buttermilk along with fresh mango pickle.

After the churning of the buttermilk is completed, the morning fire is lit and the cooking preparations are begun for the family's breakfast. By this time, elder sisters-in-law living in the house are awake and they will bring water from the well and begin grinding coconut. In a typical Brahman household, a thin pancake, dose, is eaten about four mornings a week. Dose are consumed with a fingernail size of butter, jaggery, and pickle.

On alternate mornings, beaten rice flakes are eaten with grated coconut, coriander, cumin seeds, and chillie peppers which have been fried together. This preparation, known as avalaki, is eaten with a small amount of buttermilk and hot pickle. Idli or steamed rice-blackgram dhal cakes and

a preparation of rice vermicelli, known as semige, are other popular morning foods. The men of the household usually take breakfast at 7 o'clock and the children finish at about 8. By 9.30 the women have completed their breakfast, have cleaned the kitchen, and are beginning to prepare the afternoon meal.

Prior to eating the afternoon meal, all male house members must take a bath and put on clean clothing<sup>1</sup>. One of the males must perform pūjā. A Brahman sits for meals in a cross-legged position. In front of him a banana leaf with its end removed will be placed horizontally. A full leaf is not used for the purpose of everyday meals as it is of ritual significance during death ceremonies. Pickle or vegetable will be placed on the leaf and then rice will be served. Rice is not served on an empty leaf for this is considered inauspicious<sup>2</sup>. Then, remembering his ancestral line, gōtra, a Brahman will sprinkle his leaf clockwise with water. This action closes off his personal eating space from outside space and consecrates it as sacred. This space remains closed until a Brahman is finished eating. At the close of a meal, a Brahman will take a sip of water, āposhana, which closes off his body space from his leaf which he will then leave.

After sanctifying his eating space, the Brahman touches his right hand to the rice before him and pronounces a gayatre mantra. This mantra praises the sun god who is responsible for the growth of food on earth. It states that the sun is inside each man in the form of agni and that food is a yajana offering to agni. Then a sip of water is taken as amṛita and five grains of rice are eaten individually while the Brahman invokes the five vayu

<sup>1</sup> If naivēdya is to be made for pūjā, the women of the house must bathe before preparing it. In some houses, the purity of naivēdya is augmented by the raw rice offering being boiled in coconut water or water of a plant, instead of well water.

<sup>2</sup> By the power of association, placing rice on an empty leaf signifies times of hunger to come. Similarly, a container for measuring rice is never stored completely empty and a purse is never put away without at least one coin in it.

operative in his body. The Brahman is then ready to eat, but before he does so it is customary that a small quantity of ghee be poured over his rice to purify it.

A Brahman separates his rice into two piles, one to the left of the leaf and the other towards the centre. A well is made in the centre rice heap to contain curry. All castes eat with their right hand, but the Brahman also divides rice into right and left piles. He eats from the right pile adding additional rice from the left when necessary.

Brahmans enjoy combining the tastes of different foods. In order to mix the foods in their hands, a soft consistency is required and this is a cause for the overcooking of vegetables. Each caste has its own distinctive style of eating. Different castes, for example, have their own way of lifting a sweet pudding, payasa, off a banana leaf. The imitation of one caste member by another caste member is a standard joke, guaranteed to make even a reserved young bride smile.

It is not my purpose to present a nutritional profile of the Brahmanic diet. I will rather direct my attention towards the task of illustrating how Brahmanic dietary custom is related to notions of health. The custom of eating foods of different tastes in a set sequence, and the emphasis on eating foods of different tastes during specific seasons, are both based on ayurvedic conceptions of the tridosha.

At a feast marking an auspicious occasion a leaf is laid out, and a specified number of food items are served dependent upon season and availability of produce. Those serving at such feasts place a small quantity of each item on every leaf. The sequence of eating is shown in Table 17.

This order is in keeping with ayurvedic ideology which stipulates that sweet foods should be tasted first to increase the appetite, followed by

Table 17 The Sequence of Eating at a Brahman Feast

- 
1. A small quantity of sweet pudding
  2. Rice (white) served with a small quantity of ghee
  3. S̄aru, a thin clear soup
  4. Sambar, a spice curry prepared from ground coconut and vegetables
  5. Palya, a dry curry usually prepared from coconut, vegetable, and spices
  6. Melagara, a wet curry prepared from buttermilk, ground coconut, spices and a vegetable
  7. Sweet payasa and other sweets
  8. Chitrana, a lime rice preparation
  9. Second portion of Melagara
  10. Mango pickle
  11. Rice and buttermilk
- 

the gradual consumption of heavier preparations, and final consumption of sour buttermilk as a digestive aide. Ayurveda also recommends that sweets should be taken with ghee to control their heating effect. Furthermore, in concordance with ayurvedic doctrine, all six tastes are represented on each leaf: hot chillies, sour pickle and buttermilk, sweets, pungent tamarind, salt, and a bitter vegetable curry. Ayurvedic theory postulates that the body requires food containing the six basic tastes because each taste has a different pancha b̄uta constitution and a specific effect on the body's tridosha. The effect of these tastes on the tridosha is depicted in Table 18. The Table also notes the pancha b̄uta which predominate each taste.

Table 18 The Effect of the Six Tastes on the Tridosha

| Taste                            | Predominant<br><u>Pancha Buta</u> | <u>Vayu</u> | <u>Pitta</u> | <u>Kapha</u> |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------|--------------|--------------|
| <u>madura</u><br>(sweet)         | <u>ap</u> and <u>prithi</u>       | -           | -            | +            |
| <u>amla</u><br>(sour)            | <u>ap</u> and <u>tejas</u>        | -           | +            | +            |
| <u>lavana</u><br>(salt)          | <u>prithi</u> and <u>tejas</u>    | -           | +            | +            |
| <u>tika</u><br>(bitter)          | <u>vayu</u> and <u>akasa</u>      | +           | -            | -            |
| <u>ksaya</u><br>(astringent)     | <u>vayu</u> and <u>prithi</u>     | +           | -            | -            |
| <u>katu</u><br>(hot and pungent) | <u>vayu</u> and <u>tejas</u>      | +           | +            | -            |

Note: + = Kara (aggravates)

- = Hara (subsides)

The overeating of one taste is thought to cause dosha imbalance. For this reason, if a sweet mango curry is prepared with rice, it will be followed by a preparation of chillies, or if a sweet pudding is eaten as a snack, it will be eaten with hot pickle to balance the tastes. Brahman meals are planned with this type of balancing in mind.

Each season is thought to have an effect on the tridosha. Diagram 3 (page 108) has illustrated dosha accentuation which accord to South Kanara climate conditions. Particular foods are eaten in each season not only because of their availability, but because they control seasonal dosha imbalance. During the hot summer months, more salt is added to the cooking

and cooling buttermilk will be drunk throughout the day. Nannāli (*Hemidesmus indicus*) root is crushed and drunk in quantity during summer season for its cooling action on the body, and as a blood purifier. The juice of Punar puli (*Garcinia indica*) is drunk in abundance and is noted for its cooling effects on the body. Brahmans eat more gangi because it is cooling to the body. Tambali, a cooling creamy sauce prepared from raw vegetables such as onion, cucumber, or cashew nut sprouts ground with buttermilk is commonly eaten.

Rainy season is an inauspicious time. A notion exists that bodily poisons are aggravated in this season and fever, dysentery, and respiratory diseases are prevalent. The Brahman consumes a number of wild plants during rainy season for both their food and medicinal value. In June, the leaves of Kesavina (*Colocasia antiquorum*) are specifically eaten because of their ability to digest bodily poisons. Tajunku, (*Cassia tora*) is eaten because it increases urine flow thus eliminating toxins. Haviks are famous for a preparation called patrade in which Tajunku leaves are ground with rice into a smooth paste, shaped onto a banana leaf and steamed. Patrade is eaten because it "cleans" the bowels and constipation is a common complaint of villagers during rainy season. Āne mungu (*Oroxylum indicum*), Gamate kaji (*Zenthoxylum rhetsa*) and Timare (*Hydrocotyle asiatica*) are commonly eaten during Āti month for their blood purification properties. The flower and tuber of Kodasige (*Hollerhina antidesenterica*) and tender bamboo shoots are used for curry preparations and pickles. According to vaidya, both are medicinal plants with anti-toxic qualities. The trunk of the banana plant is eaten to clean the stomach and the intestines.

Kapha increases in rainy season, thereby increasing respiratory ailments. To reduce kapha in the transitional months of August and September, the Brahman prepares hot foods, utilizing both green and red chillie

peppers. In October, a hot chutney powder is prepared to increase urination, so as to flush the system clean of kapha.

It is said that in winter season thirst becomes less, hunger becomes greater and the eating of hot foods will bring on diarrhoea. To avoid diarrhoea and indigestion, Brahmans eat a small quantity of hot and sour foods and specifically reduce their intake of tamarind. Pitta increases so sweet foods are eaten to counterbalance it. A general tonic is also made in winter season as a preventive medicine and will be described in Part Three.

Diet is also regulated in regard to the age of particular family members. As I indicated in Diagram four (page 108), the following dosha predominate respective age groups:

Child: kapha      Middle age: pitta      Old age: vata

Diet is restricted in the case of:

1. the very young
2. brahmachariya initiates into manhood
3. those performing tapas or special austerities.
4. the aged.

1. A Brahman child will not be put to the breast one to two days following birth, as colostrum is considered indigestible<sup>1</sup>.

To provide nourishment to the baby until milk secretion begins,

kashāya of the following was traditionally prepared:

Orile root (Papilionasia species)  
Pashana bhedi root (Aerva lanata)  
 Small badane root (Solanum melongena)  
Neggilu mullu (Pedalium murex)

If these roots were not available, a milk kashāya of Orile root was prepared.

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<sup>1</sup> This traditional custom is not always followed today.

Nowadays, most villagers dip a cloth in a solution of sugar water and give it to the newborn to suck. Some villagers, however, give the newborn tender coconut water on the first day, and then colostrum on the second.

A child will be breast-fed anywhere from six months to three years depending on the availability of breast-milk. If breast-milk is available, Brahman and non-Brahman women continue to breast-feed until they become aware of a subsequent pregnancy. They will then cease breast-feeding as it is thought that if they do not the developing baby will become jealous and as a result, its sense organs will be malformed. Some women, both Brahman and non-Brahman, extend nursing in order to reduce their chances of becoming pregnant, as it is believed that during lactation there is less chance of impregnation. If a Brahman woman does not have sufficient milk to breast-feed, a substitute woman is found to breast-feed the child.<sup>1</sup> This woman may be Brahman or of another caste as milk does not convey pollution. In the past, Brahman children from the Panaje-Vitla area who were suffering from weakness, anaemia and sprue, were occasionally taken to Manjeshwar on the coast to be nursed by fisherwomen who were paid for their services<sup>2</sup>.

When a child is about four months of age, it is fed small quantities of arrowroot flour mash or a preparation of ragi and wheat flour, mani. At the age of six months, a child is given small quantities

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<sup>1</sup> If a woman of another caste nurses a Brahman baby, her name is, after her death, mentioned at the family's yearly collective death rituals.

<sup>2</sup> It is a common notion that the breastmilk of fisherwomen is richer in nutrients.



- of rice and milk. If cow's milk is given to a child it is diluted 2:1 with water, whereas buffalo milk is diluted 3:1 with water. Both of these milks without dilution are too cooling and fatty for a child to digest. Often a small amount of coffee, a moderately heating substance, is added to the milk to counterbalance its cool effect. A child continues eating rice and milk and is gradually allowed to begin tasting bland vegetables at the age of one year. Banana, and other substances classified as cooling and kapha producing are not given to a child. This is because sprue, respiratory disease, extensive worm infestation, and fits are commonly attributed to kapha accumulation. In such cases, a child's diet is often considered as the factor responsible for the illness.
2. A brahmachariya undertakes a stringent diet. He may eat only freshly prepared food and by shastra he must eat only raw rice. If he eats parboiled rice he must take a bath subsequent to the meal to reinstate his purity<sup>1</sup>. A brahmachariya is not allowed to eat foods which arouse his sexual organs or which irritate his urinary tract. Such foods include chillies, onions<sup>1</sup>, and garlic. He is furthermore allowed only a limited amount of postika foods. Postika foods are foods which have a dramatic affect on the body. Postika foods include ghee, butter, milk, curds, blackgram dhal, and sour and hot foods in general. Ideally the body of the brahmachariya should be in a state of dosha equilibrium, thus enabling him to concentrate on his ritual duties.
  3. Yogis and those performing tapas shun salt because it upsets the body's vayu and they avoid pungent foods which arouse sexual desires.

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<sup>1</sup> Parboiled rice has been twice cooked and it is therefore not pure. Its slight state of impurity is known as kole.

4. The body of an elder man or woman is dominated by vata, and arthritis and rheumatic complaints are linked to vata imbalance in the body. After the age of fifty, salt intake is restricted and the use of gingely oil is recommended to assist the flow of vata. Some elderly Brahmins who are rice eaters, will eat wheat in the evening so as to increase their body heat which declines in old age.

Ayurvedic ideology also underlies various shastra governing the worship of Brahmanic deities. Brahmins do not offer salty, sour, or pungent foods to their deities. It may be noted that these three tastes aggravate pitta and internal heat and it is desired to keep gods in a relatively cool, controlled, state. Moreover, salt subsides vata, which may be analogized to the movement of the deity, pungent provokes sex and violent activity, and sour causes elimination to occur.

Sour food is particularly shunned at temples. One Sanskrit sloka cites that the best way to reduce the power of a temple is to place sour tasting objects on its premises. One informant, a Shivalli Brahmin priest, told me that sour substances could drain a deity of its power or cause the deity to leave its shrine.

#### Non-Brahmin Dietary Habits

I have illustrated how Brahmin dietary habits are influenced by the ayurvedic conceptualizations of health as a balanced state of the tridosha. Non-Brahmin habits are much less systematic. Unlike Brahmins, non-Brahmins sit for meals in a squat position, with knees raised and bent. A Shudra does not separate his rice into two piles, but rather heaps it into the centre of a banana leaf which is laid vertically in front of him. A Harijan takes

his meals in an areca-nut sheath which he fashions into a trough like container. The Brahman's horizontally placed leaf, the Shudra's vertically placed leaf and the Harijan's areca trough emphasize social identity and group membership. I would further suggest that they are indicative of the Brahman and non-Brahman attitude toward food. A Brahman horizontal leaf provides a large surface area for the mixing of tastes in accord with a system and a sequence of eating. A vertically placed leaf, a trough shaped container and a single pile of rice emphasizes quantity as opposed to a specified procedure of eating. Furthermore, whereas routine and prompt meal taking is stressed by Brahmans, such is not a general custom among non-Brahman agricultural labourers.

Two systems of food taking exist in non-Brahman households in the Panaje-Vitla area. Either family members eat small quantities of food several times a day or take meals at set times. The first pattern is prevalent among small landowners, Shudra tenant agriculturalists, and Harijan cane workers. The second pattern is imposed on areca-nut workers by the nature of their working hours. Food habits among specialized labourers like areca tree climbers, carpenters, etc. vary according to working conditions.

A non-Brahman areca-nut worker family usually has coffee and tindi for breakfast. Tindi may consist of a greengram dhal preparation, dose of corn or wheat flour, or tapioca or sweet potato tubers. Preparation from rice flour is not as common among non-Brahmans as among Brahmans in this region. For the afternoon meal either gangi and one curry is eaten at the landlord's house or the labourer returns to his own home and takes a gangi meal. On returning home in the evening at about six, the working members of the family will eat a small tindi of beaten rice or fried maize and then take a gangi meal at eight or nine o'clock. A vegetable curry will be eaten, but this will be more for flavouring the rice than for the sake of health.

Once or twice a week a diluted fish curry will be prepared for the evening meal. The use of spices such as garlic and turmeric, coconut oil, and ground coconut is minimal among areca-nut labourer families, as the cost is in excess of their earnings. The consumption of milk is rare.

Meals supplied by Brahman landowners to areca-nut workers generally consist of one-quarter kilo of rice for men and one-fifth kilo of rice for women and usually a curry of cucumber, horsegram dhal or plantain fruit. Non-Brahmans do not eat several of the common seasonal foods which Brahmans prepare, such as the banana trunk and flower, and these are not served to them. Non-Brahman landowners will occasionally prepare a diluted fish curry. Coffee or an extra coconut will be given to workers who work long hours or do particularly difficult jobs.

In actuality, the non-vegetarian in South Kanara is by force of circumstance a vegetarian. An average Panaje non-Brahman areca-nut worker eats chicken only on ceremonial occasions or when a special guest visits, and at such times one small chicken will be shared with his entire family. Such feasts may occur three or four times a year. Eggs are not plentiful as local hens are not good egg layers. If a labourer does not have his own supply of eggs he will not purchase them from the outside since the price of one egg is equal to one quarter of a woman's pay for a day of work in the field. If an egg is eaten, the one egg may be divided among the family.

Wild game, which composed a significant portion of the non-Brahman diet in the past, has been greatly reduced. Wild boar, black-faced monkey, wild fowl, python snake, hagana rat, turtle, and lizard are hunted, but by no means make up a major part of the diet. Beef is not eaten by most castes other than Korigas and Bairas and even these castes are beginning to give up this practice in public. Fish is eaten in season, but fish prices have

greatly risen since the installation of freezing plants along the coast. Fresh fish is brought in by bus and by bicycle from the coast some thirty miles away and dry fish is eaten off season. Dried fish is relished and an average areca-nut worker family of six members will purchase one-quarter to one-half kg of dried fish a week when fresh fish is not in season.

Fish or meat curry is usually consumed on no moon days and this day is a general work holiday and a day when the ancestors are worshipped. On no moon day, landowners usually give each worker a coconut from which a chutney is prepared. Fresh water fish are occasionally eaten, but these fish rarely exceed finger size.

Vegetables are most readily available from January to April. Forest, uncultivated plants commonly eaten include Nugge, Timare, Harave (*Amaranthus gangeticus*) and Tajunku. Indian gooseberry, a rich source of Vitamin C, is plentiful. Salted pickle of Indian gooseberry could be prepared by even the poorest of agricultural workers, but they do not do so. The preservation of food is not as important to their way of thinking and living as it is to Brahman castes. More complex pickling and food preparations require a great deal of work and time which the average non-Brahman working woman does not have. Because the agricultural labourer family does not prepare pickle they commonly eat fried red chillies with meals. An average family of seven members will consume one-half kilo of chillies per week.

Vegetables and fruit consumption in Panaje are minimal now in comparison to what they were two decades ago. Two reasons for this are the areca-nut boom and the Land Reform Act. The areca-nut boom caused landowners to utilize all existing space for areca-nut trees and to limit vegetable gardens to the size required to fulfill family needs. Furthermore, land reform has caused landowners to be reluctant to give labourers traditionally allotted garden space or fruit trees for their own cultivation. Added to these

factors is a soil erosion problem caused by a stripping of the hill areas of forests due to a demand for fire wood. Valuable top soil is washed away during rainy season and crops in some areas have greatly been reduced.

Of late, the areca worker has had to supplement his hunger with cheap and less desirable grains such as wheat, corn, ragi, and tubers such as tapioca and sweet potato. When he becomes ill he often blames these foods. His intake is below the optimum and his work ability has notably decreased. Some landowners have responded to this situation by giving rice meals to their regular workers. This situation is advantageous to the worker and to the landowner who can now be assured that his labourers will come to work each day. However, the availability of rice is a problem for as I have noted, landowners in the rice restricted region cannot grow enough rice for themselves and are prohibited by the Government from stockpiling rice during season when the rice price is low.

The areca-nut worker in Vitla is in a slightly different situation from the worker in Panaje. As I have noted, Vitla is an expanding crossroads town where a constant supply of vegetables is available. The beedie industry and the existence of the Areca-nut Research Station, which both pay relatively good wages, have caused a general wage rise for areca-nut garden workers. This means that a man who earns Rs. 3 a day in Panaje earns Rs.  $4\frac{1}{2}$  or 5 a day in Vitla for the same work. Added to this fact, Vitla lies just outside the rice restricted belt making rice cheaper, more readily available, and of varying qualities as opposed to Panaje ration shops which stock only government rice of relatively poor quality.

Given these conditions one might expect that most Vitla's villagers have a significantly better diet and far better health than the Panaje villager. This, however, is often not the case. My residence in Vitla was near to the Areca-nut Research Station and I was able to observe and interview workers

who lived and worked near the station. I found that a number of problems were attached to what I thought would be a situation of a new cash prosperity.

First of all, I noted that each family had a set notion of the amount of rice needed to keep up its basic diet. Quite often, earnings above this minimum would lead to family quarrels. For example, if a wife earned enough with the help of a daughter or son to fill the family's rice pot, the father would often spend his cash on liquor or cock fights or he might not work at all. Where siblings earned different amounts, misunderstandings occurred about how much each should contribute to shared household items like food. Often female beedie workers developed tastes for face powder and fancy saris as status symbols to be displayed when going to collect supplies of leaves and tobacco at local beedie branch supply stores.

In sum, a raise in wages was often not translated into better diet but rather into prestige goods or new social strategies such as saving for one's own dowry. The labourer's standard of health and diet has not risen in accord with his wages. In fact, if anything has increased it has been alcohol consumption. The beedie roller's diet has only marginally changed and beedie rollers consume a slightly greater quantity of dry fish, rice, and milk. One notion prevalent among beedie workers is that consumption of a small quantity of milk will make them resistant from the illnesses associated with beedie rolling, particularly tuberculosis. However, they generally consume less quantity of fruits and vegetables and eat almost no wild, uncultivated plants.

In general, wild foods are not given much significance by Vitla townspeople; particularly beedie rollers, contract labourers, and paddy agriculturists who have lost touch with forest lands. Even though edible tubers, shoots, leaves, and fruits are available within a reasonable distance

not much attention is paid to them except on token occasions when they are necessary for curative or ritual purposes. A general stigma against uncultivated but edible forest foods does not border on social condemnation and it is certainly true that children forage a good deal in nearby forest areas. The point is that wild food is not prestigious food nor considered essential and the eating of it is associated with the unavailability of rice.

In Vitla the use of wild plants is diminishing and the traditional diet is rapidly changing. Panaje villagers, on the other hand, still make use of wild products in their daily cuisine. As in the case of Brahmans, some uncultivated foods are consumed for medicinal reasons in particular seasons. I have noted that all villagers consider the rainy season a time when the digestive process is easily disturbed and poison is thought to accumulate in the body. Kesavina leaf is especially eaten by non-Brahmans during the rainy season to digest poisons. Kene is eaten as a bowel cleaner and Tagate is eaten to induce urination. Because of the notion that poisons increase during rainy season, non-Brahmans will not eat Nugge (*Moringa oleifera*) at this time as it is thought to aggravate poisons in the body. A system of regulating the body by different tastes in different seasons is not followed.

Age does not have much of an effect on non-Brahman diet except in the case of children. Among non-vegetarian castes, meat, chicken, or fish are not given to a child until they are approximately three years of age, or until they ask. One reason for not giving these preparations to young children is that they are usually extremely hot from chillies. Eggs, if available, are given to a child at one and one half years of age. Generally, such foods are thought to be difficult to digest and are thus avoided. Although eggs and meat are rarely eaten, fish in season is commonly eaten and could



supply a child with needed proteins. Fish is not consumed in any quantity, until a child is between the ages of three to five. The fact that children of the poorest workers often do not get their teeth until ten months or afterwards also delays the time when solid food may be given.

As in the case of Brahmans, non-Brahmans do not give their children mashed bananas and dilute milk to increase its digestibility. Usually a child is given diluted coffee or gangi water. Vegetables are not given to a child until the child is about two, but there is no hard and fast rule governing this. Most women say 'when they ask we give it' as they do not see vegetables as potentially harmful.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

ETIOLOGY

Illness and general debility are explained by any one, or a combination, of several causal factors influencing various aspects of a villager's life. Three concurrent modes of thought characterize local ideology of illness causality. The first mode has already been discussed at length. If a man's state of balance is upset, if his bodily heat or dosha are unbalanced, he will become ill. Explanations such as improper diet centre attention on internal processes and the metaphor of balance. A contrasting mode of thought explains illness by reference to any one of several external pathogenic agencies of supernatural, ecological, or human origin. A third mode of thought attributes illness to karma, the stars, or fate.

I will examine the external agents of illness from two vantage points. First, I will describe whom the agent most commonly affects, specific symptoms associated with the agent and its mode of attack. Then I will consider its meaning in relation to social structure and a concept of self. After the external agents of illness have been described the indigenous notion of karma and fate will be discussed. Finally, the opinions of informants in Vitla and Panaje will be presented in relation to the most prevalent causes of specified illnesses.

Before I begin this task, a preliminary point must be made. Internalizing, externalizing, and fatalistic modes of thought are distinct but inter-related. External agents of illness affect internal processes, i.e., bodily heat and the tridosha. Likewise, because of fate, karma, or the stars, one may be attacked by external agents. Obeyeskere (1969, 175) has noted the

importance of this interrelationship:

The demonic theory of disease causation is linked to the classical ayurvedic theory in a very interesting manner. Demonic incursions, as well as incursions by any external spirit cause in turn the upsetting of the 3 humours so that the symptoms of demonic illness may be similar to the symptoms of physical illness.

(Emphasis mine)

An illness may initially be attributed to one factor and then be recategorized later due to the course of the illness or the social environment of the afflicted. No contradiction of ideas need result, because heterogeneous factors can cause similar illnesses. A quote from the Charaka Samhita, a standard ayurvedic text, emphasizes this point:

Even if a disease is primarily caused as an endogenous one, it may subsequently develop the features of the exogenous diseases. For example, fever or insanity is primarily caused by the vitiation of the dosas but it may subsequently be combined with the features of demonic seizure which is regarded as an exogenous disease. Similarly, fever from assault or insanity caused by the demonic seizure which is regarded as an exogenous disease may subsequently develop features of endogenous diseases ...

(1976, 358)

### Supernatural Agents of Illness

A variety of wandering būta, unsatisfied spirits of the dead, spirits associated with rivers, crossroads and sacred trees, and būta and dēva associated with shrines, inhabit the South Kanarese villager's universe. Some of these spirits and būta may cause specific illness whereas others maintain the capacity to transfer any illness to men.

Gāndharva, a category of spirits who live near tanks and streams, trouble newlyweds or the young and unmarried by appearing in their dreams. Gāndharva take on a male form to females and a female form to males. Dreams of cohabitation, night emissions of men, and hysterical outbursts of women are symptoms of gāndharva attack. Drownings may be the result of their wooing an unsuspecting person into their midst.

Among the many local spirits which may cause disease is a spirit known in Panaje as Odi, border spirit, which causes burning sensation in the joints and temporary immobility of the limbs. Another spirit known as bala pide, attacks young children and causes them to suffer from fits. A masti, or she-devil, causes pregnant women to abort.

Certain būta cause particular symptoms to occur as signs of their anger. The būta Guliga causes sudden illness in which stabbing pains or the spitting up of blood is present. A Kallurti būta in Vitla, causes women to have acute stomach cramps. The curse of the būta Naga Brahma causes menstrual complaints, leprosy, leucoderma, various skin diseases, eye defects and infertility.

The wrath of a village būta can cause any type of illness. Whereas Mari is recognized as the goddess of smallpox throughout India, in South Kanara, būta as well as Mari may cause smallpox. The goddess Bhagavati on the coast is worshipped when pox diseases break out, and the būta dancers for Kallurti and Kalkuda būta are painted with white spots representing the power of the būta to cause pox diseases. Likewise, any būta can cause an epidemic of cholera, typhoid, or may cause a man to go unconscious or go mad.

Būta may cause man to become ill by several means. A curse of a būta, shāpa, or its dr̥isthi, may direct illness at an individual or family. It may be emphasized that būta act rashly and for this reason any promise which is made to them must be fulfilled meticulously within a stipulated period of time. A great many pāḍḍana have as their theme a būta offering a man glory or a prize in return for a promise of an offering, parike. The būta then causes grief or illness should the man not fulfill his promise adequately. Many myths portray the victim as having forgotten to offer the parike without malicious intent. The moral of these myths is that

once a promise or contract has been made with a būta, it must never be forgotten. In reality, however, a great many villagers make promises of offerings to various būta during times of need, particularly during times of sickness. Often, due to economic circumstances, they cannot fulfill their promises. A great number of informants, if pressed, admitted they had parike outstanding from one time or another. When illnesses occur they are often attributed to the failure to pay these debts.

Another way a būta can be led to attack a man is by vāk, power invoked by word. A villager may say a vāk against an enemy in the name of a particular dēva or būta. At that time, he will put a coin aside as a token of a promised offering to be made to the deity when the vāk, in the form of a curse, befalls the victim. The enemy will then be affected by any one of a number of afflictions. If the person who has told the vāk does not fulfill his promise to the deity in question, he invites wrath from the deity. If he changes his mind about a vāk he has said, he cannot undo the vāk without visiting the deity's shrine, paying a fine, and begging the deity to disregard the vāk. Some deities are only thought to act on a vāk which is said in truth and which seeks justice, whereas other būta, such as Ali būta of Kumbla are thought to accept vāk of a vindictive nature, if a substantial sum is offered as payment.

If a man crosses the path of a būta he may contract a fever or fall unconscious. This is known as the wind of būta, sonku, Villagers explain sudden scratches which appear on their body during the night, or after a few drinks as being due to sonku, and it is for fear of sonku that villagers will not sleep outside under the open sky. Furthermore, a būta or an ancestor spirit may, out of great love or desire, touch a person and cause illness. One villager told me that his young daughter had been given a very

light case of chickenpox as a result of a family būta which had great love for the child.

A final point to be made about būta and illness, may be exemplified by a summary of a portion of a legend collected by Manner in 1894 and still known by a few of my informants in Panaje. The legend is of political as well as conceptual importance.

In the beginning when the god Narayana created the earth, Ishvara sat on his right and Brahma on his left side. While protecting the fourteen worlds, Ishvara was sitting on his throne at Kailasa in the midst of 1001 gana (attendants or body guards) and 1001 būta. His wife, Parvati, approached him and engaged him in conversation about the evil and meritorious men living in the world. Shiva pointed to his gana and būta and said these gana and būta serve me and are dependent on me. I have created 1001 diseases because it was necessary to punish the wicked and those who love only money. If I did not do this the pride of men would increase and the poor would be much oppressed. Hearing these words of Ishvara, the būta present said, "Oh Ishvara you created us and now we are hungry and thirsty. Give us food." "Go then," said Ishvara, "and give trouble to those who have done pāpa (sin) and you will receive food, but do not trouble those who are my devotees." Then the būta said "But how will we be able to distinguish between those who are sinners and those who are your devotees?" Ishvara said, "I shall curse the sinners on earth with many diseases and troubles and you may seize such persons." Then the būta said, "But how shall such men as are afflicted with disease know that it is we who are troubling them?" Ishvara replied, "Lo in the world I have created astrologers and soothsayers and through them men will come to know of your presence and they will offer you food."

In this legend būta are allocated the task of making man pay for his misdeeds. Būta are not portrayed as having the power of blessing, of curing illness, of keeping the peace, or providing protection against malevolent spirits. Although the legend is sung in Tulu by non-Brahmans, the principles contained in the legend are Brahmanic. It may be suspected that such myths were propagated by kings and Brahmans to subsume local būta under the jurisdiction of dēva or the king's arasu būta.

I discussed this legend with two villagers who had sung it to me. They agreed that as depicted in the legend, būta were the servants, of

Ishvara, but their description of village būta characterized them with power in their own right. These būta owed allegiance to Brahmanic deities in much the same way as local Tuluva kings had owed allegiance to the Vijayanagara emperors while maintaining full power at home.

The legend is of conceptual importance for it focuses attention on illness as a time when man is prone to the attack of būta and spirits. The legend specifically states that an illness may occur prior to and be complicated by a būta attack and it implies that a man may be the victim of both būta attack and an illness at the same time. Particular symptoms, such as visual and auditory hallucinations, unconsciousness, shooting and burning pain, or delirium are considered signs of būta or spirit involvement in an illness.

This notion is important, for during times of illness, a villager may go to an ayurvedic vaidya and a mantravādi simultaneously for two separate types of relief. He may expect the vaidya to relieve a set of symptoms of physiological consequence, while expecting a mantravādi to rid him of a precipitatory or extenuating cause of the illness. He may expect the mantravādi to protect his personal space against spirit attack or to rid him of an invading spirit by appeasing or chasing it away.

Non-Brahman lineage ancestor spirits and house būta have the capacity to cause a wide range of illnesses. These illnesses may be interpreted as signs of disapproval for an event which is to take place, or as recompense for a violation of taboo or unfulfilled obligation. Among Brahmans, however, the sudden onset of an illness is not attributed to ancestors for, as Gough (1959) has noted, Brahmans have a distal relationship with their ancestors and do not ascribe to them an active role in family affairs.

Among Brahmans, family solidarity, cohesion, and moral responsibility are enforced by notions of karma, moksha, pāpa and punya. Moreover, if

a Brahman were to admit to būta attack he would be admitting to his peers that a lapse of purity had occurred in his family, because Brahmans consider themselves immune from būta and spirit attack while pure. A Brahman will usually describe serious illness by saying "dēvaru kopa", gods anger, as opposed to naming a spirit. If a spirit is named, however, it will invariably be a brahma-rākshasa, because this is the spirit of a deceased Brahman who has outstanding desires. In other words, social status directly determines which spirit is named as the cause of an illness. The influence of social status on the naming of a troublesome spirit is also apparent in the tendency for high status Shudras to name renowned spirits in cases of spirit possession. I recorded a number of cases of possession where one spirit was initially named and later the possession was attributed to a more renowned būta or dēva for social status reasons.

### The Evil Eye

Envy, jealousy, and projected desire cause sickness in the form of dṛisthi, the evil eye. Dṛisthi may be the result of either conscious or unconscious desire. A close examination of dṛisthi as a concept and as an act will reveal overt and covert meanings coexistent in its formulation.

Pocock (1973, 39) has reported that in Gujarat the evil eye is not feared between equals, such as brothers, or between people whose status is clearly different and defined. It is rather feared among caste members whose economic position and tangible possessions are unequally distributed. The fear of evil eye compels wealthier caste members to be generous<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Generosity is often described by higher caste informants as dharma yielding punya to them. Latent guilt often precipitates benevolence.



Pocock's depiction of evil eye is partially applicable in the South Kanara context.<sup>1</sup> Evil eye accusation is common between envious caste members and competitors. This is hardly surprising as dristhi accusation assumes the recognition that a particular party is envious, and one is most aware of the envy of competitors and peers. Moreover, a prevailing idea is that one does not "totally" envy something which he does not know or feel should be his own. A beggar may cast dristhi on a rich man eating rice, but it is unlikely that he will cast dristhi on a rich man driving a car. Likewise a childless widow is a likely candidate for casting dristhi on a child while it is being breast-fed, but it is unlikely that she will cast her dristhi on a neighbour who has purchased a new radio.

However, it is not just members of the same caste who one can affect by dristhi. In actuality, deities, stars, and animals are capable of dristhi as well as humans. Among humans, pregnant women, Brahman widows, the infertile, and the maimed are most feared for their dristhi. Each of these types of people have accentuated desires. A pregnant woman's desires are exorbitant and one informant described her dristhi as similar to that of a būta. I have already noted that a 'marriage of desires' must be conducted during a woman's pregnancy to control her desires.

A young childless Brahman widow is in a perpetual state of desire because she cannot remarry. Her dristhi is especially feared, and formerly some groups of South Kanarese Havik Brahmans insisted that their widows wear red saris to signal both their social and psycho-biological status. In contrast, elderly widows with children wore white saris to indicate their state of nullified desire. Purity is maintained to control desires and

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<sup>1</sup> In South Kanara one finds a pattern of scattered settlement, and members of the same caste may not live in close proximity to one another.

Brahman widows observe purity regulations to a greater extent than any other members of their caste. The infertile naturally have a desire for children, and the maimed envy those who are whole.

Subjects most prone to the effect of dristhi are those in transitional states or stages of development. A child, for example, may be the subject of dristhi projected by its mother, a family member, an enemy, a malevolent spirit, a childless woman, an envious widow, or the child gazing into a mirror and admiring itself. A mother can give her own child dristhi merely by looking at it with desire while breast-feeding. A common proverb, "Tayi dristhi, navyi dristhi" expresses that the longing gaze of a mother is like that of a hungry dog. It is used as a warning to a mother when she comments on how strong or beautiful her child is. Talk of this type could cause a child to develop diarrhoea or red rashes.

Children are protected against dristhi by either being slightly marred to distract an onlooker's gaze, or by having a protective device placed in their appropriated space. For example, a mother will place black smudges on her baby's face every day to camouflage the beauty of the child and thus avert the evil eye<sup>1</sup>. She will also perform a daily ritual to protect the child's body space. Chillies, salt, and mustard seeds are circulated three times around the baby's head, counterclockwise and then clockwise, and are then thrown into the kitchen hearth. These three heating items attract the heat of dristhi.

The forementioned ritual is carried out each day until the child is about two years old. During this time, the baby may also wear a wrist bracelet known as a dristhi mani. This bracelet is made out of black and

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<sup>1</sup> Among some non-Brahman castes it was a custom to name a child with a lowly name in order to divert the dristhi of spirits. If, however, a child was born on an inauspicious occasion, such as the new moon, an auspicious name was given to the child.

white beads which both absorb and distract dr̥isthi. A small copper tube containing a yantra may be placed around the child's waist. This yantra consists of a geometric depiction of a baby's body space, situated inside a larger figure which protects this space by preventing anything from entering into it.

I may give some examples of other transitory subjects which are especially vulnerable to dr̥isthi. Milking animals, buildings under construction, budding rice fields, and businesses are common targets for dr̥isthi. A broken pot painted with white lime spots is placed in cattle-sheds to divert dr̥isthi and it is not uncommon to find workers hanging anti-dr̥isthi devices around the necks of water buffalo especially prior to yearly village buffalo races. Milking animals which develop mastitis are thought to have been affected by dr̥isthi and are treated by anti-dr̥isthi rituals. Moreover, whenever milk is transported, a Tulasi leaf or banana leaf is placed in it, to avert dr̥isthi and whenever buttermilk is transported, a chillie pepper is placed in it for the same reason.

Buildings under construction are decorated with naked dolls to distract an onlooker's glance. Female dolls are hung from a building during its early stages of construction to attract the attention of male onlookers, whereas male dolls are hung from the building during its finishing stages to distract female onlookers who might be envious.

Budding rice fields are prime targets for the dr̥isthi of men, animals and spirits. Protective devices, rakshāṇa, are placed in rice fields during each of the three paddy seasons. A different rakshāṇa is used during each season and all rakshāṇa are plants having heat controlling properties. The rakshāṇa imbibes the field with its properties and it serves a preventative rather than curative purpose.

During the first crop, small insects and worms are an acute problem. The occurrence of these worms in one field and not in another is attributed to dr̥isthi. A small bush known as Kappu punkti (Latin name not available) is placed in the middle of the field to protect it against the entrance of these creatures. Kappu punkti has important medicinal qualities and is used in cures for fever, skin diseases, and worms. During the second crop the chief threat is fire disease, binki r̄oga, so named because it makes paddy stalks look as if they have been burned. Binki r̄oga is caused by both environmental factors and dr̥isthi. In this season, Sarol̄i (Latin name unknown) is placed in the field. Sarol̄i is a cooling plant used as a medicine for burns and women's leukorrhea, a heating disease. Some villagers place a banana stalk, a common symbol of coolness, in their fields during this season. If the banana plant bears fruit this is an omen that a jealous enemy has cast dr̥isthi on the field and its heat has caused the banana plant to bear fruit.

A third crop is very rare in the area and in order to maintain this crop, a landowner must be prosperous and have an ample water supply all year round. This crop is greatly envied. As an anti-dr̥isthi measure a Madaranḡi (*Lowsonia alba*) plant is placed in the field. The plant has thorny leaves which are said to distract dr̥isthi. It is used medicinally in the treatment of fevers. Agriculturists in other areas use strychnine leaves as rakshāna for their field during each of the three crops. Strychnine is used medicinally as an antipyretic, blood purifier, and disinfectant. It is also used to prevent spirit attack. For example, a house in which a delivery has taken place will be surrounded with strychnine leaves for protection.

Business is a transitional occupation involving continuous interaction. Businessmen tie chillies and lemons in their shop fronts as protective

devices against dṛisthi. Chillies attract dṛisthi because they are hot and like attracts like. I received various opinions as to why lemons were used for this purpose. Some informants commented on a lemon's cooling nature while others stated that lemons were life-giving, and that dṛisthi was attracted to them. In this case, a strategy of opposites attracting each other was in vogue.

Dṛisthi can cause buildings to collapse, rice fields to dry up, and businesses to fail. It can cause men to develop any one of a number of illnesses, most of which are associated with overheat. Common illnesses caused by dṛisthi include red rashes, boils, anaemia, joint pain, dumbness, nervous twitches, extraordinary bodily movements, and excessive weeping in children. Preyta dṛisthi causes intensive bodily shaking, blinking of the eyes, a fixed gaze upwards, and the feeling of extreme coldness in the limbs. Būta dṛisthi causes sudden and severe stabbing pains, delirious fever, and the spitting up of blood. These symptoms are also characteristic of sorcery, and a mantravādi must be consulted to determine what the source of these symptoms are.

Dṛisthi is of conceptual as well as functional importance. Dṛisthi is an expression of the power of desire. Man's capacity of dṛisthi is an affirmation of his potential power and his innate instincts. In a sense, dṛisthi is an expression of the būta in man.

I may recount an incident which illustrates the tenuous orientation of man's power and the scope of dṛisthi conceptualization. I once overheard a Brahman father instructing his ten year old son how to behave at a ritual function they were on their way to attend. The father told the son that if he did not behave properly the Brahmans attending the ritual would think badly of him and he would become ill. I later questioned a Brahman informant about

this, and was told that if a large group of Brahmans suddenly thought ill of a person it would constitute a direct threat to the person's health. When I questioned him further about this he told me that the effects of the ill feeling would come about like the effects of dr̥isthi. The concentrated power of these "pure" Brahmans could be negatively orientated and destructive as well as constructive.

### Māṭa

Māṭa is a general term used for both vashikaraṇa, acts of transgression which include both sorcery and witchcraft, and ucharane, or acts which negate or repel vashikaraṇa. Such acts are performed by a mantravādi, who may be of any caste. In South Kanara, one commonly finds mantravādi of the Havik and Shivalli Brahman castes, the Balyaya, Pūjāri, and Bant Shudra castes, and the Nalike Harijan caste.

A client will contract a mantravādi either to manipulate or to invade the personal space of an enemy or competitor, or else to affect a lover who one wants to attract or repel. In some cases, an attack may be levied against an enemy's entire family unit, whereas in other cases an attack may be focused on a particular victim or on his house or business. A villager will suspect vashikaraṇa if he or his family is plagued by continual or sudden misfortune or when social pressures and tensions exist within the family or with outsiders. I will examine the role, training, and clientele of mantravādi in Part Three. At present, I may introduce some of the common modes of vashikaraṇa to which a mantravādi has recourse.

A mantravādi may perform māṭa by employing a būta known as a mantra-devata. A mantravādi lures a būta with promises and develops a relationship with it the way one might develop a relationship with a watchdog. The

mantradevata is made dependent on the mantravādi who then demands that it carry out mercenary missions for him to earn its food and his praise. A non-Brahman mantravādi will offer a cock to his mantradevata prior to requesting its assistance, and while he cuts the fowl's throat he will repeat the name of a victim and promise additional rewards to the mantradevata after the victim or his family has been ruined.

The mantradevata will proceed to the victim's house, and attack house members with various illnesses of sudden onset or of a prolonged duration. A common sign that a mantradevata is attacking a house is that a sequence of illnesses or misfortunes will result, starting with weaker house members and moving upward toward stronger members. A dog or cow will be affected first, then a child, followed by a woman and finally, an adult male. If such a series of mishaps occurs a villager will suspect māṭa even if his social relationships are seemingly in good order<sup>1</sup>. To confirm or dispel his suspicion he will consult a mantravādi, or a village būta during a kōla when a possessed būta dancer will hear his case.

If māṭa is confirmed and a mantradevata suspected the victim has recourse to one of two modes of action. He can contract a mantravādi to offer him counter māṭa, ucharane, or he can promise a village or a powerful house būta an offering if it protects him and destroys his enemies. Such a request must be followed by an offering of equal magnitude to the danger resulting from the mantradevata. If a victim doubts the strength of a local būta to combat the mantradevata he may go to another village and seek additional assistance from other būta. After such offerings are made, a battle is thought to take place between the mantradevata and the būta working on behalf of the victim. Acts of vashikarāṇa and ucharane are kept highly secretive and both the aggressor and the victim will not let the other know what action

<sup>1</sup> Other less common signs of māṭa are bedbugs, crabs entering the house, mushrooms growing near the kitchen hearth, an abundance of lice or yellow frogs appearing near the house. All of these signal impurity, as these creatures and fungi are said to be drawn to impurity.

he has taken, lest the other party contract a more powerful mantravadi to his own advantage.

Instead of contracting a mantradevata, a mantravādi may conduct a māta ritual. As a result of this ritual, a victim's body or personal space will be penetrated, manipulated, or tortured. In one ritual I witnessed, a fire of mango wood was burned and into it were thrown objects associated with the victim's personal space. In this case, a license plate number, horoscope, his name and a strand of his hair were used. I was told that dates of birth, tax numbers, fingernails, faeces, or the dust of footprints would have been just as effective in fixing a bearing on the region of space to be affected by the ritual. Following these items, a series of heating substances including chillies and mustard seed, were thrown into the fire as well as sharp metal pieces. As these were thrown into the fire the victim's name was recited and his body was simultaneously presumed to be affected by burning sensation and pricking pains<sup>1</sup>.

What transpires in this ritual is that a metonymic relationship is set up between a series of signs (license plate number, hair, horoscope) and a region of space which they signify. These signs are placed in a context of transition (fire). Then heating substances and sharp objects are put in contact with the space signifiers. In a context of transition, the qualities of these heating substances are transferred to the region of personal space signified by the space signifiers. Variations of this method exist and I may note a few examples with regard to sorcery.

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<sup>1</sup> The use of heating substances in witchcraft rituals has likewise been noted by Obeysekere (1976) in Ceylon.



### Sorcery Devices

Sorcery devices are purchased from a mantravādi, and a client may or may not specify whom he intends to attack through their usage. Once the device is obtained it may be placed in any location which the victim will cross. As the victim crosses the device, his personal space is opened to the influences of the items contained in the device. Let us take a look at what these items are.

An object of sorcery may be an enchanted lemon or areca-nut, over which specific healing and destructive mantram have been chanted. Alternatively, an instrument of sorcery may be made of hair, faeces, fingernails, turmeric or lemon, a yantra containing an inscribed mantra, and charcoal, or an iron nail. It is most effective if the hair faeces, or fingernails utilized is that of the victim, but they do not necessarily have to belong to him. One mantravādi instructed me that using parts of a victim's body or house "sharpened the aim" of the māṭa but the mere crossing over of a māṭa device was enough to affect a man by its contents.

The contents of the device may be decoded into three component parts of an established metonymic relationship.

1. Health: A lemon signifies health. It is utilized as a substitute for blood in ritual contexts. For example, it is offered to the goddess Maṛi as a substitute for flesh. Lemon rice, chitrana, is served at auspicious Brahman feasts but never during death feasts because of its association with blood and life. Furthermore, lemon is highly regarded as an ayurvedic rejuvenation medicine. Yellow turmeric root is commonly given as temple prasada; as a substance promoting health. It is one of the basic village medicines, and its purification properties are so highly regarded that a piece of the

root known as nandi, is worn on the wrist by Brahmans prior to marriage and upanāyana to prevent death-birth pollution,<sup>1</sup> sutaka, should a family member die. Nandi ensures that the ceremony will take place<sup>1</sup>. Some non-Brahmans have incorporated the nandi practice as part of their possession rituals. The possession priest for the goddess Devi in Kasaragod wears nandi to ward off sutaka while possessed<sup>2</sup>. Lemon and turmeric are yellow and metaphorically are referred to as health-giving like gold and the sun.

2. Health-destroying: Health-destroying objects are indigestible (charcoal) or piercing (iron nail). Some mantravādi cited hair, fingernails, and faeces as health-destroying because of their indigestibility and impurity. Others claimed, however, that these objects only serve the function of orientation. The mantra contained in a vashikaraṇa yantra is health-destroying. I may note here that mantra are classified as being hot, cold, or neutral in effect. Vashikaraṇa utilizes heating mantram and these mantram are agarbha or space opening.
3. Orientation: Hair, nails, and faeces are signs signifying a victim and as Leach (1976) has emphasized a sign and a thing signified are treated as contiguous in sorcery. These items are not sufficient to orientate the machination in themselves, however.<sup>3</sup> A yantra must be present, not only to contain the power of a mantra but to orientate

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<sup>1</sup> Nandi is worn on the groom's right wrist and the bride's left wrist.

<sup>2</sup> This is equivalent to būta dancers who perform their own death rite to ward off sutaka.

<sup>3</sup> See Tambiah (1968, 1973) for a general introduction to the performative nature of ritual, the semantics of ritual transfer, and the importance of spell or mantra in effecting this transfer.

this mantra and the qualities of the substances contained<sup>1</sup>. Without this mantra and yantra, the substances grouped together represent a "metaphor of interaction" (Black, 1962). When orientated by an opening and heating mantra and a yantra depicting the opening of space, these substances take on metonymic relationships<sup>2</sup>.

The type of metonymic relationship that is utilized varies with the individual style of the mantravādi. For example, one Billava mantravādi told me that if hair is used in a sorcery device the victim's head will be affected and should faeces be utilized the victim's anus would be affected. As a case in point, he introduced me to one of his clients who was suffering from bleeding piles. He related to me that these piles were caused by a type of sorcery which utilized a victim's faeces. To perform this māṭa, faeces are collected and buried with a freshly killed lizard around whose neck a yantra has been tied. As the lizard decays, sores appear in the anus of the victim.

Other mantravādi described to me quite different metonymic relationships. One Nalike mantravādi stated that the nails and hair orientated the device against man and that his whole being is affected negatively by the device. A Havik mantravādi claimed that hair, faeces, and nails are indigestible substances which would poison a victim's body and interrupt his digestive processes. The

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<sup>1</sup> Zimmer has noted that the suffix -tra in Sanskrit is used to form substantives denoting instruments or tools. Similarly man means 'think or have in mind'. Mantra therefore, is an instrument for evoking or producing something in our minds. Yantra is an instrument to make yam, which means to curb, subdue, or control. The verb yam means to gain control over the energy inherent in some element or being (1963, 140-41).

<sup>2</sup> Ucharane māṭa works by either reverting this metonymic relationship back to a metaphorical relationship of no active consequence or by reversing the effect of the sorcery device back against its sender who is also appropriated to it via metonymy.

relationship he perceived was between indigestible substances and digestion as the basic process of life.

| Illness                      | . | Health                                      |
|------------------------------|---|---|
| Obstruction of external fire | . | control of bodily fire                      |
| Sorcery                      |   |   |
| <u>Māta</u>                  | . | Illness                                     |
| Obstruction of external fire | . | obstruction of bodily fire                  |
| charcoal (fire residue)      | . | <u>mala</u> (body wastes, the undigestible) |

The Brahman's perspective was dominated by an ayurvedic view of the body and bodily processes, whereas the perspective of the Nalike did not involve a sophisticated view of the body as a system. The Pūjāri mantravādi viewed a one-to-one relationship between signs and body parts affected.

Another mode of sorcery is hand poison, kai visha. Kai visha is the placing of poisonous substances into a man's food to either kill him or place him under the control of the poisoner. Although kai visha accusation is fairly common in South Kanara, few cases actually involve poisoning. A close informant, an aged mantravādi, told me he had only been asked for kai visha substances a dozen times in his thirty years of practice. Substances he supplied included strychnine, Ummatta (*Datura stramonium*), Ganja (*Cannabis sativa*) and opium.

Most kai visha accusation cases involve joint families who are on the verge of breaking up or who are prevented from breaking up due to economic conditions. As would be expected, as stress builds up, each faction suspects the other of kai visha, and in some cases factions will actually begin cooking separately while remaining in the same household. The symptoms of kai visha

are stomach pains and a feeling that there is a ball in the stomach. Loss of appetite and nausea are also associated with kai visha. Complaints such as these may readily be generated by psychological stress. For example, one case I followed up concerned a Brahman whose house was on the verge of partition. Three Brahman brothers were awaiting the death of their father before partitioning the family land. A great deal of stress existed between the eldest and youngest of the brothers because the youngest brother had been educated to tenth standard and the eldest wanted him to find a job outside the house. Tensions arose to the point that the youngest brother would not speak to the eldest and avoided taking meals with him. He confided in me that he was certain his elder brother's wife was poisoning him because each time he ate with his elder brother he suffered acute stomach pains and heartburn. After telling me that milk eased this pain, I persuaded him to visit a doctor. It was discovered that he had a peptic ulcer. However, this did not assure him that his brother's wife had not poisoned him; in fact, he took this as proof of her misdeed.

Harper (1969) has reported that among Havik Brahmans in Shimoga, kai visha is greatly feared by men who suspect widows of administering it to them. Widows do so on the pretence of bettering their marriage prospects in their next life. The substance feared is actually non-poisonous and the widows who are feared are actually powerless. Harper bases his analysis of kai visha on this fact and suggests that Brahman men feel guilty about the way they subordinate their women, in particular the way they alienate their women from their sisters and mothers. As a ramification of their guilt, men suspect widows, women whom they have relegated to a low position in society, of retaliation by kai visha.

In South Kanara, Haviks are not fearful of a widow's kai visha. It may be noted that South Kanara Haviks are less conservative than Shimoga

Haviks and they place fewer restrictions and constraints on widows<sup>1</sup>. I would suggest that feelings of guilt are less pronounced, but that to some extent, widows are suspected of envy and resentment apparent in a fear of their dristhi.

Harper's analysis of kai visha and Pocock's analysis of the evil eye are to some extent similar. In each case, a powerful faction of one group suspects a powerless faction of the same group of being envious or resentful. This envy or resentment, which may take different forms, is especially feared by those who may have a reason to feel guilty. These group members project their guilt on others who they perceive as aggressors.

Gough's (1959) analysis of witchcraft and sorcery follows a similar theme. She reports that in central Kerala, mantravādi are of the low castes as are the impure mantradevata who serve them. High caste members fear that low caste members are performing witchcraft against them because they regard them as envious of their position and wealth. According to Gough's analysis, this notion allows high caste members to displace inter-caste aggressions by projecting social aggression outwards<sup>2</sup>. Low castes are a convenient scapegoat

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<sup>1</sup> When a Havik travels to Shimoga, however, he is warned about kai visha and told not to eat until tasting salt, an antidote for Shimoga's famous lizard kai visha.

<sup>2</sup> From my own fieldwork on the Kerala border, I would suspect that Gough's analysis is oversimplified and is moreover based on a tenuous analysis of a Nayar caste structure that existed in the past. Claus (1970, 9) has noted that Gough assumes an unrealistic lineage segment solidarity and economic homogeneity among the Nayar prior to government reform acts. I would suggest that it is this idealistic view of the past which influenced Gough to find a means by which Nayars projected internal aggression outward in order to maintain internal balance. This assumption created difficulties for Gough because, as she herself notes, affines do on occasion resort to witchcraft among themselves. It may be noted that in Northern Kerala many castes which are not of low caste engage in mantravādi. The Pudiaval family of Payyanur, for example, are famous throughout South India for mantravādim and belong to a comparatively high caste. I may reiterate that mantradevata are not only of low or impure status.

for witchcraft suspicion, but not overt confrontation. High and low castes are dependent on each other for reciprocal economic benefits, therefore high caste members cannot confront low castes with witchcraft accusation directly because they need their labour force. Furthermore, low castes do not resort to direct confrontation because they depend on high castes for employment. Gough finishes off her functional analysis by stating that just as high castes make use of witchcraft to displace aggressions, so low castes use sorcery accusation among themselves<sup>1</sup>.

South Kanara data is quite different from that presented by the authors cited. Sorcery, witchcraft, and evil eye, may be directed at a villager by anyone, although those closest to him will naturally be suspected first if latent anxieties or tensions exist between the two parties. However, māṭa in the form of witchcraft will not be performed within a family unit living together because its effect is on the whole household. Māṭa utilizing instruments of sorcery are rare within the family for two reasons. As Gough has noted, a belief in capricious ancestor spirits among non-Brahmans, and a belief in karma among Brahmans, make it dangerous to undertake such overt action within the family sphere. A second practical reason that sorcery is not used is that anyone may be accidentally affected by the planted device. However, sorcery cases between family members do occur, for I recorded cases of co-wives and sisters-in-law suspecting each other of planting such devices. Moreover, the notion of kai visha in South Kanara, is an implicit statement of such suspicion, for few outsiders come close enough to the family's food to poison it.

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<sup>1</sup> Witchcraft accusations are not uncommon among untouchable castes.

### Stellar Influences

The average non-Brahman villager has little idea of how astrological calculations are determined. However, all villagers have a definite stock of opinions related to inauspicious and auspicious times based on the position of particular heavenly bodies. These opinions have been passed down through the generations and are most likely bits of information that laymen have picked up from encounters with astrologers, jyotisher, and soothsayers, balime. I may recount some common beliefs about the heavenly bodies.

The phases of the moon are allocated differing qualities. The new moon is inauspicious and a time of spirit activity and accentuated heat<sup>1</sup>. Monthly ancestor propitiations are performed at this time, but no auspicious event or būta kōla will take place. In contrast, the full moon is auspicious and a time often chosen for būta kōla. The full moon is 'cold' and as I have already noted, villagers wear a towel on their heads if they go out on a full moon night, to keep from developing excess kapha or a cold.

Eclipses are regarded as dangerous, and during eclipse all villagers abstain from eating rice. Food which is to be eaten on the eclipse day is put aside the day before, with a twig of Tulasi plant, which is said to protect it from becoming contaminated. Pregnant women are kept indoors, protected from the eclipse. Among Brahmans, buttermilk is not churned on an eclipse day or on moonless days and by shastra, among many castes, sexual intercourse is prohibited<sup>2</sup>. A birth during either of these two times is inauspicious<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> To say that someone was born on a moonless day is a common curse in Tulu and Kannada.

<sup>2</sup> Likewise, a woman cannot churn buttermilk until the fifth day following the onset of her menses although she can cook after the fourth day, those preparations which do not require milk or buttermilk.

<sup>3</sup> If a baby is born on a moonless day or on an eclipse day, an offering will be made to patron deities.



Restrictions against eating rice and churning buttermilk are symbolic statements expressing the idea that during an eclipse the body, as well as the universe, is in transition. Transitional acts, such as sexual intercourse or birth, are dangerous and inauspicious because the universe is in a state of relief and space is open. For this reason, pregnant women must be guarded against transmutations and are kept inside.

The first and second stars of the principal twenty-seven stars, Bharani (Muscae) and Kritika (Tauri) are inauspicious for starting a new project, lending money, going to a hospital, or having a court case brought to trial. A brief perusal of local PHC records demonstrated to me the extent to which this belief is followed. In four years, the lowest overall attendance records for the year was on these days. A friend, a popular lawyer from Mangalore, informed me that in his ten years of law practice, he had handled few cases during the reign of these stars.

The times of Rāhu (earth shadow) and Ketu (moon shadow) are likewise regarded as inauspicious for the beginning of any new project or curative therapy. One well known rice smuggler from a village near Panaje was concerned about these two times and his appearance at a nearby astrologer's house was a local joke, for this signalled that he was planning an illegal excursion across the border. Sankranti, the sun's entry into a new zodiacal sign, is auspicious but the following day is inauspicious. Shunni, or Saturn, is spoken of as a malevolent planet which causes vata, illnesses particularly affecting the extremities and joints.

Brahmans are better acquainted with the nine planets, twelve constellations, and twenty-seven stars, and the names of these heavenly bodies are memorized by Brahman boys as part of their traditional training. Daily pūjā require the reciting of the day's stellar co-ordinates and Brahmans must be able to read a rudimentary horoscope in order to determine when auspicious

and inauspicious pūjā may be performed. A basic knowledge of horoscopes also allows the Brahman layman to assess the success of prospective marriage alliances. Such assessment is usually done by the concerned families first and then by a jyotisher<sup>1</sup>.

Horoscopes are also consulted before beginning a new project, starting on a long journey, initiating a new therapy, or when the cause of an illness is unknown or the illness does not respond to treatment. I will describe some of the more technical relationships between astrology and medicine later. Presently, I may outline a formula utilized by many Brahmans in ascertaining their auspicious and inauspicious stars.

The twenty seven stars are divided into three groups of nine, beginning from one's birth star. If this star is the third star of the twenty-seven star set, for example, then the first group of nine includes the numbers three through twelve. This grouping by nine is repeated two additional times yielding nine categories.

Table 19 Man in Relation to the Twenty-seven Principal Stars

|  |    |    |    |
|--|----|----|----|
| 1. No development, unprosperous                        | 1* | 10 | 19 |
| 2. Good  | 2  | 11 | 20 |
| 3. Danger (the twelfth house is one's spending house)  | 3  | 12 | 21 |
| 4. Good  | 4  | 13 | 22 |
| 5. No success  | 5  | 14 | 23 |
| 6. Generally good, but not good for money transactions | 6  | 15 | 24 |
| 7. Death stars (efforts are doomed)                    | 7  | 16 | 25 |
| 8. Friendship stars                                    | 8  | 17 | 26 |
| 9. Best stars  | 9  | 18 | 27 |

\* Number 1 indicates a man's birth star; number 2 indicates the star following his birth star and so forth.

<sup>1</sup> Cases arise where two families favour a marriage but the horoscopes of the couple do not match. In some cases numerous astrologers are consulted until a favourable reading is obtained.

In the case of a potential marriage assessment, the boy's and girl's charts are matched, and positive and negative conjunctions are weighed against each other and counted up. This calculation of congruent attributes is not performed in two cases. The first is in the case of a cross-cousin marriage. The second is when a prospective bride's birth house stands seventh to a groom's house. This is known as somastama yoga and indicates co-operation and good health. If however, the seventh house of a Brahman's horoscope indicates that he will marry twice, he will perform a mock marriage to an Ekke tree (*Calotropis gigantea*) which in Sanskrit is of a feminine gender. After this initial marriage, he will marry, taking his bride as his second wife.

Brahmans regard their birth star as inauspicious. This star, denoted by a Brahman's third name, is capable of casting dr̥isthi on him. To avert this dr̥isthi, a Brahman will wear a black ash dot on his forehead during the reign of this star. Likewise, he will placate inauspicious planets in his horoscope by making offerings to them. The procedure for doing this will be described later.

The importance of astrology is certainly not diminishing. Of late, information regarding the attributes of heavenly bodies has become readily available to the villager literate in Kannada or Malayalam. The Government prints an almanac called the Panchanga, and this low-priced journal is readily available and widely circulated to the public. The Panchanga has become so popular recently that one has been printed exclusively for enthusiasts of cockfights.

Fate, the Stars, Karma, and Sin

Graha Chāra

Graha chāra, the obstruction of one's planets, is a term used to refer to or to explain a mishap or illness for which there is no overt explanation. One rarely uses the term in the first person, i.e. a villager will not say "it's my graha chāra", but it is common to hear a villager, especially a Brahman, explain another man's bad fortune as the product of his graha chāra. This term places the responsibility for a misfortune on one's planets rather than on one's self. The villager's use of graha chāra and nakshatra, stars, when speaking of misfortune is usually not in relation to specific stars or planets but refers to the position of the heavenly bodies in general.

Hane Baraha

Hane baraha, the writing on one's forehead, are words which are written at the time of birth which foretell all the events of that person's life. Unlike graha chāra, hane baraha is conjugated without a verb, indicating its intrinsic link and inseparation from man. When a villager explains an occurrence as 'nana hane baraha', "it's the writing on my forehead", he is resigning himself to his own fate. Hane baraha is a pure conception of fate; a fate which man cannot alter.

In contrast, a reference to one's stars or planets is a qualitative notion of fate, for the effect of one's stars may be altered by ritual. To illustrate how the term hane baraha is used in context, I may cite the following examples:

1. If a man is married, and shortly afterwards his luck seems to be bad, villagers will say that the hane baraha of his life has been affected by the hane baraha of his wife.

2. If a man is in good health and another man comments that he is fortunate, he may reply "Nana hane baraha olleḍu", literally, my fate is good.
3. A father searches for a long time for a match for his daughter, and finally finds one. The marriage is performed and sometime afterwards the son-in-law learns that he has a fatal disease. The father will say to his daughter "Nina hane baraha anubhavisu", experience your fate. In one incident that I noted, a Brahman couple were married after their horoscopes were calculated and found to be highly compatible. Three years later, the husband died of a sudden heart attack. This was explained by hane baraha which superseded the effect of his stars.
4. A man sought a cure for a skin disease from many practitioners, with little success. People commented that the reason he did not recover was that his hane baraha was not good.

The success or failure of a cure is often spoken of in terms of three concomitant factors: the curer's power of the hand, kai guna, the ~~quality~~ quality of medicine, and the hane baraha of the patient. Hane baraha is usually mentioned if a man is not cured by a practitioner who has successfully treated several other patients suffering from a similar illness.

### Karma

For both Brahmans and non-Brahmans, the general use of karma implies that one has experienced what he deserves. However, karma has distinct Brahman and non-Brahman meanings. I introduced this distinction in Part One and may elaborate upon it here.

For the Brahman, karma is a concept underlying the notion of rebirth and transmigration. Karma is the residuum of one's virtuous and sinful actions in this life and in past lives. Teleologically, past, present, and future are linked. Therefore, good and bad actions performed in the past influence man's present state of being. These actions may be responsible for one's wealth, illnesses, or childlessness. Furthermore, the notion of karma and transmigration justifies the high ritual position of the Brahman.

The doctrine of transmigration claims that a man is born a Brahman because of accumulated merit; conversely, a man is born a Harijan either because he has fallen from a higher position due to misdeeds or because he is not highly evolved on the transmigratory continuum<sup>1</sup>. However, karma is not fate or all that man is. Karma is what a man has the way long term memories are what a man has. They influence, but do not define his being. Karma may be manipulated or altered via performances of good deeds, seva, rituals, or by the grace of a deity, guru, or saint.

To the non-Brahman, as I have noted, karma has a distinct meaning which is not linked to any notion of transmigration or rebirth. Ancestor worship and not rebirth predominates non-Brahman religious conceptualization, and karma is viewed as a debt or a responsibility which one must keep with the ancestors. Karma may be a promise to a deity made by a deceased family member or it may be a promise to an ancestor deity.

A villager having a prolonged illness will not attribute it to be the result of his karma, for to use the term in this sense would be an admission of having committed a wrong. A third person, however, may claim that it is another man's karma which has caused him to be seriously ill. Illnesses such as leprosy are often explained by a third party as having been caused by karma, but I never heard this explanation cited when the afflicted person was present.

### Pāpa

The term pāpa, commonly translated as sin, has two meanings in context. In everyday usage, it means poor thing, or "oh, what a pity, I feel for you". For example, when Kamala, my next door neighbour, scolded me

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<sup>1</sup> This conceptualization of a Harijan having fallen from a higher caste is only loosely formulated and I never heard it spoken about except when I brought up the subject.

for taking my wife on long hikes into the forest to gather medicinal plants, she would refer to my action as pāpa. When I would crack open a coconut incorrectly this was also a pāpa. In a different context, pāpa indicates a sin or a deed that affects ones entire life negatively. For example, the pāpa of killing a cobra may cause a man's wife to be infertile.

A local proverb, "Madidavara pāpa adidavara mele", "Pāpa of the committed will be on those who talk about it", may illustrate another implication of the term. Speaking about pāpa is equal to committing such an act, as an example may demonstrate. I was walking down a road with two men, when a snake crossed our path. One man was ready to kill it and asked his friend if he should commit the act. His friend replied, "I won't carry a vāk", meaning "I won't bear the responsibility of the act by consenting". If he was to agree to the killing, the pāpa of the act would have been on his shoulders. This example demonstrates that thinking or speaking about an act carries with it the same karma or pāpa as actually doing it.

### Krimi and Kita

To some extent, the terms krimi and kita are used in a similar way as the western terms germ and virus. Krimi, a Sanskrit term utilized in ayurveda, refers to minuscule worm-like creatures which invade the body from without<sup>1</sup>. Kita are their minuscule insect-like counterpart. I recorded the local use of the term krimi in several different contexts. It was

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<sup>1</sup> Karambelkar (1961, 71) has noted that according to traditional texts krimi could cause mania or lunacy. Villagers did not acknowledge such a conceptualization. On one occasion when a villager did suffer from the delusion that he was infested by krimi in his head this was attributed to an attack by māṭa. The current usage of the terms is somewhat different than the traditional usage.

employed to describe cases of anus infection, ringworm, crawling sensation of the scalp, non-specific crawling sensation in the body due to either poor circulation or psychosomatic disorders, infected putrid wounds, decaying tissue, and itching sensations in the vagina and penis. The term kita was used to describe tickling sensations in the nose, ears, and under the armpits.

Opinions vary greatly as to what illnesses are caused by krimi and kita and in some villages the terms are used more commonly than in others. In Panaje, villagers have been exposed to strong ayurvedic influence and use the terms more extensively than in surrounding villages. Of late, however, an increasing number of vaidya are propagating these terms to bridge a gap between indigenous medical knowledge and the germ theory which is being introduced by allopathic doctors and government health officials.

As a substitute for the word germ, which is not readily understood by most villagers, vaidya are using the terms kita and krimi to describe contagious diseases. The use of these terms allows the villager to conceptualize what these creatures look like. At the same time it buttresses the credibility of traditional medicine by encompassing and describing mysterious germs referred to by allopaths.

A few sensitive allopathic doctors practising in the village areas have likewise begun to utilize these terms. One popular MBBS doctor I interviewed explained to patients why a wound should be continually kept wet or kept dry by the use of these terms. If he wanted a wound kept wet he told patients that kita were eating the flesh in the wound and must be driven off by wetness. If he wanted a wound kept dry, he stated that krimi were the cause of infection and a dry environment was necessary to cure it.



I found that villagers were responsive to the possibility that a wide range of illnesses having no specific social or religious ascriptions might be caused by krimi. I found, for example, that villagers accepted the possibility that krimi might be the cause of such contagious diseases as cholera, influenza, tuberculosis, and gastroenteritis as well as various wound infections<sup>1</sup>.

### A Survey of Disease Etiology

A survey was conducted to ascertain the opinions of a cross section of villagers as to the etiology of specified illnesses. Respondents were selected from various castes, economic classes, and literacy levels. The survey was conducted in two locations; one near Panaje village and another near Vitla town. Information was elicited from informants utilizing the local name of an illness and their opinions were recorded.<sup>2</sup> In most cases, opinions were coded into one of the following fifteen diagnostic categories:

| <u>Category</u> | <u>Implication</u>  |
|-----------------|---|
| 1. Heat         | Sun, desires, heating foods <sup>a</sup> .                                  |
| 2. <u>Vata</u>  | Internal wind - associated with nervous or muscular activity.               |
| 3. <u>Māṭa</u>  | Witchcraft, sorcery, <u>kai visha</u> .                                     |
| 4. Stars        | Influence of stars, planets, constellations.                                |
| 5. Cold         | Cold weather, lack of desire, cooling foods <sup>b</sup> .                  |
| 6. <u>Pitta</u> | <u>Pitta</u> as a vitiated <u>dosha</u> aggravated by improper food habits. |
| 7. <u>Būta</u>  | Action by village or wandering <u>būta</u> .                                |

<sup>1</sup> The potential for using these terms to convey to villagers important ideas about disease causality and contagion might well be explored further.

<sup>2</sup> English equivalents of local disease names have been used in this chapter when possible. Translation is not always possible however, as Chapter eight will document.

8. Pāpa Bad deeds, karma<sup>c</sup>.
9. Nanju Polluted blood, polluted food.
10. Kapha Excess of mucus due to cold.
11. Kule Ancestor spirits, spirits of deceased children who have come under control of būta.
12. Vayu Movement of wind inside the body, gas<sup>d</sup>.
13. Dristhi Evil eye.
14. Krimi, kita Minuscule worms or insects.
15. Other Hereditary illnesses, illness caused by semen loss, illnesses caused by the passage of a crow over a child.
16. No idea

- Note: a. Usually, the answer heating indicated the eating of heating foods.  
 b. Usually, the answer cooling indicated the eating of cooling foods.  
 c. A response of karma by non-Brahmans could refer to punishment by būta. I recorded pāpa as an initial response however.  
 d. When vayu was referred to specifically as the movement of bad winds outside the body, I have indicated this by the term gāli. In some cases, the term gāli referred to the sonku or aspecific wind of a būta.

Table 20 lists the opinions of thirty-eight informants between the ages of 35-55 who live in an area between one and three miles east of the town of Vitla. Below is a description of the informants chosen.

#### Category I

Caste: Brahman  
 Total No. 20  
 Males: 10  
 Females: 10

#### Breakdown by Caste and Education:

|                  | <u>Total No.</u> | <u>Literate</u> | <u>Educated</u> <sup>*</sup> | <u>Illiterate</u> |
|------------------|------------------|-----------------|------------------------------|-------------------|
| Havik Brahman    | 10               | 6               | 3                            | 1                 |
| Shivalli Brahman | 5                | 3               | 1                            | 1                 |
| Govda Sarasvat   | 5                | 3               | 2                            | 0                 |

\* I use the term educated to refer to schooling over 10th standard and literacy to imply only the basic skills, i.e. some reading, writing (education up to 5th standard).

Category II

Caste: Non-Brahman  
 Total No. 18  
 Males: 9  
 Females 9

Breakdown by Caste and Education

|                      | <u>Total No.</u> | <u>Literate</u> | <u>Educated</u> | <u>Illiterate</u> |
|----------------------|------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-------------------|
| Bants (middle class) | 3                | 2               | 1               | 0                 |
| Bants (labourers)    | 2                | 1               | 0               | 1                 |
| Billava              | 2                | 1               | 0               | 1                 |
| Ganigas              | 2                | 0               | 0               | 2                 |
| Mūliya               | 2                | 1               | 0               | 1                 |
| Bandari              | 2                | 1               | 0               | 1                 |
| Nayaka               | 2                | 1               | 0               | 1                 |
| Meyara               | 3                | 0               | 0               | 3                 |

20 (52.6 per cent) of the informants were literate and 18.4 per cent of the informants were educated above 10th standard.

Table 21 lists the opinions of 62 informants between the ages of 35-55 who lived in an area between one and three miles of Panaje village. Both the number of illnesses and the number of informants were greater than those elicited from the Vitla area. The following is a description of the informants chosen.

Category I

Caste: Brahman  
 Total No. 30  
 Males: 15  
 Females: 15

Breakdown of Caste and Education:

|                  | <u>Total No.</u> | <u>Literate</u> | <u>Educated</u> | <u>Illiterate</u> |
|------------------|------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-------------------|
| Havik Brahman    | 15               | 10              | 4               | 1                 |
| Karadi Brahman   | 5                | 3               | 1               | 1                 |
| Shivalli Brahman | 10               | 6               | 2               | 2                 |

Category II

Caste: Non-Brahman  
 Total No. 32  
 Males: 16  
 Females: 16

Breakdown by Caste and Education:

|                      | <u>Total No.</u> | <u>Literate</u> | <u>Educated</u> | <u>Illiterate</u> |
|----------------------|------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-------------------|
| Bants (middle class) | 4                | 2               | 1               | 1                 |
| Bants (labourers)    | 4                | 1               | 0               | 3                 |
| Billava              | 4                | 1               | 0               | 3                 |
| Ganigas              | 2                | 0               | 0               | 2                 |
| Muliya               | 4                | 1               | 0               | 3                 |
| Bandari              | 2                | 0               | 0               | 2                 |
| Nayaka               | 4                | 0               | 0               | 4                 |
| Meyara               | 3                | 0               | 0               | 3                 |
| Baira                | 2                | 0               | 0               | 2                 |
| Nalike               | 2                | 0               | 0               | 2                 |
| Maila                | 1                | 0               | 0               | 1                 |

24 or 38.7 per cent of the informants were literate and 12.9 per cent of the informants were educated.

Table 20 Etiology of Fifteen Diseases in Vitla

| DISEASES                         |             | USHNA | VATA | KĀTA | STARS | TAMPU | PITTA | BŪTA | PĀPA | NANJU | KAPHA | KULE | VAYU | DRĪSTHI | KRIME KĪTA | OTHER IDEA | NO IDEA |
|----------------------------------|-------------|-------|------|------|-------|-------|-------|------|------|-------|-------|------|------|---------|------------|------------|---------|
| KEMPU RASH                       | Brahman     | 6     | 1    |      |       |       |       |      |      | 2     |       |      |      | 11      |            |            |         |
|                                  | Non-Brahman | 3     | 2    | 1    | 1     |       |       |      |      |       |       |      |      | 11      |            |            |         |
| HERPES                           | Brahman     | 4     | 6    | 4    |       |       | 1     | 3    | 2    |       |       |      |      | 1       |            | *          |         |
|                                  | Non-Brahman |       | 2    | 2    |       |       | 3     | 3    | 7    |       |       |      |      |         | 1          | *          |         |
| SCABIES                          | Brahman     | 10    |      |      |       |       |       |      |      | 10    |       |      |      |         | 1          |            |         |
|                                  | Non-Brahman | 8     | 1    |      |       |       |       |      |      | 6     |       |      |      |         |            |            | 3       |
| LEUCODERMA                       | Brahman     |       |      |      | 2     |       |       | 2    | 16   |       |       |      |      |         |            |            |         |
|                                  | Non-Brahman | 1     | 1    |      | 3     | 3     |       |      | 8    |       |       |      |      |         |            |            | 2       |
| CHICKEN POX                      | Brahman     | 4     | 8    |      |       |       |       |      |      | 1     |       |      |      |         | 4          |            | 3       |
|                                  | Non-Brahman | 4     | 7    |      |       | 1     | 2     |      |      |       |       |      |      | 1       | 3          |            |         |
| MEASLES                          | Brahman     | 7     | 8    |      |       | 2     |       |      |      |       |       |      |      |         |            |            | 3       |
|                                  | Non-Brahman | 1     | 4    |      | 2     |       |       | 1    |      | 1     | 1     |      |      | 1       | 3          |            | 4       |
| GRAHANI ROGA<br>(Tropical Sprue) | Brahman     | 1     |      |      | 4     |       | 1     |      |      |       | 2     | 5    | 2    | 1       | 3          |            |         |
|                                  | Non-Brahman | 1     | 1    | 6    | 2     |       | 2     |      | 1    |       |       |      | 2    | 1       |            |            | 2       |
| ASTHMA                           | Brahman     |       |      |      | 2     | 3     | 1     |      |      |       | 12    | 1    | 1    |         |            |            |         |
|                                  | Non-Brahman |       | 1    |      |       | 4     |       |      |      |       | 10    | 3    |      |         |            |            |         |
| APASMARA<br>(Epilepsy Fita)      | Brahman     |       |      | 4    | 2     |       |       | 4    |      | 1     | 1     | 6    |      |         |            |            | 2       |
|                                  | Non-Brahman |       | 1    |      | 3     |       | 1     | 7    | 1    | 3     |       | 2    |      |         |            |            |         |
| PARALYSIS                        | Brahman     |       | 5    | 1    | 1     | 1     |       | 1    | 5    |       |       | 1    | 1    | 1       |            |            | 3       |
|                                  | Non-Brahman |       | 3    | 1    |       | 2     |       | 2    | 4    |       |       | 1    |      |         |            |            | 5       |
| TUBERCULOSIS                     | Brahman     |       |      |      | 2     |       |       | 2    |      | 6     |       |      |      |         | 10         | *          |         |
|                                  | Non-Brahman |       |      |      | 1     |       |       | 2    |      | 6     | 3     | 1    |      |         |            |            |         |
| SMALLPOX                         | Brahman     | 4     | 2    |      | 1     |       |       | 1    | 1    |       |       |      | 1    |         | 5          |            |         |
|                                  | Non-Brahman | 1     | 1    |      |       | 1     |       |      | 2    | 1     |       |      | 2    |         | 5          |            |         |
| JAUNDICE                         | Brahman     | 1     |      |      |       |       | 19    |      |      |       |       |      |      |         |            |            |         |
|                                  | Non-Brahman | 3     |      |      |       | 1     | 12    |      | 2    |       |       |      |      |         |            |            |         |
| TYPHOID FEVER                    | Brahman     | 2     |      |      |       | 10    |       |      |      |       | 3     |      | 2    |         | 3          |            |         |
|                                  | Non-Brahman |       | 1    |      |       | 7     |       |      |      |       |       |      | 3    |         | 3          |            |         |
| BED WETTING                      | Brahman     |       | 1    |      | 4     |       |       |      | 5    |       |       | 4    |      | 2       | 1          |            | 1       |
|                                  | Non-Brahman |       | 1    |      |       | 1     | 4     |      |      |       |       | 6    |      | 2       |            |            |         |
| STAMMERING                       | Brahman     |       |      |      | 1     |       | 1     | 1    |      |       | 2     | 1    |      | 12      | 1          |            | 1       |
|                                  | Non-Brahman | 1     |      |      |       |       |       |      | 1    |       |       |      |      | 11      | 2          |            | 4       |

\* Herpes: Numerous informants cited Naga as a cause.

Tuberculosis: Six Brahmans noted that the disease was hereditary, and two noted that it could be caused by semen loss.

Table 21 Etiology of Twenty Eight Illnesses in Panaje

| DISEASES     |             | USNA | VATA | MĀTA | STAFS | TAMFU | PITTA | BŪTA | PĀPA | NANJU | KAPHA | KULE | VAYU | DĪSTHI | KRIMI KITA | OTHER IDEA | NO IDEA |
|--------------|-------------|------|------|------|-------|-------|-------|------|------|-------|-------|------|------|--------|------------|------------|---------|
| KEMPU RASH   | Brahman     | 16   |      |      |       |       |       |      | 1    | 5     |       |      |      | 8      |            |            |         |
|              | Non-Brahman | 20   | 1    | 1    | 1     |       |       |      |      | 2     |       |      |      | 7      |            |            |         |
| HERPES       | Brahman     | 11   | 2    |      | 3     |       |       |      | 8    |       |       | 1    |      | 1      |            | *          |         |
|              | Non-Brahman | 10   | 1    | 1    | 1     |       |       |      | 5    | 2     |       |      |      | 1      | 2          | *          |         |
| SCABIES      | Brahman     | 6    |      |      |       |       |       |      |      | 16    |       |      |      |        | 8          |            |         |
|              | Non-Brahman | 12   |      | 2    |       |       |       |      | 1    | 14    |       |      |      |        | 3          |            |         |
| LEUCODERMA   | Brahman     | 2    | 1    |      |       |       |       |      | 10   |       |       | 1    |      |        | 3          | *          | 5       |
|              | Non-Brahman | 4    |      | 2    |       |       |       | 2    | 14   |       | 1     |      |      | 2      | 1          | *          |         |
| CHICKENPOX   | Brahman     | 15   | 1    |      |       | 1     | 1     |      | 2    | 4     |       |      |      |        | 6          |            |         |
|              | Non-Brahman | 10   | 10   |      |       | 2     |       |      | 2    | 2     |       |      | 2    |        | 4          |            |         |
| MEASLES      | Brahman     | 13   | 3    |      |       |       |       |      | 3    | 1     |       |      | 2    |        | 5          |            | 3       |
|              | Non-Brahman | 12   | 10   |      | 1     |       | 1     | 2    | 1    | 3     |       | 1    |      |        | 1          |            |         |
| GRAHANI ROGA | Brahman     | 8    | 1    | 1    | 4     | 2     | 3     |      | 1    | 2     | 2     |      |      |        | 4          |            | 2       |
|              | Non-Brahman | 4    |      | 2    | 4     | 5     | 2     | 2    | 2    | 2     | 2     |      |      | 2      | 2          |            | 3       |
| ASTHMA       | Brahman     |      |      | 1    | 2     | 3     | 1     |      | 2    |       | 7     | 8    |      | 2      |            | *          |         |
|              | Non-Brahman | 1    |      |      |       | 5     | 3     |      |      | 1     | 10    | 10   |      |        |            | *          |         |
| APASMARA     | Brahman     |      |      |      | 4     | 1     |       | 9    | 2    | 1     | 5     | 8    |      |        |            | *          |         |
|              | Non-Brahman |      |      | 4    |       |       | 1     | 16   |      |       |       | 11   |      |        |            |            |         |
| PARALYSIS    | Brahman     |      | 12   |      | 2     | 2     | 1     | 2    | 2    |       |       |      | 3    |        | 1          | *          | 2       |
|              | Non-Brahman | 1    |      | 2    | 2     | 5     |       | 5    | 2    |       | 1     | 5    | 1    | 8      |            |            |         |
| TUBERCULOSIS | Brahman     | 1    |      |      |       |       |       |      | 3    |       | 4     | 5    |      |        | 6          | *          | 4       |
|              | Non-Brahman |      |      |      |       | 2     | 1     |      | 4    |       | 14    | 2    |      |        | 7          |            |         |
| SMALLPOX     | Brahman     | 6    | 1    |      | 1     |       | 1     | 4    | 5    | 1     |       | 1    |      | 1      | 5          | *          |         |
|              | Non-Brahman | 10   |      | 2    |       |       |       | 2    | 8    |       |       |      |      |        | 6          | *          |         |
| JAUNDICE     | Brahman     | 3    | 1    |      |       |       |       | 26   |      |       |       |      |      |        |            |            |         |
|              | Non-Brahman | 5    | 2    |      |       | 1     |       | 18   | 1    | 1     | 1     |      |      | 2      | 1          |            |         |
| TYPHOID      | Brahman     | 5    | 3    |      |       | 11    |       | 1    |      |       | 1     |      | 1    |        | 6          |            |         |
|              | Non-Brahman | 1    |      |      | 1     | 6     |       | 20   |      |       | 1     |      | 1    |        | 2          |            |         |
| RED WETTING  | Brahman     | 1    | 1    | 1    | 4     | 1     | 2     | 1    |      |       | 1     | 6    |      | 3      | 2          | *          | 2       |
|              | Non-Brahman |      |      |      | 4     | 2     | 1     | 3    |      |       |       | 16   |      | 4      |            |            | 2       |
| STAMMERING   | Brahman     |      | 1    |      | 7     |       |       | 2    |      |       | 1     |      |      | 16     |            | *          |         |
|              | Non-Brahman |      |      | 2    |       |       |       |      | 4    |       |       | 4    |      | 20     |            |            |         |

Table 21 (Cont'd)

| DISEASES                     | USENA | VATA | MĀTA | STARS | TAMPU | FITTA | BŪTA | PĀPA | NANJU | KAPHA | KULE | VAYU | DRISTHI | KRIMI KITA | OTHER IDEA | NO IDEA |
|------------------------------|-------|------|------|-------|-------|-------|------|------|-------|-------|------|------|---------|------------|------------|---------|
| MUMPS                        |       |      |      |       |       |       |      |      |       |       |      |      |         |            |            |         |
| Brahman                      | 11    | 1    |      |       | 13    |       |      |      | 1     | 1     |      |      |         | 3          |            |         |
| Non-Brahman                  |       |      |      |       | 8     | 2     |      |      | 4     | 2     |      | 1    | 3       | 11         |            | 1       |
| BALA GRAHA                   |       |      |      |       |       |       |      |      |       |       |      |      |         |            |            |         |
| Brahman                      | 2     | 1    |      | 9     |       |       | 1    | 2    |       | 3     | 10   |      |         | 2          | *          |         |
| See Appendix B               |       |      |      |       |       |       |      |      |       |       |      |      |         |            |            |         |
| Non-Brahman                  |       |      |      | 8     | 2     |       | 13   |      |       | 1     | 7    |      | 1       |            |            |         |
| PAKKI KADAPU                 |       |      |      |       |       |       |      |      |       |       |      |      |         |            |            |         |
| Brahman                      | 1     | 2    |      | 6     | 1     | 2     | 3    | 12   | 1     | 1     |      |      | 1       |            | *          |         |
| See Appendix B               |       |      |      |       |       |       |      |      |       |       |      |      |         |            |            |         |
| Non-Brahman                  |       | 3    | 2    | 8     |       |       | 7    | 2    |       |       |      | 6    |         |            | *          |         |
| DYSENT. RY                   |       |      |      |       |       |       |      |      |       |       |      |      |         |            |            |         |
| Brahman                      | 18    |      |      |       | 5     |       |      |      | 2     |       |      |      | 1       | 4          |            |         |
| Non-Brahman                  | 6     | 3    |      | 4     | 6     | 5     | 1    |      | 3     |       |      | 1    |         |            |            |         |
| MISCARRIAGE                  |       |      |      |       |       |       |      |      |       |       |      |      |         |            |            |         |
| Brahman                      | 16    |      | 3    |       | 2     |       | 1    | 4    |       |       |      |      | 1       | 1          | *          |         |
| Non-Brahman                  | 11    |      |      | 1     | 1     |       | 3    | 3    | 2     |       | 3    |      | 1       |            | *          |         |
| HEART PAIN                   |       |      |      |       |       |       |      |      |       |       |      |      |         |            |            |         |
| Brahman                      | 9     | 1    | 3    | 3     |       |       | 2    | 2    |       | 7     |      | 2    |         |            |            |         |
| Non-Brahman                  | 10    | 2    | 5    | 1     | 1     | 7     | *    |      |       | 3     | 1    | 2    |         | 1          |            |         |
| WHOOPIING COUGH              |       |      |      |       |       |       |      |      |       |       |      |      |         |            |            |         |
| Brahman                      | 8     | 1    |      |       | 7     |       |      |      | 1     | 5     | 1    | 2    |         | 2          |            | 2       |
| Non-Brahman                  | 2     | 1    |      |       | 10    | 1     |      | 1    |       | 7     |      |      | 3       | 3          |            | 4       |
| INTENSE EARACHE              |       |      |      |       |       |       |      |      |       |       |      |      |         |            |            |         |
| Brahman                      | 10    | 4    |      | 1     | 15    |       |      |      |       |       |      |      | *       | 6          |            |         |
| Non-Brahman                  | 2     | 1    |      | 5     | 7     | 5     |      |      | 1     | 4     |      |      | 2       | 5          |            |         |
| LARGE BOILS                  |       |      |      |       |       |       |      |      |       |       |      |      |         |            |            |         |
| Brahman                      | 23    |      |      |       |       |       |      |      | 4     | 1     |      |      | 3       |            | *          |         |
| Non-Brahman                  | 14    | 1    |      | 2     |       |       |      | 1    | 7     |       |      |      | 7       |            | *          |         |
| CONJUNCTIVITIS<br>(Eye Pain) |       |      |      |       |       |       |      |      |       |       |      |      |         |            |            |         |
| Brahman                      | 16    | 2    |      |       | 2     | 2     |      |      |       | 1     |      | 1    | 2       | 4          |            |         |
| Non-Brahman                  | 12    | 4    | 1    | 1     |       |       |      |      |       |       |      |      | 2       | 9          |            | 3       |
| SUTAKA VAYU                  |       |      |      |       |       |       |      |      |       |       |      |      |         |            |            |         |
| Brahman                      | 4     | 4    | 2    | 1     |       |       |      | 1    | 3     |       |      | 9    | 4       |            | *          | 2       |
| See Appendix B               |       |      |      |       |       |       |      |      |       |       |      |      |         |            |            |         |
| Non-Brahman                  | 2     | 4    |      |       | 1     | 1     | 2    | 3    | 5     |       | 3    | 6    |         |            | 24         | 3       |
| MALARIA                      |       |      |      |       |       |       |      |      |       |       |      |      |         |            |            |         |
| Brahman                      | 1     | 1    |      |       | 5     |       |      |      |       |       |      | 3    |         | 20         |            |         |
| Non-Brahman                  | 3     |      |      |       | 2     | 1     |      |      | 1     | 1     |      |      |         | 17         |            | 7       |

Herpes: Twenty four Brahmans and Thirty two Shudras cited the curse of naga as a cause.

Leucoderma: Six non-Brahmans cited the curse of naga as a cause, eight Brahmans said it was hereditary.

Apasmara: Many Brahmans consider it hereditary.

Tuberculosis: Seven Brahmans cited semen loss (in adults) as the cause.

Smallpox: Twenty four Brahmans and all Shudras agreed that Devi could cause the illness to occur as well as other female būta.

Pakki Kapdapu: Four Brahmans and most non-Brahmans mentioned a crow corssing a child's body as a possible cause.

Heart pain: Most informants mentioned būta attack.

Earache: Nine informants also mentioned dr̥isthi as a common cause.

Large boils: Most informants mentioned nanju and dr̥isthi as a common cause.

Sutaka vayu: Two informants said it was hereditary.

Bala graha: A number of Brahman informants stated that it was hereditary.

Miscarriages: A number of Brahman and non-Brahman informants stated that it was hereditary.

Paralysis: Three Brahmans stated that it was hereditary.

Asthma: Many Brahman informants considered asthma hereditary and six suggested that ashma could be caused by semen loss.

Bed wetting and stammering: Five Brahman informants considered these ailments to be hereditary.

Tables 20 and 21 indicate that a considerable variance of opinion exists in regard to villager's ideas of the predominant cause of specific diseases. A comparative analysis of the data with regard to location and caste variation provides us with some interesting inferences.

Table 22 Locality as a Variable of Etiology

|    |  |        |   |  |
|----|--|--------|---|--|
| 1. | <u>Kempu</u>   | Vitla  | Overheat<br>Evil eye  | 23.7%<br>57.9%                           |
|    |  | Panaje | Overheat<br>Evil eye  | 58.1%<br>24.2%                           |
| 2. | <u>Grahani</u>   | Vitla  | <u>Māṭa</u><br>Overheat<br>Stars                              | 18.4%<br>5.7%<br>15.8%                   |
|    |  | Panaje | <u>Māṭa</u><br>Overheat<br>Stars                              | 4.8%<br>19.4%<br>12.9%                   |
| 3. | Chickenpox   | Vitla  | Overheat<br><u>Vata</u>                                       | 21.1%<br>39.5%                           |
|    |  | Panaje | Overheat<br><u>Vata</u>                                       | 40.3%<br>17.7%                           |
| 4. | Asthma   | Vitla  | <u>Kapha</u><br><u>Kule</u>                                   | 57.9%<br>10.5%                           |
|    |  | Panaje | <u>Kapha</u><br><u>Kule</u>                                   | 27.4%<br>29.0%                           |
| 5. | Paralysis  | Vitla  | <u>Pāpa</u><br><u>Vata</u><br><u>Buta</u><br>Evil eye<br>Cold | 23.7%<br>21.1%<br>7.9%<br>2.6%<br>0.0%   |
|    |  | Panaje | Evil eye<br><u>Vata</u><br><u>Buta</u><br>Cold<br><u>Pāpa</u> | 21.0%<br>19.4%<br>11.3%<br>11.3%<br>6.5% |
| 6. | Herpes<br>(causes other<br>than the curse<br>of cobra) | Vitla  | <u>Pāpa</u><br><u>Māṭa</u><br>Overheat                        | 23.7%<br>21.0%<br>10.5%                  |
|    |  |        | <u>Pāpa</u><br><u>Māṭa</u><br>Overheat                        | 21.0%<br>33.9%                           |



Table 23 Caste as a Variable in Etiology

| Location | Disease | Caste Group            | Opinion     |             |       |
|----------|---------|------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------|
| 1.       | Vitla   | <u>Grahani</u>         | Brahman     | <u>Māta</u> | 5.0%  |
|          |         |                        | Non-Brahman | <u>Mata</u> | 33.3% |
| 2.       | Panaje  | Chickenpox             | Brahman     | <u>Vata</u> | 3.3%  |
|          |         |                        | Non-Brahman | <u>Vata</u> | 31.3% |
|          | Vitla   | Chickenpox             | Brahman     | <u>Vata</u> | 26.0% |
|          |         |                        | Non-Brahman | <u>Vata</u> | 38.9% |
| 3.       | Vitla   | Measles                | Brahman     | Overheat    | 35.0% |
|          |         |                        | Non-Brahman | Overheat    | 5.6%  |
| 4.       | Vitla   | <u>Apasmara</u>        | Brahman     | <u>Būta</u> | 20.0% |
|          |         |                        |             | <u>Kule</u> | 38.9% |
|          |         |                        | Non-Brahman | <u>Būta</u> | 30.0% |
|          |         |                        |             | <u>Kule</u> | 11.1% |
| 5.       | Panaje  | Paralysis              | Brahman     | <u>Vata</u> | 40.0% |
|          |         |                        | Non-Brahman | <u>Vata</u> | 0.0%  |
| 6.       | Panaje  | <u>Sanni</u> (Typhoid) | Brahman     | <u>Būta</u> | 3.3%  |
|          |         |                        | Non-Brahman | <u>Buta</u> | 62.5% |

Many variations in response, which take on locale or caste patternings, are due to the influence of specialists residing in these areas. From a scrutiny of numerous case studies, I found that a stronger tendency existed in Panaje than in Vitla, to ascribe illnesses to the variables of hot and cold. This is not surprising in light of the fact that Panaje has had a stronger ayurvedic influence and a famous family of vaidya residing there.

Social relationships also have an effect on local illness etiology. Vitla informants had a greater tendency to ascribe māṭa as the cause of their illnesses. The greater importance of māṭa may be correlated to extenuated social tensions existing in Vitla. These tensions have resulted from a breakdown of intercaste relationships, the Land Reform Act, fluctuating wages, and other factors described in Part One as more pronounced in Vitla than in Panaje. The extent of the fear of māṭa in Vitla is not accurately represented in the tables because māṭa is a highly secretive topic and only close informants would speak of it openly.

It would appear from Tables 20 and 21 that modern health ideas have had a significant effect on the etiology of disease indicated by an increased usage of the terms krimi, kita, and germs in referring to contagious diseases.

Table 24 Pathogenic Explanations of Contagious Diseases in Vitla and Panaje

| Percentage of Informants Citing <u>Krimi</u> and <u>Kita</u><br>as Causative Factors |    |
|--|----|
| Malaria *  | 60 |
| Tuberculosis   | 28 |
| Mumps  | 23 |
| Smallpox   | 22 |
| Chickenpox   | 17 |
| Typhoid  | 14 |
| Measles  | 9  |

\* An answer here includes both the recognition that mosquitoes bring the disease and the idea that it is spread by minuscule creatures.

However, we must question what acculturation means here just as we questioned the formal meaning of Brahmanization in Part One. The terms krimi and kita may be used synonymously with the allopathic term germ, but this does not mean that a doctrine of specific etiology has been accepted nor does it mean that these terms are perceived as the initial cause of illness. Whereas it is true that a significant proportion of villagers have accepted the proposition that krimi may precipitate an illness, several questions remain to be answered. Why is it that krimi have entered one man's body and not another's? How do krimi penetrate the body space of an individual? How is it that one individual contracts a bad case of a contagious disease and almost dies, whereas another individual suffers only mildly from the same illness?

Western man answers these questions by way of allopathic metaphors, i.e. vague references to resistance and antibodies which are far from being scientifically satisfactory<sup>1</sup>. The South Kanara villager answers these questions with respect to indigenous notions of resistance and his own metaphors, i.e. the balance of tridosha, the balance of hot and cold, and purity as a protective field.

A villager may accept the idea that krimi causes a pox disease but he may still think that a būta has caused krimi to attack him at a particular time. I reported such a phenomena in my discussion of dr̥isthi. A rice field attacked by insects, may be ascribed to dr̥isthi, for dr̥isthi can cause a field space to be open to the effect of krimi at a particular time.

Ideas as to the best way of resisting krimi or germs differ in the east and west. I may emphasize this point by narrating a lecture given to

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<sup>1</sup> For a poignant discussion of this topic see Rene Dubos (1957, 63-90)

me by a Havik Brahman on the importance of regulating the tridosha by diet. In his opinion, and in the opinion of many other Brahmans, the importance of dosha regulation is far more significant than trying to combat extrinsic pathogenic agents of disease via injections.

A Country has a constitution. If that constitution is strong, if its judges are intelligent and its leaders quick to act, then no outside force will be able to take over that country. If the judges and leaders are not acting correctly for the benefit of the country then the country may fall easily to its enemies. The body is like that. Your people name so many germs and our ancestors have named so many spirits, but if a body is pure can these enemies enter? If there is no soil can a seed sprout? It is not possible! If a body is free of mala no germ can live and if vata, pitta and kapha are in harmony there will be no accumulated mala.

An appreciation of the indigenous notions of health as balance, resistance, and the multi-causality of disease, is necessary if we are to comprehend how the villager uses his existing medical resources and those placed on his threshold.

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<sup>1</sup> Explanations which utilize these metaphors are in turn integrally connected to notions of karma, dristhi, maṭa, and pāpa, which are factors that create imbalance, and impurity.

## CHAPTER NINE

THE LANGUAGE OF DISEASE

In this chapter I will examine the vernacular used in Panaje to describe illness. The task is difficult because the villages in the southern region of South Kanara are multi-lingual; for the sake of clarity my analysis will be confined to Kannada. The topics I will consider include disease nomenclature, contagion, the nature of folk taxonomy, and the way in which verbs and tenses are used to designate contrasting modes of thought pertaining to the onset and course of an illness. Before I begin, however, a few preliminary points are in order.

It was noted in the last chapter that significant variability in etiology exists between members of different castes and locales. This is also true of the naming and diagnosis of illness. Brahmans and non-Brahman castes often have their own names for symptom states. Moreover, although different regions of South Kanara share a common core of illness terminology each maintains its own stock of local terms which may not correspond to syndromes in other locales<sup>1</sup>. An in-depth examination of regional variations and of differences between Brahman and non-Brahman terminology is beyond the scope of this thesis. An appendix has been provided listing common Tulu and Kannada terms for diseases along with their defining characteristics. My present concern is the structural aspects of illness rhetoric and their functional implications.

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<sup>1</sup> The name of an illness may reflect the importance given to it in a particular location, as well as its ascribed cause. Villages with a strong buta cult or a tradition of mantravādim may have a different set of ideas in regard to disease names and causation than an area with a number of ayurvedic vaidya.

## Disease Nomenclature

Generally speaking, disease names are either descriptive or suggestive. They may metaphorically refer to an outstanding feature of a disease, literally signify a predominant symptom, or suggest an ascribed cause. Descriptive names, be they metaphorical or literal, may refer to either internal or external features of the disease. The following examples will illustrate the referential naming process.

Diseases named by internal symptoms:

1. tale bisi hot head. This is used to describe the anxiety of a man who verbalizes his problems.
2. huchu avanige huchu ide, to him a desire is, i.e. he is mad. Huchu implies a strong desire.
3. sihi muthra  
sakre roga sweet urine or sugar disease. This is a description of diabetes which, in the language of vaidya is classified into stages of sweetness. "Honey sweetness" denotes the most serious stage.
4. apasmara apa: no, smara: memory, i.e. a loss of memory, a falling of consciousness. This refers to epilepsy as well as to sudden unconscious fits. The term is a borrowing from Sanskrit.
5. ardha tale bene half head pain. This is used to refer to a headache on one side of the head.
6. kai-kalu naduka hand-foot shaking. This condition refers to general body nervousness. Hand and foot are referred to specifically because as one informant put it, 'if a man has the shakes, it appears in the hands and feet, isn't it?'
7. mai-kai novu body hand pain. This is said for two reasons. First, as mentioned above, if a person has been working hard at manual labour his body and arms will be affected most. Secondly, Kannada uses rhyme as a common feature when describing body feelings. For example, gudu-gudu refers to the sound of the stomach grumbling.
8. nare nitrana nerve weakness. The term nare refers to nerve, vein, and artery. People often use this term to complain of weakness and doctors misinterpret this as mal-nutrition or ignore the complaint entirely. In many cases, it refers to general instability, lack of well being, and lassitude. Physical weakness is often an expression of mental weakness.

9. tale tirigutade head revolving, dizziness.
10. chali jwara cold fever. This is used to describe malaria, where body states alternate between hot and cold. This also is used to describe influenza and fever accompanied by chills.
11. ushna horakadde heat going outside. This refers to diarrhoea.

The following are disease names which indicate their appearance in relation to the animal world:

1. dengi bāpu crab swelling. This is an infection of the hand in which the fingers become bent, crusty and swollen taking on the appearance of crab's legs.
2. nāyi kemmu dog's cough. This is used as reference to whooping cough, because of the similarity in sound.
3. minu vōḍuvudu fish running. This refers to leg cramps, to a sudden tightening of the muscle.
4. iruve hariyuvudu ants grazing or crawling. This refers to the sensation of numbness, of pins and needles.
5. Gaja karna Elephant's skin. A condition in which the skin becomes toughened and cracked.
6. Kōli kaṇṇu chicken's eye. Refers to conjunctivitis.
7. hula tinnuvudu worms eating. This refers to athlete's foot, caused by "worms chewing at one's feet".

Diseases named by external appearance especially in relation to colour, shape and size:

a) Shape:

1. keppataraya king of chins. This refers to the mumps.
2. gadde jwara tuber fever. This is a reference to malaria which causes a protrusion in the stomach resembling a tuberous plant growth.
3. raja kuru kingly abscess. This is a large abscess which appears on the spinal column. It is said to have three heads, and people say that each head of the boil is an eye of Shiva, to whom the ailment is attributed.
4. rupayi hunnu rupayi boil. This term describes a boil which is large and round in size like a coin previously in circulation.

b) Colour:

1. kempu redness. This refers to cellulitis and other conditions accompanied by visible red rashes. The term is only used in the southern regions of the District.
2. kempu kannu red eye. This is another term for conjunctivitis.
3. arasina mundige turmeric sickness. This is a reference to the colour of jaundice.
4. glani faded, that which has been discoloured. In usage it refers to the emotional state of depression.

## Diseases having the names of gods:

1. Devi This goddess is the cause of smallpox and by extension the disease has taken on her name.
2. sarpa sutu literally, cobra circling. This is herpes which follows a circular pattern around the body. Because of its resemblance to a snake, villagers say that this disease is the curse of the serpent god, naga.
3. naga dosha literally, curse or trouble of cobra. The common usage of this term is to denote childlessness. Although other diseases are caused by naga, they are not generally given this term.
4. sanni patha This refers to typhoid which is believed to be caused by the wrath of Sanni, a variety of malevolent spirit.

In certain contexts, a disease name is not overtly mentioned. The names of diseases associated with divine punishment are not spoken of in the first person or in the presence of the afflicted because they convey a sense of guilt. To say that someone has leprosy for example, is to imply that he, or some member of his lineage segment, has violated a serious taboo, such as killing a cobra. The same is true of infertility or insanity.

Other diseases are shameful and this in turn influences their description. For example, whereas men are generally straightforward about discussing their bodies and bodily sensations, many women are not. Women are described as nāchike, a term indicating both shyness and shame. A woman's shyness becomes particularly evident during pregnancy and illness.



When a woman experiences unusual bodily sensations she may speak of personal symptoms vaguely. In some cases she will refer to parts of her anatomy which are more general and less private than that actually affected, particularly if these parts call attention to her femininity. For example, if a woman has a menstrual complaint, she may say 'mai inda hogutade', it goes from my body, rather than explicate it further.

Likewise, a woman who is pregnant for the first time may not mention the fact to other family members or outsiders, until they notice it and confront her with their observation. Several Lady Medical Officers working in village Primary Health Centres mentioned to me that numerous women come to them complaining of general weakness, when in fact they are implicitly referring to pregnancy. They do not mention that they are pregnant and leave it to the doctor to observe during the course of an examination<sup>1</sup>.

The names of the more serious, spirit-linked diseases are considered powerful in themselves. Saying the name of a disease such as leprosy is thought to invite the disease to come into one's body. The significance of this belief is that villagers will not mention without qualification the local spirit linked names of smallpox, herpes, or leprosy. Some villagers will refer to a disease such as leprosy, kushta, by using a different name entirely. Brahmans, for example, call leprosy elder pain, hire bene, as the disease is considered the most serious and thus, by analogy, the eldest of diseases. Likewise, many villagers are reluctant to refer to smallpox as Devi or Amma, two names of the mother goddess commonly associated with the disease. They prefer to speak of the disease as mailige rōga, disease

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<sup>1</sup> Generally, the first pregnancy is the source of great embarrassment to young women. Pregnancy is an overt sign of sexuality. In general, women have only a vague idea of their own biological changes and shame is commonly linked to these bodily changes and the female genitals.

of pollution or filth. When I would ask what they thought caused smallpox, few would mention Devi directly. They preferred to speak more generally of dēva or būta or allude to the wind of būta, sonku.

Villagers will not openly say they are suffering from any 'big' disease, dodda roga. Alternatively, they describe these diseases symptomatically or describe how the disease, or its symptoms, 'has happened'. For example, if a villager contracted measles, chickenpox, or smallpox he might simply say, 'it fell on my body, mai alli bittide' and offer this as an explanation as well as an indication of the disease from which he suffered.

As a general rule, if a disease is of a serious nature, a villager will not speak of it when the sick person is within his proximity. When he leaves the area, however, the disease may be referred to with qualification. A speaker may say Avarige kushta agide, to him leprosy has happened, but the speaker will quickly emphasize his distance from the disease by adding Nanage illa avarige unṭu, to me it isn't, for him it is.

Different terms exist for the general category of disease.<sup>1</sup> The term rōga, which refers to a serious, often incurable illness, is never used in the first person. Rather the term kayile is employed. For example, if I was to inquire of a villager how his cure of leprosy or herpes was progressing, I would say, "Nimma kāyile heg unṭu" and not "Nimma roga heg unṭu" although both literally mean "how is your sickness". Kayile is used in cases of serious non-contagious diseases such as diabetes which linger, seem to get better, but recur. Rōga is used to designate serious contagious diseases such as smallpox, leprosy, etc.

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<sup>1</sup> Lately, the English term 'sick' has been 'Kannaḍaized' and speakers use the term sīku to refer to a general ill health.

### Contagion

Indigenous notions of contagion are expressed in different ways. All diseases considered contagious may be referred to as an̄tu-rōga, sticking disease. Diseases recognized as contagious include smallpox, chickenpox, measles, tuberculosis, cholera, and typhoid. In the vernacular, the term an̄tu-rōga may be substituted by the expression, 'it goes from one to another'. Contagion may also be expressed subtly by the use of the term mailige, a term which implies impurity and danger. Mailige is a general term for pollution and one who is mailige should not be touched since contact transfers pollution. Menstruation is spoken of as mailige, and so is the touching of a defiling substance, animal, or person. Moreover, contagious pox diseases are referred to as mailige rōga. The course of these diseases are structurally similar to other forms of pollution. I will portray this similarity, note how villagers describe contagion in context, and briefly examine the notion of hereditary disease.

I may begin by considering the implications of the term mailige. During her menses, a woman is mailige and is forbidden to touch people as well as various substances capable of conducting pollution<sup>1</sup>. Among Brahmans, a menstruating woman cannot touch a wooden object such as a bench with which another person is in direct contact. An understanding of this custom necessitates an analogical analysis. Wood is a conductor of mailige because it is a wild product (unprocessed). The menstruating woman is in a transitional state analogous to wildness. The following structural analogies may

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<sup>1</sup> She is allowed to touch her own children only if they still have their milk teeth. She signals to a slightly older child that she is in a state of impurity by one of two contrasting methods. She may say, "I have been touched by a crow", which all children learn is polluting or she may say, "Nanage maḍi", "I am ritually pure", therefore implying that she cannot be touched. Brahman children learn about purity at a young age because of daily house pūjā.

explicate this point:

|  |   |                                    |
|--|---|------------------------------------|
| nature                                     | : | culture                            |
| uncontrolled:                              | : | controlled                         |
| open space                                 | : | closed space                       |
| transition                                 | : | relative stability                 |
| uncontrolled bleeding and emotions, menses | : | normal state of bodily control     |
| unprocessed natural products               | : | plastic, silk (processed products) |
| wood                                       | : |                                    |

In this context, mailige marks a time of body cycle transition and a time of openness. A menstruating woman must sleep outside of the house or on the veranda. In other words, she exists on the periphery of the social and the wild. During menses, a woman is open to the attack of roaming malevolent spirits and she protects herself by carrying an iron knife or by placing one under her mat while she sleeps. Iron in this context is a symbol of the power men hold over nature. A menstruating woman can touch objects which are made of silk or plastic without transferring pollution because they are processed and thus have already been separated from the wild.

I pointed out earlier that pox diseases, particularly smallpox, are not spoken of with reference to their names associated with deities such as Devi, Amma, etc. These names themselves can cause a disease to spread. I further noted that informants referred to these diseases indirectly, or called them mailige rōga. The term mailige is expedient for several reasons. Overtly, the term conveys the idea of pollution and contagion. Covertly, the course of pox diseases share structural characteristics with the course, or effect, of other mailige pollutions. This may be demonstrated in respect to the treatment of pox diseases. Pox diseases are not treated by local medicine for several days after their onset. Villagers consider pox scabs to be the outcome of internal poisons and heat being pushed out of the body to the surface. The course of a pox disease is analogous to the course of menses. The suppression of both the course of the disease or menses is

regarded as dangerous.

menses: overheating: internal poison rejected via menses blood

pox : overheating: internal poisons rejected via pustulates

The effect of other forms of mailige set in motion a course of events which are structurally similar to those caused by pox diseases. One use of the general term mailige and the Havik term anjalu is to describe someone who has eaten but who has not yet washed his hands<sup>1</sup>. Contact with such a person or substance which is anjalu, touched by saliva, can cause boils and blisters. For example, in the disease known as uguru sutu, boils which appear on the fingernail, are caused by one person flicking water from his unwashed hands after eating onto another person. A serious uguru sutu infection leads to a disease known as dengi bāpu, or crab hand, a condition where the whole hand becomes swollen and pusy. This infection is caused by bad blood and toxins pushing out of the skin.

Contagion may be transmitted in various ways. Villagers with pox diseases do not bathe for fear of suppressing the natural course of the body ridding itself of internal poisons. They also do not bathe because if pox scabs are washed off they could spread the disease. Likewise, if a man dies of a pox disease he will be buried and not burned to insure that the disease will not be spread by the wind via smoke.

Contagion is also conveyed by a bad wind. Villagers refer to this wind as sonku, or use the general word for wind, gāli. As I have mentioned previously, the use of the term sonku is connected to būta. A number of

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<sup>1</sup> Anjalu may also be used to describe any food touched by saliva. The term kole is a lesser form of mailige so used to describe food transformed by cooking and reheated. Anjalu food may only be eaten by one's wife.

informants told me that a bad wind could blow through a house and bring sickness. One informant, an elderly Muslim midwife, stated that women are kept in a dark windowless room after delivery to protect them against this wind. Another means of expressing contagion which is becoming more common is by speaking of krimi and kita, as well as germs.

Before leaving the subject of contagion, I may briefly mention ramifications of culturally prescribed pollution restrictions in the cases of birth and death. Times of sutaka are times of semi-quarantine. All house and lineage members must observe a period of restricted movement where contact with others must be suspended in regard to food sharing, visiting, and touching. A person who has sutaka cannot enter a temple or attend a public gathering because of his impurity. Socially, a sutaka period marks a time when a villager's personal and family relations are qualitatively changing. The birth or death of a member of one's lineage necessitates a realignment of social relationships. Reidentification as well as psychological and social support are emphasized by lineage members who express the extent of their obligations vis-a-vis a social distance scale defined by a specified number of pollution days. The sutaka custom serves a social and ritual function as well as an ancillary function with respect to health. Vis-a-vis the custom of sutaka, the spread of a contagious disease which may have caused a death will be somewhat confined to a limited group. It may furthermore be noted that the house in which a man dies itself becomes polluted and must be ritually and physically cleaned. Until the last decade among hill tribes like the Koragas, a house was burned or abandoned if a man died in it.

A notion of hereditary illness is also prevalent<sup>1</sup>. These diseases

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<sup>1</sup> Some hereditary diseases are considered contagious and vice versa. For example, tuberculosis was considered hereditary and contagious by different informants.

are referred to as parampare inda. Less commonly, these diseases are spoken of as present in the blood. Hereditary diseases carried in the blood are of a bio-moral nature. For example, the breaking of a taboo by a lineage member such as the killing of a cobra, will have a direct effect on his blood line if the action is not ritually rectified. This idea is rarely expressed overtly however. Villagers will usually say that a curse is on a family due to its pāpa and not that pāpa is polluting the family line.

Table 25 Hereditary Illnesses

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Leprosy

Ubbassa (asthma, allergies affecting the respiratory system)

Huchu (madness)

Apasmara (fits)

Pakshavata (paralysis)

Diabetes

Infertility

Miscarriage, excessive menstrual bleeding

Bedwetting (Brahman informants only)

Stuttering (Brahman informants only)

Leucoderma

Tuberculosis

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Disease Taxonomy

Frake (1961) has provided anthropology with a carefully thought out formal model of a folk medical taxonomy. Frake's research among the Subanun included an investigation of the folk categories of the Subanese taxonomic system of human disease. He proposed that named diseases are 'diagnostic

categories' defined by verbal descriptions, the characteristics of which are learned by villagers as a shared cognitive code. According to Frake, Subanese villagers operate with identical diagnostic concepts based on shared definitions of disease categories.

Informants operating with identical diagnostic concepts may disagree about the application of these concepts in a particular case, but rarely disagree on their verbal definitions of the concepts themselves. (1961, 125)

Frake's model of folk taxonomy, and the methodology he has utilized to establish this taxonomy are valuable in that they enable the anthropologist to catalogue symptoms and to predict with relative accuracy what name will be assigned to a given set of symptoms. However, the cognitive unity which Frake proposes is indeed questionable.<sup>1</sup> It is one thing to say that villagers think within the parameters of an established system which encompasses all medical phenomena. It is quite another thing to say that the categories of this system are unambiguous and make up an identical cognitive code shared by all members of a society. Frake's model is static; it does not account for the fact that individual models, individual taxonomies, exist and interact. Moreover, collective ideas may be less precise than Frake has proposed. Frake avoids an examination of the substantial ambiguity which is characteristic of some diagnostic categories.

Frake points out that all illness episodes are construed by villagers to fall into one or more diagnostic categories. By extension, difficulty in identifying an illness by name is not the deficiency of the taxonomic system but a deficiency in the subject's knowledge. If, as Frake has suggested, all villagers share common ideas as to the attributes of a diagnostic category, then identification problems exist because of one of two reasons. Either villagers are confusing two diagnostic categories, or an illness at a point in time does not display the classic symptoms of a diagnostic category.

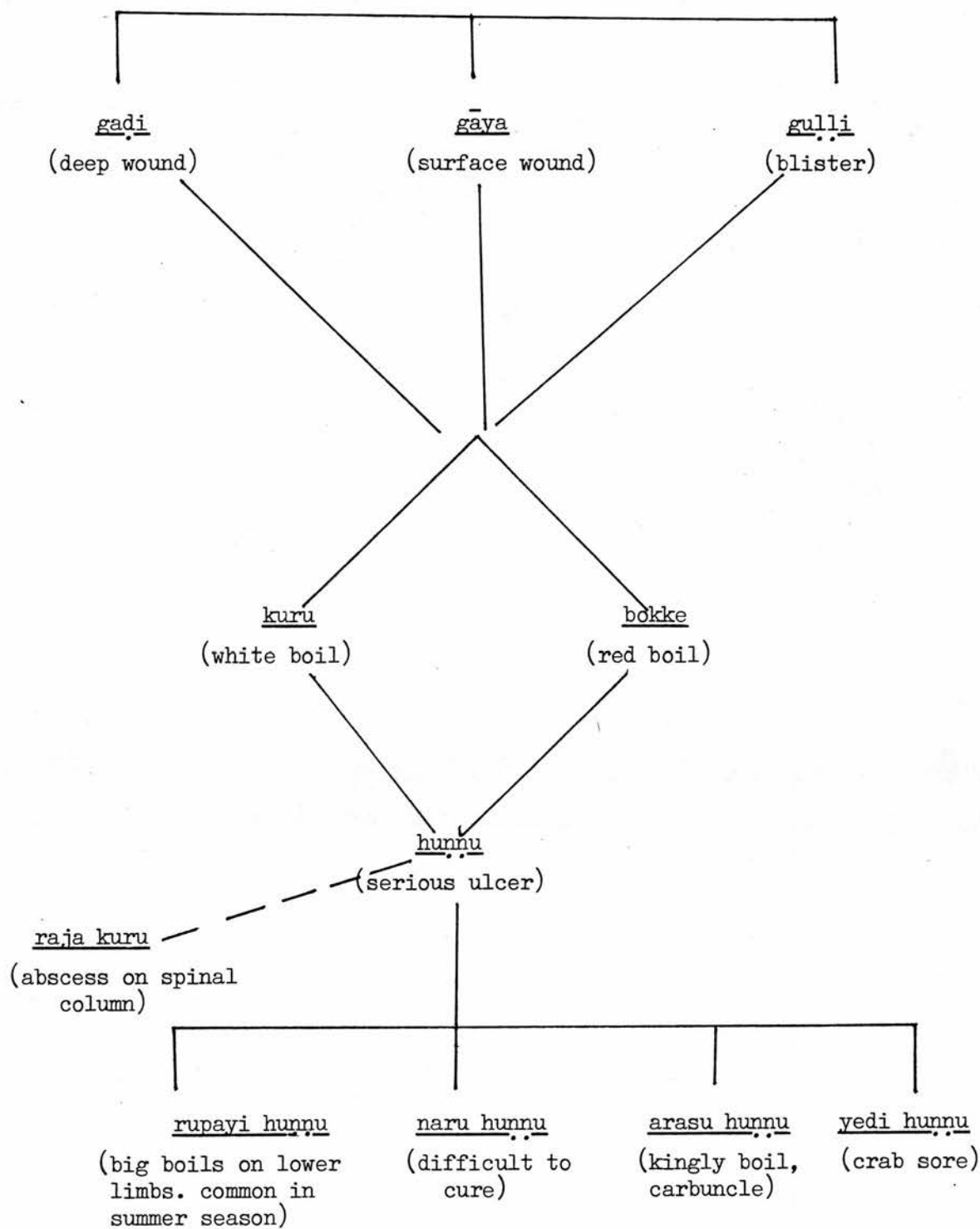
<sup>1</sup> Fabrega has questioned the specificity of native diagnostic categories. He has moreover noted that the complexity of native classifications is influenced by moral and existential factors.



In many diseases, symptoms are pronounced to a greater or lesser extent in different individuals. I would suggest that because symptoms are so variable in some diseases, particularly fevers, internal infections, and children's diseases, diagnostic categories which subsume them are sufficiently vague to encompass a wide range of possibilities. Seen in this light, ambiguity is not a weakness of the system but a strength. Moreover, as Herzlich (1975, 69) has noted it is often not only the symptoms but the relationship between an individual and various diseases which provides the basis for distinguishing among them. I may examine these points in respect to data collected in Panaje. Before doing so, I must stress that the present context is significantly different than that described by Frake. India's social structure is caste based and caste, to some extent, obstructs the free flow of ideas. Moreover, pluralistic health cultures pervade Indian society and affect collective ideology. If the Subanun may be taken as a case exemplifying homogeneity, then the present case exemplifies heterogeneity. In India, the relationship between individual taxonomies and collective ideologies is an important field of study, particularly in the field of health where these relationships have practical consequences.

A majority of Kanarese diagnostic categories are specific. For example, informants in Panaje described the symptoms of herpes, jaundice, measles, and mumps in the same way. They also described the prodromal relationship between wounds, blisters, boils, ulcers, and sores in a definitive manner (Chart VII). However, as a result of a study of the interaction between laymen and medical specialists, I came to realize that informants often knew only one outstanding characteristic of a disease which they had not personally experienced. They were unclear as to other characteristics which distinguished it from another category. Furthermore, many informants utilized a disease name in an ambiguous manner because they assumed

Diagram VII The Prodromal Relationship of Wounds, Boils, and Ulcers.



that disease "Z" must be disease "Y" if it was not disease "X", of which they knew the characteristics. A contrast here was between known and unknown syndromes. Let me illustrate these points in context.

The terms sanni patha and vayide jwara are used to describe high fevers of long duration. Some informants used these two terms synonymously whereas others distinguished them. Some claimed that sanni patha designated fevers which became higher at night accompanied by delirium, excessive thirst, red eyes, body pains, head pain, and reddish-yellow urine. They described typhoid cases as sanni. According to these informants, vayide jwara was a term used for body pain and fevers which were particularly high on alternating days, but which did not specifically increase at night. This definition was not accepted by all informants. Some informants described cholera (fever, diarrhoea, nausea, painful muscle cramps) as vayide jwara. They did not know of a day fever-night fever distinction or a definition which characterized the variety of this fever as coming on alternate days. Other informants told me that these latter symptoms were not those of vayide jwara, but of vanti bhedi (diarrhoea and vomiting) a term often used in cholera cases. Confusion also arose over the term chali jwara, cold fever. Some informants utilized the term to signify influenza, malaria and pneumonia which had developed over time<sup>1</sup>. Others used it narrowly to describe malaria.

This variance in the use of disease names has serious repercussions. I found that patients who requested medicines directly from chemists or from untrained distributors of allopathic medicines received medicine

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<sup>1</sup> A number of ayurvedic vaidya labelled a severe case of pneumonia sanni patha meaning by the term that the three dosha were simultaneously vitiated. Sanni maintains this meaning in ayurvedic texts and is subdivided into sixteen categories.

for the name of the disease they specified, vis-a-vis the practitioner's translation of this term into English. I found that anti-malaria tablets were distributed to pneumonia cases because chali jwara was translated as malaria, although used by many villagers to mean fever with chills. In one area near Belthangadi, Cloromycin, under the brand name Reclor, had been so misused in non-typhoid cases that its present value was considered dubious by the local PHC Doctor. Research proved that a number of medicine shops had distributed the drug to all patients naming sanni patha or vayide jwara as their ailments. These terms were considered synonymous with typhoid. In some cases the shop practitioner had never seen the patient, but had merely sold the drug on the basis of the name of the disease given by a family member<sup>1</sup>.

Sutaka vayu is an example of a diagnostic category which is used by many informants in a rather nebulous way; as a catch all for highly variable conditions. Sutaka vayu is a condition which follows delivery and is characterized by different informants by (1) the retention of impure or menstrual blood, (2) by gases which should be expelled from the body during delivery but which are retained and go to the head, (3) the eating of nanju food prior to delivery or during confinement which causes impure blood and bad gases. The most prevalent description of sutaka vayu symptoms is fits after delivery. However, some informants have stretched the term to include any unusual psychological or physical symptoms following delivery and occurring

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<sup>1</sup> Carl Taylor (1976) has noted the occurrence of a similar phenomena in the Punjab. He found that indigenous practitioners who could not read the English labels on allopathic medicine vials have had the pharmacists who supply them with the drug write their usage in local Punjabi disease term nology.

during confinement. In one case, a married woman began scolding, laughing loudly and being argumentative after her fifth delivery. Her husband explained her actions to me by saying that she was suffering from sutaka vayu. Other informants said she was tale bisi, anxious, as she did not want any more children.

Kempu is another ambiguous diagnostic category. According to some informants, kempu, redness, designates red rashes accompanied by burning, swollenness, or fever. All informants identified herpes as a variety of kempu and most identified cases of reddish cellulitis, advanced oedema, staphylococcus infection, and urticaria, as kempu. However, some informants were far more liberal in their identifications of kempu than others. For example, the term kajji denotes scabies and a variety of itchy, burning skin diseases. When such a skin disease became seriously infected some informants would claim that the condition was kempu whereas others stated that it was not kempu because kempu did not produce weeping sores.

A variety of kempu specialists called kempu vaidya practice in southern South Kanara and I consulted a few on the characteristics of kempu. I found through interviews that they had developed their own kempu taxonomies. All those I consulted listed for me several subclasses of kempu which subsumed almost any type of inflamed swelling, red or otherwise, that I could describe. Categories they agreed upon were identified by descriptive names such as:

|                    |                  |                                  |
|--------------------|------------------|----------------------------------|
| <u>shita kempu</u> | (cold redness)   | red swelling, cold to the touch. |
| <u>sarpa sutu</u>  | (snake circling) | herpes.                          |
| <u>kalu kempu</u>  | (foot redness)   | red swelling of the foot.        |

However, many other classes of kempu were individually named by vaidya. The construction of personal categories was valuable, for if one kempu vaidya could not cure a case, he referred it to another as a type of kempu which he

could not cure<sup>1</sup>. Another point may be made with regard to the kempu case. I found that in villages where a kempu vaidya resided, descriptions of kempu were much different than in villages where kempu was treated by a mantravādi or by an ayurvedic vaidya. The definition of a diagnostic category was significantly influenced by indigenous practitioners who resided in the locale. I may pursue this point in some detail using an ayurvedic vaidya I worked with as a case study.

One Brahman vaidya I studied under had undergone a short apprenticeship with a relative trained in ayurveda, but was, for all intents and purposes, self-taught. He had read classical texts in Sanskrit and popular texts in Kannada and Malayalam. This vaidya was placed in the difficult position of having to work within two taxonomic systems simultaneously. In order to diagnose an illness, or at least to identify it in relation to a specified medicine, he had to ascertain its name within the ayurvedic taxonomic system determined by dosha vitiation. At the same time, he had to function within a local taxonomic system in his interaction with patients. Over time, he developed a taxonomy of his own. In some cases, he correlated terms from the two taxonomies. In other cases, he subsumed a local term as a class or a prodromal stage of a disease named in ayurveda. Moreover, his personal taxonomy affected the taxonomies maintained by his clients.

For example, the vaidya used the localized Sanskrit term cavi to designate diseases caused by bad blood. His interpretation of cavi etiology was that the blood became impure due to the indigestion of food by: (1) under eating, (2) eating of incompatible foods, (3) over eating, or (4) eating in

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<sup>1</sup> The same phenomena was observed in the case of sanni vaidya or vaidya who treated high fevers.

inappropriate places or at inauspicious times. According to the vaidya, cavi was specifically caused by undigested fats and fats were undigested because of pitta vitiation. He purported that if cavi was not treated it would become more serious, and would develop to a stage known in ayurveda as ama, uncooked, unripe<sup>1</sup>. The vaidya ascribed children's sprue, menstrual and lactational disorders, infertility, and debility with nausea as cavi diseases.

When patients frequented this vaidya with an illness and he named it as cavi, they would take this to mean that their specific symptoms were cavi and not that cavi, undigested food, caused their symptoms. Most had no idea that the term cavi could indicate other syndromes and few thought that cavi was associated with undigested fats. Most villagers thought cavi was a blood disorder.

The cavi case also illustrates the influence which an indigenous practitioner can have on his clients in regard to their definitions of a specific diagnostic category for different practitioners use the term to indicate different sets of symptoms. These practitioners in turn influence their patients. I collected different descriptions of cavi from various informants in Vitla and Panaje and traced many of these descriptions to vaidya:

1. blackish spots on the behind
2. children's sprue characterized by weight loss, steatorrhea, foul smelling diarrhoea with undigested fats.
3. laziness in children accompanied by over salivation, weakness in hands and legs, loss of appetite.
4. spots which appear at the time of delivery.
5. menstrual pain
6. decrease in breast milk.

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<sup>1</sup> Ama is a dhatu-agni disorder wherein rasa becomes putrified as a result of improper dhatu transformation.

A case study may illustrate the aspecificity of the layman's diagnosis and how different a vaidya's personal taxonomy can be from that of his clients. The following case was carefully followed over the course of three months.

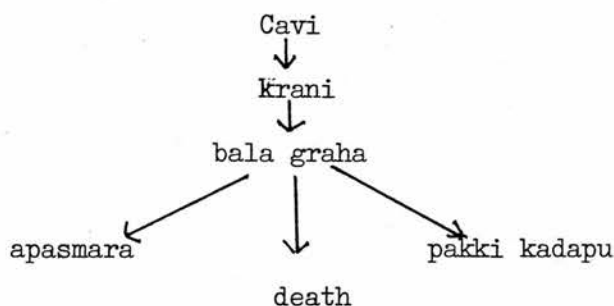
1. A Shudra child, aged two, suffering from malnutrition and symptoms characteristic of tropical sprue, developed a case of fits which occurred the day of a new moon. The father considered this to be indicative of the disease bala graha, caused by a bala pide spirit. He took the child to a mantravadi and received treatment by mantra and ash, busma. He also purchased prepared tablets known as bala graha matre from an indigenous medical shop. Such tablets are locally made and readily available in most villages and towns. They are taken as a preventative as well as curative medicine for bala graha.
2. The child became weaker, developed foul mucus laden stools, had difficulty in moving his limbs and had muscular pain. The father returned to the mantravadi, received a yantra, and was told that the spirit causing the illness was now powerless to attack the child. He suggested that the child be taken to a vaidya.
3. The child's condition did not improve and a second attack of fits occurred. During these fits, the child expelled a quantity of phlegm from his mouth. Afterwards, the child was weak. Two days later, a visiting relative diagnosed the condition as krani and prepared folk medicine which she administered to the child for one week with little effect. Her diagnosis was questioned by a neighbour who said that the condition was not krani because in krani the skin became thorn like and the child would have developed night blindness or a film over the eye. She called the disease cinne dosha. Finally, the family consulted a vaidya.
4. When the father consulted the vaidya, he described the child's symptoms but did not initially mention fits. He rather stressed the expulsion of kapha from the mouth, diarrhoea, and weakness. The vaidya specifically asked about fits and was told that the child had been taken to a mantravadi and had received a yantra. The vaidya gave the father medicine for ten days and told him to return with the child when that period had elapsed for additional medicine. The father asked the vaidya if the illness was cinne dosha. The vaidya said that the illness was cavi and this name was accepted by the father without comment and repeated to neighbours afterwards.
5. After the father and son left, I discussed with the vaidya the terms bala graha, cinne dosha, krani and cavi. He described these terms as prodromal stages of a syndrome. Cavi was a first stage, characterized by malnutrition, the inability to digest fats, crying fits, and the dissolving of bones in the urine. Krani was a possible next stage of cavi, characterized by the former symptoms and in addition thorn like skin, a white coating over the eyes and muscular complaints. The next stage was bala graha. In this stage, fits would become frequent, be accompanied by vomiting, diarrhoea and temperature change in the



body. The body would be cold from the navel downward and hot from the navel upward. Cinne dosha, he claimed, was a synonymous term for bala graha derived from the fact that ayurvedic vaidya and shops administered cinne busma, gold oxide, as a medicine for children's fits.

He then stated that bala graha could lead to two other conditions, pakki kadapu (bird crossing over) or apasmara. Pakki kadapu is a condition in which a child's limbs are weak and tightly bent in towards the chest. A wheezing sound, like that made by a bird, is heard during breathing, and fits or a low fever may be present. Apasmara is an ayurvedic as well as a local term referring to intermittent fits and loss of consciousness in adults and adolescents.

Diagram VIII One Vaidya's Taxonomy of Children's Diseases



6. I interviewed the family of the patient and concerned neighbours two months later. The child's health had somewhat improved. This could have been due to the medicine, as well as to the fact that the seasons had changed from the rains to the healthy winter season. I interviewed these villagers and found that a good deal of ambiguity still existed as to the characteristics of bala graha, krani, and cavi. The family now thought that cavi indicated the symptoms remaining after a bala graha attack.

I suggested to the villagers the idea that children's diseases mentioned to me might be stages of one another as the vaidya had mentioned to me. I did not, however, mention the vaidya's name. All informants agreed that bala graha could lead to apasmara in later life, but the suggestions that krani could lead to bala graha or that bala graha could lead to pakki kadapu caused little response from them. Finally, one informant asked me how one of these diseases could lead to another if they each had different causes. Krani was caused by food or the stars, bala graha by a spirit, and pakki kadapu by a bird.

The last remark recorded is significant in that it focuses attention on the fact that suspected etiology of an illness often contributes to its placement in a diagnostic category. In the case presented, the father of

the child did not know the definite characteristics of krani, bala graha, and cinne dosha, other than the fact that they all involved fits and diarrhoea. However, when his child developed fits on a new moon, he immediately suspected malevolent spirits and therefore presumed the case to be bala graha. His diagnosis was influenced by an etiological suspicion.

I have not intended to belittle the specificity of the folk taxonomy in Panaje. My monitoring of diagnostic sessions at the homes of villagers and vaidya proved that in a great many cases, subtle observations of symptoms were made by non-specialists and their diagnosis was helpful to the vaidya, and sensitive practitioners of western medicine.

### Verbs

Depending on context, different verbs may be used in describing particular illnesses. These verbs signal implicit knowledge regarding the onset and course of the illness. Whether or not the speaker is actually aware of this verb choice is another matter. Any linguistic analysis must assume that, far from being aware at every moment of making such decisions regarding tense and verb, the speaker is working from his store of internalized grammar.

Surprisingly, little attention has been focused on the language of disease, either by linguists or by anthropologists. Liendhardt (1961, 147-150), in his monograph on the Dinka, has noted that they speak of disease with reference to physical factors or with reference to powers, depending on the severity of the disease. He comments, moreover, that the Dinka talk about disease in a different manner than Europeans. A Dinka will say that a disease or power seizes man and not that a man catches a disease. In the English realization, man is the subject, the doer, and the disease is the object. In Dinka, as in Kannada and other Dravidian languages, the disease is the agent

(subject) working on or in man. This is both a structural feature of the language and an indication of the speaker's perspective. I would agree with Liendhardt in saying that the verbal description of disease by Dinka or South Kanarese villagers reflects their perception and interpretation of disease, its cause, and onset. However, in the present case, an analysis of the verbs used to describe disease reveals far more subtle distinctions.

The Kannada verb baru is generally used to convey the meaning to come or to know. In the context of disease, baru may have several meanings, dependent on the situation. A man may say, for example, "Nanage shita bandide", "A cold came to me", to imply that he has a cold, but he does not know from where he contracted it. The use of baru further implies that the cold had a sudden onset. If he wanted to convey the impression that the cold developed gradually over a period of days, the verb agide, happened, "A cold happened to me", would be utilized. The shift in verb choice signals ascription of onset and course of the cold. In describing the symptoms of a particular skin disease, a man may say "bigu bartade, binki bartade, resi agide", "swelling comes, burning comes, pus happened". Swelling and burning sensation occur suddenly, and thus take the verb come, pus developed gradually and thus takes the verb happened.

In another context, a form of the verb to come is used with a serious disease which is linked to the wrath of a spirit. Examples of diseases which fall into this category are smallpox, cholera, and epilepsy. To say, "Nanage mailige rōga bandide", smallpox came to me, is to indicate that the disease actually came to the body from a spirit or force outside the body. The use of this verb expresses an externalizing mode of thought.

As was noted in the previous chapter, external factors interact with internal factors of the body to cause an illness and verb usage may reflect this fact. While the verb baru may express the external or precipitating

factor of an illness, biddide, fall, marks its internal development. These two verbs provide a level of contrast, a framework within which speakers may convey both the onset and course of their illness. When a speaker says, "Smallpox fell on the child's body", he implies a sudden appearance of spots. Fall here means not from outside the body to the surface of the body, but rather from inside the body spots fell to the surface<sup>1</sup>. This does not contradict the notion that smallpox is caused by a spirit attacking externally but rather explains what happens after the initial attack. The spirit causes an imbalance within the body and bodily heat and poisons are pushed to its surface causing pustulates to appear. One of the names given to smallpox, sidubu rōga, shooting up disease, conveys this thought.

Perhaps the largest range of diseases are linked to a form of the verb agu, to happen. In general, this verb is used to express illness which has been developing in the body from a point in the past and continuing to be present. Many skin diseases, for example, take as their verb agide, happened, as do illnesses relating to stomach problems and mental weakness. A form of the verb agu is used with diseases which cause rashes on the skin and develop gradually within the body. To say, "Avala kaialli kajji agide", on her hand an itching rash happened, implies that the rash happened gradually and appeared few in number. If the verb biddide was used as in Maguvina mai mele kajji biddide, a rash fell on the child's body, it would indicate a sudden appearance of spots all over. Although the initial cause may be different, as signalled by the use of agu or baru, the verb biddide may be used to provide

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<sup>1</sup> In a similar way, to explain that a man has sprained his ankle he will say kolpu biddide, sprain fell. I took this to mean that he fell and therefore received a sprain but in the context of the inside-outside nature of illness, it refers to a sprain that fell to the outside from the inside. I would like to thank Pam Claus for bringing this to my attention.

contrast or explanation. If a villager takes medicine and gets a cure he will say, "Since medicine was given, the kajji from inside the body fell outside".

The further use of verbs as a contrast may be noted in the following example:

Hunṇu inali hula agide In the wound there were worms. This refers to the entrance in the past and continued development up to the present of worms inside the body which are travelling outside to the surface. This is in keeping with a prior discussion of agide and the notion of internal worms.

Hula hunṇu madide The worms made a wound. This refers to worms from the outside environment which are chewing the feet and thus causing infection. This is in keeping with the indigenous conception that worms cause athlete's foot. The condition is referred to as "worms eating".

A level of contrast may also be noted in regard to indigenous description of desirable and undesirable possession states. Unwanted possession states are treated as an illness. The use of hiddide and hiddiyutade, forms of the verb "to hold", express an unwanted, involuntary possession by an ancestor spirit, wandering būta, or pide. Avanige buta hiddide, Būta held him, implies that it did so by force. To express possession by a wanted spirit, one might say "Avanige maimēle bandide", it came unto his body. Other ways exist to describe desirable possession, but the point to be noted is that hiddide would never be used in that context. Madness, leprosy, and bala graha also take the verb hiddide to stress their severity.

## Tense

In the first few months of my field study, I elicited information from villagers by suggesting hypothetical symptoms or diseases with which I was not yet familiar. When I used this technique, informants answered the questions utilizing the present tense. However, I noted that during actual situations of illness, speakers often did not use the present tense in describing illness but used the past tense. For example, a young man and his father came to an ayurvedic practitioner's shop where I was conducting research. The vaidya looked at the boy and said, "Is it that fits came to him?" Apasmara bandideyo? The boy, however, was having fits at that moment.

The vaidya's use of the past tense in this case seemed unusual and I began to investigate tense as a further indicator of specific disease states. I may first note that the colloquial use of the present tense in Dravidian language acts in the capacity of the English present-continuous and future tense. The Dravidian past tense indicates both the English past and the present-perfect tense. The Kannada speaker utilizes tense as a means of specifying how an illness has come about. For a symptom such as sudden headache or stomach ache, the present tense is utilized, indicating that it has just happened without a series of precipitating or developing symptoms. When the past tense is utilized, it indicates that the present symptoms are actually part of a known sequence of events established in the past<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> This is not limited to verbs used with disease. For example, a hungry man will say, "Nanage hasive agide!" Hunger happened to me, and when someone is called to have a meal and is about to come, he will say "bande", literally "I came". This indicates "I am coming" as a sequence of events has been established.

### The Hot-Cold Idiom and Multiple Causality

I may finally focus attention on the integrative function of the hot-cold idiom in a heterodox society where several different sets of ideas coexist as to an illness' etiology, and cure. All villagers utilize the terms hot and cold when describing illness, be it of a physical or psychosomatic nature. These terms provide distinct segments of society with a general medium of communication; a medium wherein a broad range of feelings and meanings are linked in a primary symbiotic relationship.

Numerous examples have been cited demonstrating the use of hot and cold as relational markers in a literal, as well as a metaphorical sense. Body states, food, heavenly bodies, qualitative times, medicines, illnesses, mantra, psychological proclivities, types of music and even the moods of deities, may be described by the terms. Moreover, the terms allow a wide range of experiences to be communicated, if not directly then indirectly, to otherwise distinct segments of society. For example, the terms facilitate varieties of social interaction, such as the mobilization of a broad range of resources against illness. Although Brahmins and non-Brahmins have distinct ideas as to the functioning of bodily processes and the treatment of particular illnesses, they are able to communicate basic ideas to each other by references to hot and cold. These references enable the communication of subtle and innovative ideas vis-a-vis analogical propositions. Bearing this point in mind, I may emphasize the integrative function of the hot-cold terminology in the context of illness and its cure.

Data presented thus far points out that illness may potentially be caused by any one of a number of factors, ranging from spirits to food. In many cases, a group of x symptoms are taken to indicate y illness caused by z phenomena. However, due to the course of the illness, or variations in the opinions of family members, the illness may be rediagnosed. During this

time several different types of treatment may be undertaken, either progressively or simultaneously. A question arises as to how diverse thoughts and actions can take place simultaneously without creating dissonance, contradiction, or at least confusion.

First, as I have noted, ambiguity does result in situations where a named illness develops symptoms thought to be uncharacteristic of that illness. Family members often doubt the validity of their own crude diagnosis. However, they will not doubt that a name does exist for the illness, that its causes can be identified, and that a specialist, or specialists, exist who can cure it. If one specialist or treatment fails, this does not mean that the specialist is incompetent, his medicine useless, or that the patient cannot be cured. The doctrine of specific etiology is not in vogue and it may be adduced that the illness has been caused, or complicated by, multiple factors.

Is it merely an ideology of multiple causation which reduces the confusion of simultaneous therapies and etiological viewpoints? I would suggest that confusion is minimized by the conjunction of ideas pertaining to the hot or cold nature of a disease and the notion of multiple causality. Whatever the cause or causes of an illness, body heat is considered to be affected. Any treatment which attempts to resolve a recognized imbalance in heat will be utilized and thought beneficial despite its loci of reference. In this sense, a concern over the control of body heat transcends differences in heterogeneous therapies and facilitates concentration on a common theme. It is true that one indigenous practitioner will often claim that his treatment is responsible for dealing with the initial cause of an illness and that other treatments undertaken have merely concerned themselves with reducing symptoms. However, no practitioner will dismiss the action of other therapies



as useless. As long as these therapies are focused on a similar manipulation of body heat they are complementary instead of contradictory. This point will be emphasized in Part Three by a discussion of referral relationships existing between pluralistic medical cultures.