

Police Matters

The Everyday State and Caste Politics
in South India, 1900–1975

Radha
Kumar



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ABBREVIATIONS

ADMK	All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (also abbreviated as AIADMK)
BL	British Library
CCP	Code of Criminal Procedure, 1898
CPI	Communist Party of India
CTA	Criminal Tribes Act, 1911
DM	District Magistrate
DMK	Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam
DRCM	District Record Centre, Madurai
DSP	District Superintendent of Police
DW	Defence Witness
FIR	First Information Report
<i>FNR</i>	<i>Fortnightly Report for Madras Presidency</i>
GO	Government Order
GOM	Government of Madras
HC	Head Constable
IGP	Inspector-General of Police
IOR	India Office Records
IPC	Indian Penal Code, 1860
KD	Known Depredator
<i>MPAR</i>	<i>Report on the Administration of the Police of the Madras Presidency / State</i>
PC	Police Constable
PW	Prosecution Witness
PWD	Public Works Department
RDO	Revenue Divisional Officer
SI	Sub-Inspector
SP	Superintendent of Police
TNA	Tamil Nadu Archives
VM	Village Munsif or Village Magistrate

GLOSSARY

Bandobast / bundobast: Preparatory security arrangements.

Dravidian: Of the South. Usage of the term draws on overlapping linguistic and racial knowledge formations of the nineteenth century, contrasting Aryan / Sanskritic North India to Dravidian South India.

hartal: Public protest that calls for shutting down establishments.

karnam: Village accountant.

kaval: A precolonial and colonial rural policing system that skirted the line between pillage and protection.

kavalgar: A person, usually belonging to the Thevar or Naicker caste, who participated in the *kaval* system.

kusba: A small town centered on a market.

lathi: A heavy wooden stick used as police weapon.

Panchayat: “Council of Five” / village leadership.

Panchayatdar: Member of the village council.

Ramayana: One of the two major Hindu epics.

talayari: Village watchman.

serai: An inn.

NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

Gender: I use the term “policemen” and not “police personnel” throughout this book. Although women began entering the police force in some parts of the country in the first half of the twentieth century, police personnel in the region I study were all men. The capital city of Madras established a Women’s Wing in 1964; district offices began recruiting female personnel only in 1973. Policing was gendered power, and the use of the term “policeman” is a reminder of one manifestation of this power. The Tamil Nadu police significantly corrected its gender imbalance toward the end of the twentieth century through initiatives like the establishment of all-women police stations.

Place names: The region I study lies in a southern Indian province that was known as the Madras Presidency for most of the colonial period and was renamed Madras Province in 1937. The truncated province formed after the 1956 linguistic reorganization of states was called Madras State. Madras State was renamed Tamil Nadu in 1969. The book uses both Madras and Tamil Nadu to refer to the province, depending on the period being discussed.

Transliteration: For ease of readability, I have restricted transliteration from the Tamil to direct quotations and book titles, where I use the University of Madras Lexicon scheme. For the rest, including place names and caste names, I use the most common spelling, e.g. Madurai, not Maturai. Nouns are pluralized with an s, e.g., Pallars. Caste names appear unitalized but other non-English terms that appear less frequently are italicized, e.g., *talayari*. Translations are mine unless otherwise indicated.

NOTE ON CASTES

The table below, intended for readers not familiar with Tamil Nadu, gives a quick overview of the castes frequently mentioned in this book. I principally use caste to mean *jati*—birth groups that share a common language, cuisine, etc., and not *varna*—the schematic five-fold classification of the social order.

Occupying the lowest rung in the caste order are those deemed ritually “untouchable.” Since the 1970s, this group has been called Dalits (those that have been crushed), but they were named differently at different moments in the twentieth century. For purposes of affirmative action, they were termed Depressed Classes until the mid-twentieth century and are today referred to as Scheduled Castes. Gandhi’s term for the community was Harijan (child of Hari, a caste-Hindu god), a term seen as patronizing by most Dalits. Adi-Dravida (first Dravida), still used often in Tamil, refers to Dalit identity as the indigenes of the region. For the sake of consistency, I use the term Dalit (or the specific *jati* name) throughout this book, except when one of the alternative names is referenced in quotations or in proper nouns.

The following is a broad classification and does not include the details or exceptions mentioned in the Tamil Nadu government’s formal listing, which runs to several pages, indicating the centrality of caste-based affirmative action in this region. (To name some just details in the government’s listing: Backward Classes are further divided into Other Backward Classes and Most Backward Classes; several groups of Chettiars are counted as Backward Classes by the state; and Christians occupy different brackets depending on their caste identity before conversion.)

TABLE I.

Broad Ranking	Administrative classification	Caste (<i>jati</i>) names	Common last names
High	Forward Castes	Brahmin, Pillai, Chettiar	Iyer, Iyengar, Pillai, Chetty
Middle	Backward Classes	Thevar (includes Kallar, Maravar, and Agamudaiyar), Naicker	Thevar, Servai, Naicker
Low → Middle	Backward Classes	Nadar (known as Shanar in the 19th century)	Nadar
Lowest	Scheduled Castes	Pallar, Paraiyar	Kudumban, Samban

POLICE MATTERS

Introduction

VIOLENCE IN RAMANATHAPURAM DISTRICT in southern Tamil Nadu on October 4, sparked by a confrontationalist, caste-based mobilisation with a communal orientation, claims 11 lives,” ran the November 1998 headline in the *Frontline*, a prominent Indian magazine.¹ The report referred to a violent clash that had taken place the previous month between two caste groups, Thevars and Dalits, in the villages of South India, leaving behind victims belonging to the lowest castes and classes of the region. The report was by no means unusual. In fact, incidents like this occurred with alarming frequency in the 1990s, prompting attention not just from the media but also from local and international human rights organizations. Nor was this a new phenomenon. Although the 1990s witnessed an increase in violent caste-related conflict, caste confrontations between Thevars and Dalits, as well as between other caste groups, had occurred with some regularity through much of the twentieth century. In 1957, the Ramanathapuram countryside had been torn asunder by violence between the Thevar, Dalit, and Nadar castes. And as early as 1932, Madras Legislative Council members were debating means of preventing Thevar oppression of Dalits and the resultant riots between the two communities.²

The persistence of caste-based politics and violence in rural Tamil Nadu is explained by some, rather circularly, as stemming from the persistence of caste and its centrality to Indian culture.³ Additionally, the incidence of caste politics is seen as indicative of state absence. Thus, the grip of caste is seen as particularly vicious in rural spaces where, seemingly, the modern state has been unable to touch traditional power relationships and the rule of law has battled ineffectively against the primordial politics of violence. But caste lines are not static; they require frequent if not constant redrawing through a range of practices that include spatial segregation, economic discrimination, ritual precedence, and the crafting of identity.⁴ Violence (or the threat of it) plays a role in reinforcing and resisting these practices. When the state has a monopoly over legitimate violence, as was the case in twentieth-century India, the use of violence by caste groups to reproduce or resist caste norms draws in the police, who use the discretionary

authority vested in them by the state either to ignore or to put down the violence. Indeed, a closer look at caste politics through the century reveals the policeman as an inescapable actor in the story.⁵ This book tracks routine police procedures—walking the beat, recording a crime, interrogating suspects in custody, and managing public assemblies—to reveal this entwined world of policing and caste politics in the southern countryside of Tamil Nadu (earlier the Madras Presidency) in the first three-quarters of the twentieth century.

The entanglement of caste politics and policing during the twentieth century speaks to the extent to which the colonial and postcolonial states entered the everyday lives of rural subjects. While the presence of the postcolonial police in the Indian countryside evokes little surprise, the conventional historiographical understanding of the colonial police is that they were barely present outside cities except on occasion to brutally subdue protest, even in the twentieth century when the institution was better established than in the first century of rule. “The thin blue line was very thin, indeed. . . . over large parts of the Indian countryside, there was no police presence at all,” writes Rajnarayan Chandavarkar of the Bombay Presidency police.⁶ As for the Madras Presidency, David Arnold writes that “the police organization did not extend to the villages,” though their firepower was sufficient to subdue any outbreak of protest.⁷ Arnold’s focus on moments of confrontation between unarmed subjects and the police, echoed in other works on India and other imperial realms, rightly corrects an earlier image of the police as protectors of the people, showing instead the extent to which the institution functioned as the coercive arm of an exploitative regime.⁸ However, this literature either ignores or denies the significance of routine policing in rural spaces.⁹ In contrast, *Police Matters* draws on previously unexplored archives preserved in rural police stations to argue that the colonial police did exercise an everyday presence in the Tamil countryside.

At the quotidian level, the police were central to ensuring the smooth running of the colonial economy. Across Madras province, policemen were deployed to secure the commercialization of agriculture, the development of a productive labor force, and the circulation of people and commodities. Indeed, the emergence of the modern police from the eighteenth century onward—in Europe and later its colonies—had as much to do with managing economies as with preserving regimes, as a policing scholarship heavily influenced by the work of Michel Foucault has shown.¹⁰ Over this period, as ruling powers allied themselves with their propertied classes,

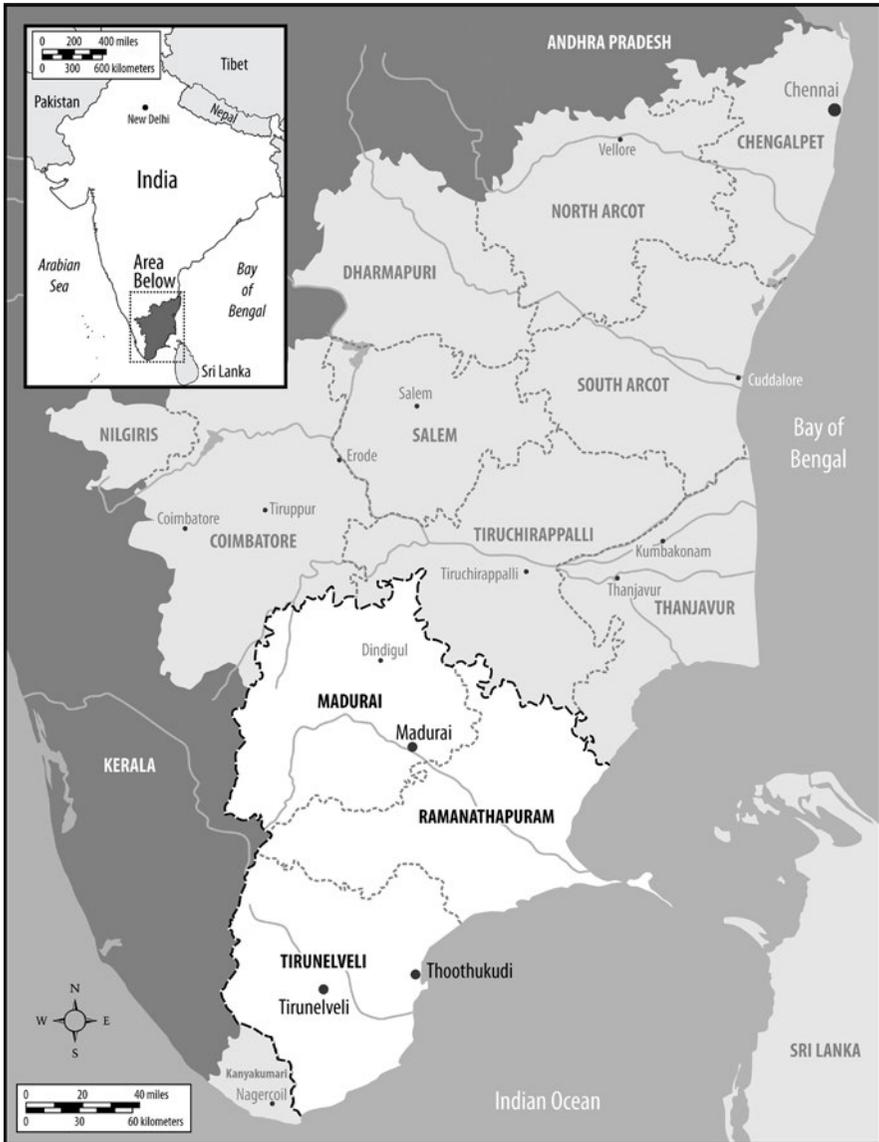
new laws were written to define criminality as an attack on private property.¹¹ Accordingly, from London to Rio de Janeiro, police forces ensured that private property was protected from theft and that potentially licentious and intemperate laborers worked diligently.¹² Unlike the global policing literature, which focuses on cities, this book moves to the countryside. This is not merely a matter of setting; rather, it reflects the specificity of the colonial economy, which was geared to provide agrarian raw material for British industry. In the early twentieth century, agriculture contributed almost half of India's national income and provided livelihood to two-thirds of its work force.¹³ The Madras police necessarily monitored rural spaces.

Routine rural policing certainly relied on violence, but it also crucially depended on knowledge of subject populations. Numerically disadvantaged in the vast countryside, colonial policemen optimized their resources by drawing on and reproducing knowledge that categorized, enumerated, and objectified Indian subjects based on their caste.¹⁴ The colonial police thus brought epistemic *and* legal violence into the Tamil countryside, transforming its way of life. The use of state knowledge differentiating subjects, however muddily, is inherent in policing: in eighteenth-century Europe, for instance, “vagrants, itinerant sellers, prostitutes, and Jews were some of the main groups identified and governed” by the police.¹⁵ In rural Madras, such knowledge was fundamental to policing, dictating its structure and rhythms. Moreover, this knowledge was specifically colonial in its inflection, shaped by Orientalist perceptions of lying natives, impulsive crowds, eternal villages, and, above all, by the late nineteenth century, of a society composed of enumerated communities rather than of individuals.¹⁶ There is a vast literature on the intertwining of community and criminality in colonial governance, but this corpus is limited to vagrant communities that were legally criminalized for posing a threat to an economy based on sedentary agriculture.¹⁷ While the policing of criminalized communities was extraordinarily harsh, I argue that it did not stand in isolation from other regular, albeit less visible, practices of rural policing that extended to the larger population. Using knowledge practices that objectified colonial subjects based on their caste identity—as thrifty, laboring, litigious, or respectable castes—the colonial police channeled their meager resources to effectively police the broader rural population as well.¹⁸ Through this calibrated policing of communities, the colonial police ensured the security of agriculture and trade, a challenging achievement had its efforts been directed toward monitoring individual subjects. Furthermore, it was not only the objects of

policing who were classified by community; its agents were too. Knowledge of caste was used in colonial recruitment policies so that the composition of the force itself reflected objectified notions of caste identities and hierarchies.¹⁹ The deployment of rigid notions of caste in policing helped reconstitute knowledges and identities of caste in the Tamil countryside, casting long postcolonial shadows. Among policemen and among the objects of their coercive gaze, caste became a particularly salient form of identity in the politics of public spaces. Far from being the dregs of a premodern past, modern caste politics has been shaped in conjunction with state policing.

The Setting

The southern, predominantly Tamil-speaking districts of Madurai, Tirunelveli, and Ramanathapuram in what was once the Madras Presidency and is now the state of Tamil Nadu, in peninsular India, form the site of my book.²⁰ Since the 1980s, these districts have been in the news for incidents of caste violence that also intimately involve the police, as mentioned earlier. Just as important, focusing on a small region through almost a century allows for a close-up view of social interactions as they played out at the level of the everyday and the exceptional. This southern region came under colonial authority at the end of the eighteenth century, when the English East India Company moved southward from its base in Fort St. George to defeat the local chieftains in a series of skirmishes. By 1802 the territory was brought under the Permanent Settlement and Company rule formally established. Soon, in an always incomplete process that would last the better part of a century, the Company began to appropriate to itself all the policing functions that had earlier been distributed within society, to form a state police force.²¹ Initially, Company policemen held both revenue and judicial powers, leading to accusations that they wielded absolute authority that they exercised for tax collection. Responding to pressure from members of the British parliament, the Company undertook a major reorganization of the Madras Presidency force around 1856, when the police were carved out as a separate arm of the state with a clearly defined line of command. This organizational structure, seen as a considerable improvement on the earlier one, was retained despite the disruptions of the next couple of years, when a nationwide revolt against Company rule resulted in the transfer of power to the British Crown. The changed organizational structure was adopted nationwide through the Police Act of



Map 1. The Southern Tamil Region.

1861 and remains largely unchanged to date. Over the last decades of the nineteenth century, the institution was professionalized to a large extent, but complaints about police ineffectiveness and corruption persisted, from both nationalist newspapers in India and the British parliament.

In 1902, the government of India responded to these concerns about police functioning by setting up the Second National Police Commission (often called the Fraser Commission). The commission's scope was large, and its final recommendations—on rationalizing the strength of the force across provinces, modifying recruitment and training methods for personnel, and streamlining procedure—materially impacted policing in Madras. *Police Matters* commences here, with the implementation of the recommendations of the Police Commission. It ends in 1975, with the declaration of the Indian Emergency, a twenty-one-month-long period when civil liberties were suspended and police torture was rampant across the country. By including both the colonial and postcolonial periods in its purview, this book accords with recent scholarship that reframes decolonization not as an event limited to 1947 but as an extended process that started in the 1940s and continued well into the 1950s.²² Whereas some aspects of decolonization took time, others simply entailed no change, since the postcolony inherited untouched several institutions and practices—including those pertaining to policing—that its colonial predecessor had established.²³ Except for an accelerated Indianization of the officer cadre, the institutional structure of the Madras police survived decolonization intact. Likewise, the legal codes that had informed colonial policing were retained verbatim by the new republic. Indeed, the 1950s and '60s saw the new Madras government employ several policing controls its colonial forebear had used, often to curb political opposition. Although the Emergency is infamous in the history of independent India as a moment of constitutional failure and police abuse, it was not an exception to an otherwise flawless democratic chronicle. Rather, it was the upsets of the Emergency that led to popular and governmental questioning of police functioning in independent India. It is significant that the first national police commission in independent India was constituted only in 1977, immediately after the Emergency, seventy-five years after the Fraser Commission and thirty years after the country won independence from British rule.

Police violence, then, did not end with colonial rule; it continued in independent India. This continuity was not purely the result of a historical accident, the fact that independent India *chose* to retain a colonial police

institution at a turbulent moment in its history. Nor is police violence somehow unique to India.²⁴ To the contrary, the rule of law in liberal states—whether colonized or independent—assumes the existence of police force. “There is no law that does not imply *in itself, a priori, in the analytic structure of its concept*, the possibility of being ‘enforced,’ applied by force,” writes Jacques Derrida.²⁵ To be sure, colonial rule allowed for a degree of violence not justifiable in a democratic regime, so that the continued use of colonial policing procedure eased the use of legal violence in independent India.²⁶ That said, police violence in independent India was not limited to specific legal provisions: say, one that allowed the police to fire at a public gathering. Rather, the police are legally sanctioned to use violence for maintaining law and order in *any* situation if they deem it necessary. Since policing occurs at the threshold to judicial procedure—before a criminal is tried, before a crime is even committed—all acts of policing entail the use of discretionary authority. The policeman does not only fire at a gathering or arrest a drunken laborer, he determines *when* a public gathering becomes unlawful and *when* a drunken laborer is a threat to public order. In other words, the police do not simply enforce existing law, they also decide when to invoke state force to maintain order. Policing thus combines executive and legislative authority: this is fundamental to policing and characterizes democracies as much as it does authoritarian regimes. Crucially, as Walter Benjamin writes, by collapsing the separation between the normal (when legal codes hold) and the exceptional (when such law can be suspended by police discretion to give way to violence), policing exposes a broader critique of liberal democracy itself.²⁷ Sovereign violence, and not a putatively nonviolent law, undergirds the authority of the modern liberal state, as has been discussed in an extensive scholarship spanning legal history, anthropology, and political science.²⁸ Moreover, violence is apparent not only when the law is explicitly suspended to give way to a state of emergency (as in 1975); rather, the embodiment of exceptional powers in the person of the policeman means that every moment of policing carries the possibility of violence. State violence is continuous and subtle, woven into the warp and weft of everyday life in the form of policing. In twentieth-century Madras, castes that policemen targeted—such as the Thevars and Dalits mentioned in the opening paragraph—were especially vulnerable to this form of continuous state violence, both before and after independence.²⁹

Since police violence was legally sanctioned and could always be justified in a court as discretionary, effective checks to police authority in

twentieth-century Madras came from the political arena rather than from judicial process.³⁰ The chapters that follow show that policemen taken to court for violence—a constable charged with custodial violence or an officer charged with firing on a crowd—rarely received judicial penalties. In colonial as well as independent India, subject-citizens seldom succeeded in using judicial channels to obtain redress for police violence. Instead, resistance to police violence occupied the space of politics, which had different evidentiary requirements from courts. Under colonial rule, it was political opposition in the British parliament that provided the impetus—in 1855 and again in 1902—for the government to undertake significant measures toward police reform. Native subjects themselves had fewer options to be heard: newspaper articles penned by literate urban nationalists, ineffectual questions raised in legislative assemblies, gossip exchanged on street corners. This changed in 1950, when India adopted universal adult franchise. Now electoral politics offered everyone, including those belonging to the lowest social classes, an avenue to mount resistance to policing. The coming of independence therefore impacted the actual practice of policing, continuities in legal procedure notwithstanding. There was now a new check on police power in the form of the vote. Recent histories have shown that the making of Indian democracy was neither an inevitable colonial legacy nor a project restricted to the Indian elite. Rather, a radical shift of “political imagination” allowed subalterns (as much as elites) to *make* democracy; this was demonstrated in their determined struggles to vote, to invoke the constitution in their daily lives, and, as will be discussed in the following pages, to resist police force.³¹

The vote was especially effective in resisting police force when citizens came together as caste-communities. Contrary to the liberal critique of identity-based politics as not quite modern, the politicization of caste enabled a democratization of politics, as numerous other works have also demonstrated.³² Subaltern communities could more easily highlight their experience of police violence by speaking in the idiom of caste in public politics than they could as individuals in courts. Public politics that deployed caste identity acknowledged the realities of social and political inequality, whereas judicial redress was limited by its assumption of liberal subjects who were equal before the law.³³ The ability of subaltern subjects to coalesce around caste identities in protesting police force was facilitated in Madras province, where caste politics were central. The primacy of caste in this part of the country had been long in the making. In the modern era, the

steady deployment of caste identity in colonial enumeration, ethnography, and legislation had hardened precolonial identities and hierarchies, so that Indians themselves had begun organizing around caste—in associational politics of the liberal public sphere as much as in popular politics of the street. During the first half of the twentieth century, the emergence of strong anti-caste movements—ranging from the elite Justice Party’s criticism of Brahmin ascendance to EVR Periyar’s radical attack on the entire caste system—further boosted the politics of caste in Madras. This manifested after independence as a culture of political parties that represented caste interests, a political context where marginalized castes could readily organize under the banner of formal parties in protesting their experience of police force. At times such protests have turned violent, as in the Thevar-Dalit encounters mentioned above, deepening liberal aversion to caste politics. However, spectacularly violent politics do not stand independent of the routine violence that has long supported caste hierarchy, albeit less conspicuously. Admittedly, violent caste politics have frequently favored upper castes backed by police force, but they have also empowered subordinated castes like Dalits to expose, and counter, the historic injustices they have faced from combined upper-caste and state force.

The Method: Everyday Actors, Everyday Records

Affirming or resisting caste hierarchy is not limited to occasional large-scale encounters. Rather, caste is made and challenged in numerous localized encounters, such as when a Dalit boy lingers at the entrance of a village temple or when a Dalit laborer complains about being sexually assaulted by her landlord.³⁴ Routine caste violence and its ties to policing has been the subject of rich ethnographies in recent decades.³⁵ The topic has also begun entering written records through Dalit autobiographies and Human Rights reports.³⁶ Furthermore, the very emergence of the Dalit as a constitutionally protected political subject and a rights-seeking political agent has engendered new sites of conflict—and their attendant legal archive—since the 1970s.³⁷ But building an ethnography of caste violence that occurred before the 1970s presents archival challenges. A study of routine policing partially circumvents this problem by retrieving moments when the state was called in to maintain caste order.

Unfortunately, the rural constable on his daily beat has been a neglected figure in the historiography of caste, and even in the scholarship

on colonial state authority. One reason for this is the evidence of numbers: the colony was vast and its police institutionally poor, as was indeed the case across empires. The three districts I study covered an area of over 4,000 square miles each, adding up to about 14,000 square miles. In the 1920s, each district had a population of around two million, and a police force about 1,000 strong.³⁸ There was thus approximately one policeman per five square miles, and per two thousand people. This was admittedly not much, but the targeting of specific castes enabled the police to be far more effective than these numbers suggest. Over the 1940s and 1950s, between the pressures of war and the efforts of decolonization, the strength of the Madras police grew substantially. As of 1960, there was on average one policeman for every 1.5 square miles in Madurai (as compared to one policeman per 4.5 square miles in 1930), one per 1.6 square miles in Tirunelveli, and one per 1.9 square miles in the more sparsely populated Ramanathapuram district.³⁹ Broadly speaking, compared to the early twentieth century, there was a doubling of police strength by the first decade after independence.

A second reason for the historiographical silence on routine policing is the nature of the archive. Although there is a rich scholarship on South Asian legal history, this corpus has emphasized legislation (which generated records in centrally located legislative houses) and litigation (which generated records from the courtroom). Law enforcement, occurring on the streets, is more elusive to capture through a documentary archive (but lends itself to ethnography).⁴⁰ Governmental and newspaper records of routine policing do exist for urban spaces, evidenced in the historiography on the policing of labor and sexuality in colonial cities.⁴¹ For rural spaces, however, newspaper and government records—both of which were produced by urban, literate elites—privileged moments of spectacular violence, which needed to be questioned, over acts of routine policing, which passed unnoticed. Tamil newspaper archives for the period under study have largely been lost; and although Tamil cinema provides rich material to study postcolonial policing, it is not as helpful for the colonial era. These disclaimers notwithstanding, everyday interactions between policemen and their rural subjects in the first three-quarters of the twentieth century did leave slight documentary traces: deliberations on the location of police stations, orders to tweak police procedure, transcriptions of testimony collected during criminal investigations, and reports on the disciplining of errant policemen, all of which are archived in London, Chennai, and Madurai.⁴² But what helped me trace the

narrative thread of routine policing from these myriad records was the turn to a rarely used archive—the police station.

Dating from at least 1922 and continuing until today, every police station in the Madras Presidency has been required to maintain a narrative record on each village within its precincts; these are collectively called the Part IV records. As opposed to most other forms of local police writing, which are periodically destroyed, the Part IV records are meant to serve as a continuous record of the jurisdiction of each police station. Since these records are kept permanently at police stations, they do not make their way to official archives and are not easily accessible to the public. I gained access to Part IV records at six police stations in the Tirunelveli district and two in the Ramanathapuram district, which between them cover about seventy villages and several dozen hamlets. Relocation and rebuilding of stations during the past few decades and inadequate archiving resources within stations have resulted in the loss of many of these records. All the same, enough remain to indicate the presence of the police in the Tamil countryside during ordinary moments, not just at exceptional times of disorder. Part IV records are valuable also because they throw light on police practice at the most locally documented level. Unlike records in centralized government archives, which were typically written by high-ranking European officers, Part IV records were written by native police inspectors. The writing is of a different texture from official reports to the government—less censored, less idiomatic in its use of English, richer in detail.⁴³

Consider an inspector's note from the early 1930s cautioning his constables about "one Sankaralinga Tevan . . . a drunkard and worst type of rowdy of (Sethurayanpudur village). He keeps a Palla woman and is feared by all the villagers."⁴⁴ The note reveals that the colonial state—embodied in its stations, policemen, and records—reached down to individual villages and villagers. Further, the native policeman's appropriation of colonial knowledge—of community (Tevan belonged to a caste that was deemed criminal by the colonial state), labor morality (drunkards were not diligent workers and had to be policed), and sexual morality (he was in a relationship with a woman to whom he was not married)—indicates the impact of colonial legal discourse on the formation of native subjecthood. Colonial knowledge was not divorced from other, local forms of knowledge with a longer past: in censuring the transgression of caste norms, seen in the relationship between Tevar and the "untouchable" Pallar, and overdetermining the Palla woman's identity through her sexual availability and vulnerability, the note points to

the role of legal power in reproducing caste norms.⁴⁵ Sankaralinga Tevan, the object of the policeman's gaze, was likely aware that he was of interest to the local police, and this may have informed his actions, at least on certain days. Perhaps he skipped a midday visit to the local arrack shop (if he was indeed a drunkard) when the beat policeman was in his village; or perhaps he provoked a confrontation with the beat policeman, and someone returned home with a black eye. Police power informed Sankaralinga Tevan's actions in less hypothetical ways too: a follow-up note from the inspector, in 1935, indicates that Sankaralinga Tevan had been bound over under the preventive sections of criminal law, thereby halting his activities for several months.

The inspector who wrote this note, though unnamed in the record, was almost certainly Indian and occupied the vast middle tier of the police force—the principal actors of *Police Matters*. The Madras police apparatus functioned at three levels under colonial rule; race or caste identity played a role at each level. At the highest was the officer cadre consisting principally of Europeans, who alone were seen as impartial and trustworthy enough to supervise the force. In terms of numbers, this was a small body, comprising around 1 percent of the force at the provincial level.⁴⁶ The second and largest tier was the subordinate police, largely native in composition and recruited from what were seen as thrifty, agricultural castes; in the Madras Presidency, these included, among others, Naidus, Raos, and Pillais.⁴⁷ Moreover, literacy was valued in recruitment, resulting in further discrimination against lower, less literate castes.⁴⁸ At the lowest rung were the village police, comprising the headman (or village *munsif*) and the watchman (*talayari*). The village police, who were survivors of a precolonial police system, were not fully part of the state police. They were neither appointed nor fully remunerated by the government, and their role was merely to assist the constabulary by providing criminal intelligence and reporting crime. In the southern districts, the headman belonged to the high Brahmin and Pillai castes as well as to Thevar or Naicker castes, which were otherwise marginalized under colonial rule, but locally somewhat dominant. The *talayari* of precolonial times had typically belonged to the lowest castes (Dalits), but these groups were weeded out of the force in the 1860s and '70s, often giving way, once again, to Thevars and Naickers who thereby dominated the village police.⁴⁹

The composition of the force changed slightly at all three levels after independence. First, the officer cadre was fully Indianized. Second, by the 1960s the importance of the village police had diminished. Third, as to the

subordinate police, although official caste statistics are not available, scattered evidence suggests that in the decades after independence, there were periodic influxes dominated by certain castes, notably Nadars in the 1950s and Thevars from the 1980s onward, indicating popular awareness of the significance of policing in everyday politics, and of the importance of the subordinate police within the force. Indeed, it was the subordinate police who were primarily responsible for routine policing in the countryside, the law enforcers most visible to rural subject-citizens.

Following the 1902 Police Commission's recommendations, the subordinate police were further split into two levels: the upper subordinate police, consisting of Inspectors and Sub-Inspectors, and the lower subordinate police, consisting of constables.⁵⁰ Sub-Inspectors had charge of a station while Inspectors had charge of a police circle comprising five to eight stations. Both of these ranks, predominantly held by Indians, were limited to those of "good moral character and social position" who had at least completed their schooling.⁵¹ The lower subordinate police—constables—were recruited locally from "classes usually regarded as respectable," and were invariably literate in the Madras Presidency.⁵² Recruits spent some months at training schools before commencing work. Inspectors were taught criminal law, police procedure, and "the habits and customs of the criminal classes," while constables were trained in "drill, discipline, elementary law, and police procedure."⁵³ The legal and procedural training that recruits received included relevant sections from local laws; the Police Act of 1861, the Code of Criminal Procedure of 1898, and the Indian Penal Code of 1860; and executive orders from the provincial government that laid out the nitty-gritty of police procedure. Written in the second half of the nineteenth century, at a moment of heightened racial anxiety, these codes manifested the "institutionalization of racial difference" within statutory law itself.⁵⁴ Their provisions accounted for supposedly native tendencies to fabricate evidence, to breach the peace over matters of caste status, to impulsively turn violent when gathered in large numbers, and so on. By examining the everyday life of these laws, this book throws light on the exercise of a specifically colonial state power, but one that was mediated by native actors and inherited by their postcolonial successors. The white police officer is almost absent in this study, giving place instead to the routine enactment of racialized and caste power by the native inspector and constable.

Nevertheless, I do not seek to present individual policemen, who indeed often belonged to higher castes than the objects of their violence, as the

villains of this story. The surprisingly enduring tendency to attribute police violence to individual abuse ignores the extent to which penal practice is part of broader social discourse.⁵⁵ Rather I emphasize the extent to which law enforcement itself presumed violence and criminal procedure itself was permeated by knowledges of caste (and class) to privilege social hierarchy. This manifested not just in explicit allowances made for those from powerful castes, but also implicit biases—against certain occupations, customs, forms of politics, and so on.

I also raise the caste identity of the policeman to emphasize that “the state” or “the police” was not an abstract entity, removed from the workings of an autonomous caste society. To the contrary, the police was a disaggregated institution, whose power was performed by embodied actors who also held a place in society. A policeman who asked an agrarian laborer not to create a disturbance by asking for higher payments during the harvest season was not only a state agent enforcing legal order. He was also (the upper-caste) Inspector Padmanabha Iyer telling the (lower-caste) Pallar laborer to abide by the socioeconomic norms associated with caste hierarchy.⁵⁶ For their part, unequal social actors derived their power from their unequal access to police power as well as from ideals of caste hierarchy. The upper-caste landlord not only relied on caste norms to coerce labor from a Dalit; he also used his privileged access to Inspector Padmanabha Iyer to secure his caste and class status. State power and caste authority were mutually constituted at the everyday level by actors who drew power from both institutions. Indeed, the disciplinary shift in scholarship on the modern state—from political science to anthropology—reflects this renewed emphasis on understanding the state through the everyday enactments of its institutional tenets.⁵⁷ This framing, which has also informed historical scholarship on the colonial and early postcolonial states, seeks to destabilize the binaries of traditional and modern politics, of elite and subaltern politics, by blurring the line between state and society.⁵⁸ Seemingly traditional caste politics are constituted alongside modern police authority; violent subaltern politics are inextricable from liberal elite politics.

Chapter Layout

Policemen in twentieth-century Madras interacted with subject-citizens at the level of the everyday, examined in Part I of this book, as well as the exceptional, examined in Part II. These interactions, both ordinary and

remarkable, helped make state and caste authority. Mirroring the cadence of my archives—from the dispersed to the centralized—my chapters move from the routine to the periodic, from the stories less audible to those that announced themselves loudly, from the negotiations of the marginalized to the protests of the relatively empowered. Contestations over caste hierarchies, implicit in the interactions in Part I, become explicit in Part II.

Part I explores police practices and interactions whose visibility was typically limited to the local and the immediate. It looks at where the police established stations, whom they monitored on the beat, how they investigated crimes, and how coercion seeped into these ordinary activities. Chapter 1 examines the routine production of police knowledge linking community, criminality, and space, and shows how this knowledge informed the distribution of stations and beats. By selectively marking their presence in the Tamil countryside, the police gave enduring physical form to colonial knowledge about caste. Under colonial rule, this enabled the police to monitor the rural economy. After independence, the goals of the state changed but the police continued to exercise discretionary authority over the same castes—now in the name of development. Throughout, the imbrication of caste knowledge in police practice helped solidify caste subjectivities among both policemen and legal subjects.

Subject-citizens were not passive objects of police power; they also used their knowledge of police procedure creatively to navigate their world. Chapter 2 delves into a world of rural politics pivoted on a police document called the First Information Report (FIR), used to register crime. By the late nineteenth century, concerned by what they saw as the native tendency to fabricate evidence, colonial administrators had invested the FIR with the juridical authority to determine whether a crime had actually occurred. The impossibility of the task made the FIR a highly contested object over which power was negotiated, a document that enabled villagers to channel the force of judicial punishment into local politics. On the one hand, castes with proximity to the police exploited their relationships to register FIRs favoring their version of an event. On the other, in a display of their discretionary authority—manifest to the competing parties as a potent combination of state and caste authority, policemen determined which cases they would take up for investigation and which they would not, which acts of communal violence they condoned and which they did not. The FIR remained a crucial political tool even after 1947, when other modes of political participation had emerged: its enduring relevance

indicates the centrality of legal subjecthood to political personhood in postcolonial India.

Periodically, there were disturbances to the rural social order that provoked the exercise of direct police force on recalcitrant subjects. Chapter 3 looks at such acts of routine violence, which were cloaked in the language of law and order: protest was “bitterness” and submission “reconciliation.” Sometimes police intervened in conflict using legally codified violence, for instance through preventive arrests that required no due process. At other times, policemen enacted (legally ambiguous) violence on the bodies of vulnerable subjects. The chapter then moves into the police station to argue that custodial violence was not an exception but instead fit at one end of “a continuum of excess violence” that the modern state enacted on marginalized populations—in colonial and postcolonial India alike.⁵⁹

Routine police violence often achieved its goal of putting down protest, but not always. Sometimes, especially among caste or class communities that were considerably politicized, resistance persisted in the face of opposition. Part II examines the policing of politics that were more episodic, more directly confrontational of state authority, and that garnered more attention from the public and the state. Here, I look at caste disputes over public spaces, labor protests, and, increasingly after independence, the pivotal role played by political parties in organizing subaltern resistance to police force.

Chapter 4 examines the spectrum of policing measures deployed by the colonial state to maintain public order amid popular protest. These measures included executive orders that pre-emptively banned public assembly; the stationing of additional armed police forces in “disturbed” areas; and, at the extreme, firing on public assemblies. The chapter argues that the colonial police did not engage with protestors only at the moment of riot, which is most visible in the archive; rather, they continually kept their eye on popular protest. Relatedly, the riot, contrary to its representation in colonial discourse, was not a momentary and impulsive reversal to precolonial politics but was instead shaped over extended interactions with the police, often occurring in response to the close monitoring of dissent. Chapter 5 discusses the continued use of colonial policing techniques to suppress politics in independent India, a process that reached its nadir in the Emergency months. But unlike in the colonial period, powerful political parties in the 1950s and 1960s mobilized popular support against state violence, using it to their advantage. This chapter suggests that continuity in policing

methods from the colonial period helped increase the legitimacy of the politics of the street and normalize violence in postcolonial politics. The Conclusion emphasizes threads that run through the seventy-five-year period under study to demonstrate how caste hierarchies and politics changed in conjunction with police power, despite continuities in police procedure.

PART I

Police and the Everyday State



State Knowledge

Seeing Like a Policeman

A WEEKLONG “Agricultural and Industrial Exhibition and Cattle Show” was held in the city of Madurai, in the southern Madras Presidency, in May 1906, after a long gap of six years.¹ A plague epidemic had ravaged the country since 1896 and the local government, fearing further spread of the disease, had withheld permission to conduct the fair until then. But once permission was granted, prominent members of the local community convened a meeting, formed a committee, and quickly put together plans for the exhibition. They reached out to rich landlords and merchants for contributions, collecting the substantial sum of 10,000 rupees; fully half the amount was donated by the Nattukkottai Chettiars of Devakottai, a prominent mercantile caste community. Money in hand, the committee bought a sugarcane press and other equipment. Exhibits were received through the second half of April from numerous towns and villages in the Madurai district, from other parts of the Madras Presidency—as near as neighboring Tirunelveli and as far as Berhampur in present-day Orissa, and even from parts of the Bombay Presidency. The District Collector of Madurai pitched in, requesting the Revenue Department to lend an oil engine and pump from Manamadurai, a small town 50 km southeast of the venue. The regional office of the Forest Department was asked to collect and forward select varieties of forest produce for display. During the fair, 14,000 head of cattle were assembled in the Tamukkam grounds, a prominent landmark on the northern banks of the River Vaigai, which cuts through Madurai city. Lectures were given on cotton cultivation, seed selection, the state of agriculture in the Madras Presidency, the value of cattle penning as an industry, and the chrome leather industry. Over 3,000 rupees was raised from the sale of tickets.

A routine event, in short, and one that is easily unnoticed amid the pile of bureaucratic paper generated by the colonial government. And yet, massive

economic, political, and societal transformations during the second half of the nineteenth century undergirded its smooth occurrence. A post and telegraph system allowed the organizers to advertise their event across the country. Roadways and railways connected the venue with numerous small and large towns across peninsular India. Governmental agencies had taken over forests to manage their resources. A centralized medical apparatus had entered the towns and villages of India to combat the spread of the plague. Landed and mercantile interests, often united by ties of caste, had begun participating in an emerging public sphere. Cities had been reordered racially—dense native habitations razed and leafy European enclaves established. And a police force had been established to safeguard these spaces and flows.

Many of these transformations to the landscape legitimized empire as the harbinger of progress. But importantly, they served an imperial economy that extracted raw material from Indian agriculture and forests and distributed finished goods from British industry to the colonized population. Historians have characterized this economy as an imposition on the colonial countryside, an onslaught that was backed by the might of the colonial government so that the peasant and the tribal faced the combined authority of the landlord, the moneylender, and an alien government.² David Arnold argues that in this context, insurgency was structural to the nature of colonial power, not an outlier limited to frontier zones or “fanatic” communities. Consequently, the police were a necessary prop to the colonial economy, for police force played a crucial role in putting down insurgency.³ But the police role in supporting the colonial economy was not limited to moments of sudden and spectacular violence. I argue that it was also in evidence at quieter moments, when “nothing” happened. If peasant uprisings are written into administrative documents in the prose of counterinsurgency, then governmentality appears in the dry garb of budgeting and planning by provincial Public Works Departments—an alternative archive of minutiae.⁴ The undertakings mentioned above—running the railways, managing forests, combating disease, and securing property—each central to the colonial economy, relied on police support to function smoothly. The Agricultural Exhibition of 1906 appears in the archive as a non-event precisely because nothing untoward happened—neither popular protest nor its violent suppression. The police were undoubtedly present at the exhibition, even though they find no mention in the governmental record of the event. This chapter argues that, contrary to conventional historiographic

representations, the colonial police were a routine presence that facilitated the smooth functioning of a rural economy. Outnumbered in the vast spaces of the countryside, the Madras police drew on, and reproduced, knowledges of caste toward optimizing their resources, so that trading and farming communities received protection, while laboring and so-called criminal communities were monitored. If the Nattukottai Chettiars of Devakottai generously donated 5,000 rupees to a local fair, they also expected the colonial government and its police to extend special protection to their mercantile activities.⁵

Charting how stations and beats were laid out in the Madurai, Tirunelveli, and Ramanathapuram districts in the southern Madras Presidency during the first half of the twentieth century, the following pages show that the space of law and order that policing supported was the space of a colonial political economy. The police marched into the Tamil countryside bringing with them, as it were, a new logic of colonial power. But it was not only the flow of goods or the presence of the policeman that signaled the entry of colonial power into the Tamil countryside. Determining how to allocate scarce police resources required a continuous production of police knowledge—of unsafe spaces and criminal subjects. This chapter therefore also examines how police record keeping relied on and reaffirmed the objectification of caste identity in colonial Madras.

The arrangement of police stations across the Tamil countryside, intended by the colonial government to optimize its surveillance of the rural economy, did not change much after independence, despite the changed priorities of the new state. This was simply because the new force did not need to optimize its resources the way its predecessor had: it was substantially better manned and benefited from improved technology. As a result, the material imprint on the Tamil landscape left by the colonial state in the form of its police stations stayed largely undisturbed, enabling the continued policing of certain spaces and communities. Further, most colonial record-keeping formats were also inherited by the postcolonial police, enabling the continued production of knowledge that objectified castes based on their putative criminality. However, police knowledge and surveillance that targeted certain castes now intersected with new definitions of criminality—focusing on the moral offender, and new political concerns—pertaining to widening political participation. Thus, even as the lower-caste male continued to be policed in postcolonial Madras, the provocations were now different, as shown in the final section of the chapter.

The Arrangement of Stations

In its memorandum to the First National Police Commission of 1860, the Government of India described the ideal spatial organization of its police as evenly distributed and radial, so that an officer at any level could superintend all his subordinates: "Each officer's area should decrease with his rank, till those in immediate charge of the constabulary of any one district ought to be able to reach any police post at a stretch within the day."⁶ The Second National Police Commission of 1902 and successive executive orders of the provincial government echoed this spatial imagination of a police force radiating from nodes of supervisory authority. In accordance with these directives, the bureaucratic chain of command within the Madras police force ran from the Inspector-General (who managed the entire province from his seat in Madras City), through the District Superintendent (who managed a district), Circle Inspector (in charge of five to eight stations), and Sub-Inspector (in charge of a station), to the lowly constable (at each station house). Space was produced not evenly but by privileging centers of colonial state authority across the province.⁷ This was amplified by the overlap between race and rank in the colonial police force: while constables and inspectors were inevitably native, superintendents and their superiors were necessarily European.

Scattered points of state authority notwithstanding, the layout outlined above suggests an even, almost panoptic, police gaze from each nodal point. For perfect supervision, an inspector or a constable would have had to see along every direction from his vantage point. But neither was he in a watchtower, nor was there a light shining on the country around him. This was an actual man, on a horse or in a motor vehicle, on a bicycle or on foot, who needed to pick a direction. A "narrowing of vision" was, therefore, required to make the countryside legible to the colonial state.⁸ The fact that the colonial police force was fairly thin compared to the area and population it needed to manage made the need to choose even more crucial. Through much of the first half of the twentieth century, the districts of Madurai, Tirunelveli, and Ramanathapuram had around 900 policemen each, resulting in a ratio of approximately one policeman per five square miles and per 2,000 people.⁹ Consequently, there was a second principle driving the location of stations. This was the imperial political economy, which, as Manu Goswami has shown, "shaped the reconfiguration of the relationship between state and space in colonial India," especially after



Map 2. Distribution of police stations in the colonial period.

1857.¹⁰ Less spectacular than railway lines or irrigation projects, police stations were nonetheless crucial markers of state space, guarantors of the state's protection of private property. The distribution of police resources in the first half of the twentieth century provides evidence of extraordinarily detailed planning that, besides ensuring European oversight of native policing and colonial control over nationalist politics, also optimized police support for the smooth functioning of the colonial economy.

The Police Commission of 1902 had suggested that the Madras police reduce its overall number of stations from 1,621 to 1,000, to bring the province's per capita police presence closer to that of other provinces.¹¹ In 1905, in line with the Commission's recommendations, the government of Madras began an extended project to reallocate police resources across the province. The reduction in numbers did not necessarily diminish the state's reach over its subjects. Rather, police planners accounted for, and produced, a "hierarchy of spaces" requiring different levels of policing.¹² At the top of the hierarchy were urban centers, certainly. But the countryside was not undifferentiated space. Contrary to Raj Chandavarkar's claim for the Bombay Presidency that "villages were omitted from the administrative design of the police force," the Madras police painstakingly listed every single village within its bounds to determine its security requirements.¹³ Planners accounted for each village's population, its class composition, and its location relative to centers of trade. Ideally, a rural police station was to cover 150 square miles; in practice, stations varied widely in size. Thus, Tenkasi Station, which included the "*kusba* town of Tenkasi (with) a population of 22,071," covered only 75 square miles, while Nattam Station covered an area of 196 square miles since "much of it consist(ed) of jungle and hills."¹⁴ Furthermore, class mattered: select populations needed to be either protected or monitored. Traders as well as receivers of stolen goods, laborers as well as the wealthy, were given extra policing. Sivandikulam, a village off Thoothukudi town, was allocated extra resources because it housed a portion of the "respectable classes" who frequented the town as well as the coolie laborers who were employed in the town.¹⁵ Even sparsely populated stretches that were deemed to require police surveillance were allocated resources, albeit in the form of outposts. Unlike fully equipped police stations that were managed by sub-inspectors, outposts, which were intended for "remote" areas, were managed by the lower-ranked head constables and could not act as investigating centers of crime. Still, they enabled a more contiguous state surveillance than would have otherwise been possible. Thus Pettai, "a

detached portion of (Tirunelveli) town separated from the rest by a space of open country” got an outpost because it was “a busy and expanding trade centre and to some extent the scene of political activity.”¹⁶ Finally, circulation, in addition to quantity and quality of population, was factored into police planning. Lightly populated high roads linking centers of trade were provided additional forces.¹⁷ Railways, British India’s quintessential carriers of people and goods, had their own police force. And station houses were located near important temples that had large floating populations and witnessed considerable exchanges of goods during festivals.¹⁸

Knowledges of caste materially impacted these decisions on locating and staffing stations. To a large extent, the overlap between caste and class helped here. In the southern districts, Chettiars were an old mercantile community with links across the Bay of Bengal, while Nadars emerged as an important trading community toward the end of the nineteenth century. But, also, the very fact that the colonial police extended special protection to these two communities—establishing police stations and providing extra beats in their hubs—contributed to their economic success *as* a community. Furthermore, both Chettiars and Nadars mobilized *as* communities to seek police protection on several occasions—when they felt threatened by property theft but also simply when their caste status was under threat by other communities. Thus, the continued success of Chettiars and the newfound success of the Nadars as mercantile castes, both of which lasted well into the twentieth century, leaned on the colonial police’s use of caste in allocating its resources.

The converse of extending special police protection to certain (mercantile and landed) castes was the criminalization of vagrant castes, who were seen as threats to the colonial economy. In the southern districts, these included Koravars, Maravars, and Kallars. Although the Criminal Tribes Act (CTA) was extended to the Madras Presidency only in 1911, the identification of “criminal” caste groups—by colonial anthropologists and administrators—had already occurred by the late nineteenth century, informing the distribution of police resources. For instance, in 1888, officers increased police forces in the Tenkasi, Nanguneri, Ambasamudram and Tirunelveli taluks of Tirunelveli district “owing to the strong and troublesome Marava element which they contain(ed).”¹⁹ The initiative came in response to a petition from landholders of the district seeking enactment of the CTA against Maravars to protect them from “crimes such as damage to crops and robberies.”²⁰ The episode speaks to the interweaving of class and caste

interests, to the extent to which colonial policing occurred not simply as the imposition of a distant state but in conjunction with elite native interests, and to the ways that enmeshed notions of caste and criminality seeped into popular consciousness.

It was not only the most or least powerful castes who were policed. Policemen routinely listed the caste demographics of different villages to determine where to go and whom to watch. Thus, wily or reliable Brahmins, landholding and literate Pillais, factious Paravars, restive Konars, and laboring Pallars were all on the police radar. Of course, it was impossible to monitor such a diverse array of subjects spread across the countryside from scattered police stations alone. Central to routine surveillance of the countryside was the police beat. Strictly speaking, the Police Commission of 1902 had abolished the village beat, having assessed the previous policy wherein constables undertook beats to *all* villages as impractical and ineffective. Instead, in an effort to target police resources to the “really dangerous,” the Commission recommended that constables now only undertake beats to specific places, at specific times: villages whose authorities were untrustworthy; villages where especially “dangerous criminals, or gangs” resided; and “camping grounds, *serais*, ferries and all places of public resort.”²¹ In this targeted effort at surveillance, colonial knowledge that mapped the country based on its resources and that classified its population based on community played a key role. The requirements of the beat, sometimes recorded with an astonishing degree of precision, were an important consideration in planning the location and staffing of stations. In fact, around a third of the constables in the southern districts were staffed specifically for beat duty. The beat, critical in determining where exactly the police would be present and how often, enabled the police gaze to take in a far wider area than would have been possible from just the police station. Thus, it was not just that the Madras police set up new stations in response to the requests of mercantile caste organizations like that of the Chettiars. They also staffed these stations for the express purpose of monitoring criminal caste members who resided in the villages around urban hubs and ostensibly threatened Chettiar trade.²² Some suspects would be monitored through daily beats, others through nightly beats, one-day beats, twice-weekly beats, and so on.

In addition to monitoring specific communities, beat policemen also directed their resources at specific times and spaces—notably markets and festivals. Both were occasions for large gatherings of people and exchange

of goods, and consequently fit policing's goal of protecting persons and property. In addition, as spaces where people across communities came together, they were also sites of potential violence. Markets brought into relief the uneven benefits accrued to different communities by the colonial economy: in fact, two of the most notorious riots between the trading Nadars and the criminalized Maravars in the region—one in 1899 and the other in 1918—occurred during the weekly Tuesday market. The colonial trope of religious communalism, which entailed the ever-present possibility of the outbreak of a riot in India, as Gyanendra Pandey has elucidated, lent urgency to the policing of festivals.²³ It was not only large festivals that caught police attention; station-house records noted festival details for every village within their jurisdiction, and cautioned constables to monitor them. To cite just one example, Inspector Gopala Pillai cautioned his deputies that “every year Thiruvatharai festival is celebrated at Sepparai, a hamlet of (Rajavallipuram) village and there will be large congregation of people and police *bundobust* is necessary.”²⁴ Even small village festivals mattered for a police force invested in maintaining caste order. As extraordinary yet recurring moments in rural life, festivals allowed subversion in ways not possible in everyday spaces; in particular, power dynamics between castes were reaffirmed, contested, and negotiated during festivals.²⁵ Police presence at festivals often muted possible protest (see Chapter 3) although, on occasion, violence broke out regardless (Chapters 4 and 5).²⁶

Of course, the very level of detail in police maps and plans, the very frequency with which police jurisdictions were changed to better discipline suspected criminals, suggests the anxiety and uncertainty of colonial control over the spaces of the countryside as much as it does the actual extent of surveillance. The steady shuttling of villages among different stations toward better monitoring them on the beat is indicative of this. For instance, in 1922, the government of Madras ordered the transfer of two villages, Alanda and Poovani, from Pudukkottai station (to which they had been assigned just three years earlier) to Maniyachi station. The villages were around fifteen to twenty miles each from the old station, but only two to four miles from the new one; hence the transfer would “ensure closer supervision of the criminals in the locality.”²⁷ In 1936, when the two villages next appear in the government archive, they are transferred yet again, this time from Thattaparai station to Seidunganallur station.²⁸ However, this arrangement did not work either, and in 1938 the two villages were transferred back to Thattaparai station, to which they were better connected by

train.²⁹ Over a period of less than twenty years, policemen of five different stations had tried to monitor these two villages on the beat. The ability of the everyday state to keep its subjects in its gaze fell short of its ambitions.

Producing Police Knowledge

The calculus of criminality that went into optimizing police resources in the colonial countryside required a continuous production of knowledge that tied people and places to crime. “In order to deal effectively with crime, it is necessary to have a continuous record of the criminal history of individuals and localities,” recommended the 1902 Police Commission.³⁰ Some of the information used by the Madras police in allocating their resources were readily available, products of the colonial state’s prior efforts to make territory legible and profitable. This was a state whose efforts to amass knowledge had peaked in the second half of the nineteenth century—J. H. Nelson, a civil servant, had already written his influential five-part manual on the Madurai District, and A.J. Stuart, a district judge, his on the Tirunelveli district. The colonized land’s history and geography, flora and fauna, festivals and gods had been categorized for state use; the land itself had been reordered to facilitate resource extraction—its rivers dammed, wastelands appropriated, its surface crisscrossed with railway lines. The knowledge practices of the nineteenth-century colonial state had enabled the production of the space of its economy, and policing drew upon this knowledge to reproduce that space. But in addition, the police institution itself produced knowledge that further cemented the relations between communities and crime. Since this knowledge was produced in the execution of routine police practices at each station, it fused into the working of the institution, thereby surviving the transition to independence and the attendant Indianization of higher echelon police personnel.

The police station was as much a bureaucratic site as any other institution of colonial governance, generating piles of paper in the course of a normal day. Policemen maintained records on crimes reported and investigated, potential and actual criminals, their residences and movement, police informants and their caste, property and arms owners, personnel performance, and station supplies, to name a few topics. This information from station records periodically traveled up the police institution, via district offices, to the provincial headquarters at Madras City, and sometimes to the national capital. Statistics from stations across the province were

compiled to produce annual police administration reports. But data was not just stored in dusty offices. Information from station records was also continually deployed in planning future police policy, including the location and staffing of stations. Thus, station jurisdictions were determined based not only on their area and population, discussed in the previous section, but also on their annual crime statistics. Along with balancing the area across police jurisdictions to the ideal target of 150 square miles, planners also sought to equalize the average number of crimes investigated in each station, to the desired norm of fifty to seventy investigations per year. Since the veneer of objective crime statistics overlay historically specific colonial legal categories that defined crime, above all, as political resistance to the state or threat to property, the use of crime statistics in determining station allocation meant that villages inhabited by castes and classes that threatened property were more intensively policed than were others.³¹

Police data also moved outside the confines of the department to inform broader legislative and executive decisions. For example, the Madras District Reconstitution Committee of 1910 used detailed area, population, revenue, and crime statistics from across the province to recommend the creation of the new district of Ramanathapuram out of parts of the Madurai, Tirunelveli, and Tanjavur districts. One rationale cited for the change was the presence of “the large Maravar and Kallar element” that contributed to the high crime statistics of the erstwhile Madurai district, and the presence of Maravars, “the caste which mainly supplie(d) dacoits” to the erstwhile Tirunelveli district.³² Likewise, the extension of the Criminal Tribes Act to the Madras Presidency in 1911 required highly granular police data since the Act was enforced not on an entire caste but on individually identified members of specific castes who belonged to specific villages, a few dozen individuals at a time. In addition to being an institution of law enforcement, the colonial police also acted as “an apparatus of knowledge” about caste, thereby shaping the exercise of state power that targeted certain communities above others.³³

The effectiveness of police knowledge in informing policy was sharpened by the extent to which different police records drew on similar objectifications of caste to create a dense web of knowledge about crime and community. Consider the Maravars mentioned above, whose “criminality”—measured by seemingly objective police statistics as well as by sweeping stereotypes—formed the creation of the Ramanathapuram district and the enactment of the CTA. Maravars are mentioned in an array

stations in the Mudukulathur region upon aggregating the numbers of the criminally inclined across its villages.

The apparent evidentiary weight of police data on criminal communities is belied when we peel back their layers to reveal their construction. Most often this is difficult, as stations periodically destroyed their records after sending them to district offices where they were abstracted to fit known patterns about communal criminality. But the rare document that remains points to the tenuousness of these abstractions. Most police stations that I visited in Tirunelveli had filed a document from the early 1940s called a “Marava Form.”³⁵ The form sought village-level information on Maravar criminality as manifested in a precolonial policing practice called *kaval*, which the colonial government had long criminalized.³⁶ The Marava Form listed eleven questions on the *kaval* system in a village—whether it existed, who its beneficiaries were, and who its victims. In theory, this was an open-ended form to be filled in by local inspectors, who could well have discovered that Maravars, in fact, did not engage in anything criminal. In practice, the very framing of the questions, which assumed a village riven by caste and oppressed by criminal Maravars, informed many of the answers. For instance, the form for one village declared that “there is no oppression by Maravas” but that the (high-caste) village *munsif*, Ranga-subbaraya Iyer, “is afraid of the Marava” and that “somebody will come out boldly to depose against the Maravas.”³⁷ Likewise, Mavadi village apparently had no *kaval* system, and yet the “Maravars will commit any type of crime if *kaval* is refused.”³⁸ Logically inconsistent within each form and following no clear pattern across forms, the forms should have been of little help to the Madras police in estimating the prevalence of *kaval* or Maravar criminality. Documents from senior police officers, however, translated this messy data into accessible statistics and neater narratives of oppressive Marava *kaval* that needed to be policed and uprooted. Discussing *kaval* in the neighboring Ramanathapuram district, IGP F. A. Hamilton noted in 1929 that “in the 20 villages for which statistics have been gathered, there are 256 *kavalgars* receiving payment annually of 14,310 rupees. This gives an average payment of four rupees and eight annas a *kavalgar* each month.”³⁹ Having rearranged local knowledge (albeit already informed by the larger discourse about criminal castes) into more recognizable patterns, senior officials proceeded to use these statistics to determine the placement of stations and staff across Chettinadu, a commercially important region dominated by the Chettiar caste. As James Scott writes, state

simplifications toward making society legible did not remain on sheets of paper; they had the power to refashion society.⁴⁰

The Marava Forms from the 1940s remain in station folders because they were part of what are called the Part IV records. Every police station in the Madras Presidency was required to maintain a “Station Crime History,” a five-part record of crime and criminals in its jurisdiction.⁴¹ Four of these five parts were periodically destroyed. The other, Part IV of the Station Crime History, was intended to serve as a continuous and permanent record of the crime history of each police station: “Any information which may be useful to a new station-house officer, having no previous experience of the station, should be entered in this register.”⁴² These fragile records, which I found filed by village in steel cabinets in rural stations, provide a means to understand the textured construction of police knowledge about the Tamil countryside.

The Part IV record mapped each village within a station’s jurisdiction in terms of its geography, communities, spaces, and times that needed surveillance. The record contained a brief opening paragraph describing a village, followed by periodic updates filled in by successive police inspectors on whether there was anything particular in that village that needed extra monitoring. Written and read by local inspectors, Part IV records helped modulate the tempo of state surveillance. Unlike most police forms which were tabular, the Part IV form was narrative and open-ended, merely seeking “General Information” pertaining to a village.⁴³ All the same, the opening entry for a village followed a recognizable pattern across stations, indicating the permeation of a fairly standardized understanding of the police role in the countryside. The records commence by listing the population for the village broken down by caste, reflecting an Orientalist conception of rural society organized by community.⁴⁴ Significantly, it was not only criminal castes, but all numerically significant castes in a village, that appeared on the police radar. Thus, Naranammalpuram was “a fairly big village on the left bank of the river Tambrabarani with about 50 houses of brahmins, 50 houses of Shepherds, 20 Marawars, about 40 houses of Nadars and 20 Illathupillai, and about similar number of Vanniayar.”⁴⁵ Pallimadai, on the other hand, was “a small village, consisting of a few houses of Pallas, Shepherds, Nadars and Muhammadans.”⁴⁶ The record draws attention to the criminalized Maravar caste as well as to the laboring low-caste Pallars and the trading, socially mobile Nadars. Police concern was not with isolated communities, but with their relationship to each other and their role in the economy.

There was, then, another image coexisting with the perception of the village as a traditional space adhering to the dictates of community and custom. The village was also depicted as a space of change that was part of a broader colonial economy and polity—a space that therefore called for the intervention of state power in the form of policing. The opening note for Manur village, reproduced in full below, draws attention to its locational importance vis-à-vis trade routes, caste and class demographics (i.e., Dalit laborers and upper-caste power holders), local festivals, institutions of local importance, and extent of governmental presence:

This is a small village situated 9 miles north of Tinnevely on the Tinnevely-Sankarankoil road. Pallars form the bulk of the population. There is a strong ill feeling between the V. M. (Avudayappa Pillai) who is an acting man from Tinnevely and the Karnam (Guruswami Pillai) the permanent resident of Manur, in which one is trying to entangle the other in some criminal case or other. Both the village officers do not cooperate with the local police. There is an ayurvedic dispensary maintained by the Tinnevely district board. Treatment in this dispensary is offered free. There is a temple which gets an annual income of Rs. 4,000 which is under the management of the Tinnevely temple committee. One Shunmugasundram Pillai is the manager of the temple. Every year in the Tamil month of *Avani* a festival called Moolam Thirunal is celebrated and a lot of crowd from the neighbouring villages of other taluks visit. 2 constables are usually deputed during the festival for *bundobust*. Pickpockets are likely to visit. The police station is the only government building in this village. There is no other thing worthy of mention.⁴⁷

Apart from detailing spaces and people to be watched, the description also made it clear that the rest of the village (men who beat their wives? landholders who exploited laborers?) did not merit police surveillance: “There is no other thing worthy of mention.”⁴⁸ The priorities reflected in police writing allowed for the penetration of state authority into a countryside framed in terms of caste and gender hierarchies.

Just as police knowledge of space underscored caste identities, so too did their knowledge of individuals. Broadly speaking, the police used one of two criteria to select objects of surveillance: a person’s criminal record and his communal identity. Accordingly, policemen monitored not

just the legalistically defined “habitual criminal,” i.e., a person with two or more convictions, but also drew on colonial knowledge of Oriental societies to monitor “criminal tribes” and “wandering gangs.” The *Madras Police Orders*, for instance, declared that “gangs of Asiatic nomads require close watching as they are apt to be lawless and to terrorise the people.”⁴⁹ In practice, the two criteria often overlapped, with surveillance records tying caste identity to suspect behavior and potential criminality. Thus, we have Inspector Padmanabha Iyer advising his deputies that “Maravars of (Naranammalpuram) village and the adjoining village of Kurichikulam are a troublesome lot and require constant police attention,” and Inspector Muthuswamy Pillai’s note that “the (Christian Dalit) Sambans are inclined to defy authority and they should be carefully watched.”⁵⁰

At first glance, Inspector Iyer’s and Inspector Pillai’s decisions to monitor those of lower castes based on their being “troublesome” instead of their criminal record appears to be largely an expression of caste authority, an individual’s abuse of police authority, a dereliction of duty. But to deliberate on whether policemen adhered to rulebooks in identifying an object of surveillance is to forget that surveillance, whose goal was crime prevention, necessarily existed in the space before the commission of a crime, before legal definitions of criminality became meaningful. Accordingly, police manuals left the choice of objects of surveillance to the discretion of local policemen. For example, the *Madras Police Orders* advised that policemen maintain History Sheets not just for all Known Depredators and criminal tribe members residing in their jurisdictions, but also for those “not convicted, but believed to be addicted to crime.”⁵¹ This determination of who was “addicted to crime” did not occur in a discursive void; instead, it relied on prevalent characterizations of caste and class behavior. Inspector Iyer’s warning to Maravars simply tied policing power to the broader structures of caste and class power. The fact that definitions of crime themselves frequently stemmed from these characterizations brought policing even closer to expressions of caste and class authority.

The reliance on individual discretion in police surveillance was by no means unique to Madras; it was intrinsic to policing, seen across the colonial and metropolitan worlds. In turn, local determinations of whom to monitor drew everywhere on broader discourses to identify deviant everyday behavior, to characterize so-called criminal proclivities that disrupted governmentality. The 1902 Police Commission justified its recommendation that policemen maintain History Sheets for whomever they considered

appropriate subjects, regardless of conviction, by citing the French police system of maintaining *dossiers*.⁵² Across the Channel and several decades earlier, the magistrates of Ludlow told the 1839 England and Wales Constabulary Commission that they had about forty depredators in their borough, “idle and drunk, who each keep a dog: no visible means of obtaining a livelihood,” while in Chesterfield, the depredators’ “habits (were) to prowl about the borough and immediate adjacent villages.”⁵³ The nineteenth- and twentieth-century police practiced surveillance by identifying race, class, and gender, by cataloging morals and behavior, more than by adhering to legal definitions.⁵⁴

The reality of policing identity and behavior (“Eswarasamy Maniyagar of Thammanaickenpatti village is a pucca drunkard. His movements should be watched”) seems to render superfluous the reams of surveillance details maintained at stations and compiled at central offices.⁵⁵ These included the Surveillance Register, Bad Character Roll, Check Register of Known Depredators, Descriptive Roll of Known Depredators who have passed Out of View, Register of Classified Professional Criminals, History Sheet, Gang Register, Nominal Roll of Gang Members, and List of Railways Thieves or Suspected Persons.⁵⁶ In 1908, for instance, across the Madras Presidency, there were supposedly 15,105 male and 211 female Known Depredators at large, out of which only 2,642 males and 47 females were out of view; and there were 7,432 male and 37 female Suspected Persons at large, out of which 762 males and 7 females were out of view.⁵⁷ The very preciseness of these numbers, in combination with the vagueness of the categories, raises questions about the reliability of these statistics. It may well be that policemen carelessly inscribed empty forms simply to forward them to district offices, in practice drawing on their notions of caste, class, and behavior to determine whom to monitor.

Having said that, police surveillance did not just mirror social realities; it also shaped them. The life of some of the technical surveillance terms mentioned above points to this. The Known Depredator, usually abbreviated to KD, was arguably the most frequently used of these terms in police writing. KD had a seemingly technical definition in Madras police manuals, to indicate a person who had been convicted of one of an array of offenses under the IPC of 1860 or the CCP of 1898.⁵⁸ However, the definition included those “liable” for a repeat conviction in certain coin and property cases, as well as those apprehended under the bad livelihood sections of the CCP, making it somewhat looser in its application. Police journals and

planning documents also suggest that the term was not used rigidly. The term may have been a metropolitan import, used in police practice before getting straitjacketed into colonial legal codes, for it is mentioned in the 1839 report on the constabulary of England and Wales, thereby predating the midcentury penal and criminal codes of British India.⁵⁹ In course of time, the acronym slipped into popular usage in the colony, indicating the extent of its use in police practice. In records from the first half of the twentieth century, KD retained its meaning as a person under police surveillance, but points to the specifically local interpretation of criminality—it was inevitably members of certain castes who were monitored as KDs. Thus, in a murder trial from 1944, a prosecution witness, Irulappa Tevan, noted of the victim, his brother, that “as he was a K.D., the police used to check his presence in his house.”⁶⁰ By the end of the century, KD had entered colloquial Tamil as a loanword, *kedī*; the English acronym was now a Tamil word, meaningful by itself as both noun and adjective. However, the Tamil word was used more expansively, and sometimes subversively, to describe a (not necessarily unappealing) rogue.⁶¹ In *Kedi*, a 2006 Tamil film, the title character is a carefree (i.e., *kedī*) but principled young man, pitted against a wealthy but villainous woman.⁶² The linguistic transformation of KD to *kedī* captures a moral transformation of its referent from criminal suspect to subordinated poor: the lens has flipped to reveal the perspective of the subaltern object of police surveillance.⁶³

Ultimately, what we find in routine police writing in colonial Madras is neither a mirror image of the caste order nor a statistical registry of well-defined criminal types, but an alternative, shrunken order of things: *kavalgar*, Notified Member, and Known Depredator, seemingly lacking classificatory logic but in fact reflecting the conjunction between caste and police authority.⁶⁴ Police writing marked out certain castes as objects of state coercion. Additionally, by privileging caste as a category in which police functionaries repeatedly wrote about crime, police knowledge production contributed to the formation of policemen themselves as casted subjects.⁶⁵ Admittedly, policing in colonial India did not suffer from “the imperialism of epistemic claims,” unlike, say, scientific forestry in the nineteenth century or urban planning in the twentieth.⁶⁶ The Madras police openly valued local knowledge, evidenced in the importance they placed on recruiting constables from the locality (in stark contrast to the armed police, who were typically brought in from outside). All the same, by requiring native policemen to view criminality through the lens of caste,

institutional knowledge production practices reframed local perspectives. Neither were local policemen passive inheritors of atavistic caste loyalties, nor was the colonial state a distant entity unable to impinge on these loyalties, as critics of rural caste politics suggest. Rather, the very process of producing police knowledge strengthened identities of caste among native policemen who began “seeing like a state.”

Besides reframing rural society in terms of its caste, police writing practices also reframed rural space as state space. Police knowledge of crime was tightly indexed to place. Policemen were expected to know that a crime had occurred in a particular village, and that it had occurred in a particular station’s jurisdiction. In a two-step process, crime was associated with place, and place was appropriated by the state. The Station Crime History, in particular, was implicitly sequential and explicitly spatial: “The area to be covered by the Station Crime History shall be the complete limits of a police station.”⁶⁷ By identifying crime and criminals with a specific station and its limits, police records attached knowledge of criminality to a space produced by the state. Indeed, in 1922 the government of Madras ordered that the term “Village Crime Notebook,” used to denote station records of crime and criminals, be changed to “Station Crime History,” attaching, as it were, the locality to the station, and relocating the imagined point of surveillance from scattered villages to a nodal police station.⁶⁸

The village where the crime had occurred, in some senses, *belonged* to the station. Planning documents approach lived space as property of the station, to be carved up and moved around at will. To cite just a couple of examples: “Eleven villages are proposed to be transferred from the Kalpatti station in the Madura district to Ammathur and Nathampatti stations in the Tinnevely district.”⁶⁹ “Tiruppattur (station) yields seven villages to Neykuppai and receives eight from Madaguppatti.”⁷⁰ The frequency with which verbs like “transfer,” “add,” “receive,” and “remove” animate villages in planning documents indicates not just a careless use of words in the careful channeling of state resources but also representations of space in which a village was rewritten, and possibly reimaged, by the police corps as principally a juridical space.⁷¹ Police writing down the ranks also points to representational practices that helped reimagine the village as state space. Notable here is the opening entry of Part IV of the Station Crime History, describing each village within a station’s jurisdiction, as seen in the following entries dating from the 1930s.

Avadayapuram is situated to the east of Thulukapatti Railway Station at a distance of 2½ miles and to the south east of Vachakarapatti Police Station at a distance of 3 miles. This village and the hamlets belong to Mannakkottai Zamin.⁷²

Ettoorvattam is situated to the south west of Veppillaipatti Chatram at a distance of 5 miles and to the north of Vachakarapatti Police Station at a distance of 6 miles. This village and the hamlets belong to Ettayapuram Zamin.⁷³

Kalpothu village is situated to the west of Thulukapatty Railway Station at a distance of 6 miles and to the east of Vachakarapatty Police Station at a distance of 6 ½ miles. The village belongs to Vadimitta Zamin.⁷⁴

And so on. Formulaic as they are, the entries point to a mechanical reimagination of a village as a part of a broader network of circulation, and in terms of its cardinal distances from nodes of state authority—railway stations and police stations. The historical production of the inland, agrarian districts of the southern Madras Presidency as state space stands in marked contrast to the simultaneous marginalization of coastal space inhabited by fisherfolk, in Kanyakumari, less than a hundred kilometers from Tirunelveli town. In *Shorelines: Space and Rights in South India*, Ajantha Subramanian examines “the historical production of a line separating inland from coast,” a line that separated a primitivized coast from a seemingly modern inland. In coastal Kanyakumari, which was not drawn into the imperial economy to the extent agrarian Madurai or Tirunelveli were, “until recently, the only roads servicing . . . villages were those connecting villages to each other; hardly any roads led to inland agrarian pockets or to the district capital of Nagercoil.” Significantly, Subramanian asserts that in coastal Kanyakumari, “it is the presence of the church and not the state that is felt most strongly.”⁷⁵ Not so in the interior Madras Presidency. Here, police practices—writing, ambulatory, architectural—helped announce the authority of the colonial state.

The Brick and Khaki State

The distribution of stations across rural Madras and the routine surveillance conducted by native policemen made the coercive power of the colonial state visible in the Tamil countryside at the everyday level. Police

stations did not exist only in plans; they were concrete structures occupied by policemen and seen by inhabitants of the Tamil country. Admittedly, the squat and dusty rural police station was no architectural marvel. The built space of police functioning was not given much importance by the colonial government: although standard plans for I, II, and III class station houses were put in place in 1901, they were executed in fits and starts, depending on the police budget, which was hit especially hard by World War I. The station structure was simply to be “built of brick in mortar and the interior and exterior walls plastered with one coat of chunam and washed.”⁷⁶ The total furniture allotted to a station was two tables, two chairs, a bench, a record box, a record rack, and two hurricane lanterns; an outpost had even fewer pieces.⁷⁷ If bare, the station was nonetheless a symbol of sovereign power and announced its presence: its name was to be painted, “in English and the vernacular, on a board to be hung up conspicuously outside the station house.”⁷⁸

The rural station was certainly different from governmental buildings of imposing height and spatial expanse—architectural traits that symbolize state power in general, and that symbolized imperial power and the social distance between races in British India.⁷⁹ To be sure, there were imposing police buildings in the Madras Presidency, such as the provincial and district headquarters, all of which boasted elevation, pillars, and wraparound verandas.⁸⁰ But these buildings were distant from the everyday lives of rural subjects. Importantly, they were principally occupied by European officers. The rural station, on the other hand, directly reflected the divisions of power within native society. Some castes had privileged access to its interiors, while others did not. This was, then, a different form of state power—not distant, but proximate. As such, it played a more immediate role in the everyday lives of rural inhabitants. This was a building people passed on their way to the weekly market or the monthly festival. This was where people filed complaints or were summoned for investigation. Prior to a proposed set of changes in station locations in 1925, the Tirunelveli District Magistrate received numerous petitions from inhabitants of the area objecting to the changes. The farmers of Perungulam, for instance, protested the transfer of a station from their village to Iral village, just over three miles away, since they had “benefited by the presence of the police station which (had) kept in hand certain local Maravars.”⁸¹ The IGP’s dismissal of such petitions as “animated by parochial and purely selfish considerations,” points to the immediate relevance of police presence to

colonial subjects: some, like upper-caste landholders, valued the proximity of a station, while others, like lower-caste criminal castes, assuredly did not. Since policing the mobility of criminal castes was seen as a central part of their moral and behavioral transformation, those notified under the CTA had to report to police stations daily and nightly, to confirm that they had not left their villages.⁸² The path from the station to the village, then, was not only traced by the beat constable who, in the process, imagined the village as belonging to his station. It was also the path traced by the notified member to the police station, as he incorporated the unwelcome building, the road leading up to it, and a coercive state into his spatial imagination. Indeed, coercive state authority as manifested through the police station dramatically appears in history during moments of subaltern insurgency; the burning of the Chauri Chaura police station by peasant nationalists in 1922 is an obvious example. But this exceptional, violent interaction was rooted in the station's everyday role in articulating power.

In addition to the police station, the presence of the policeman on the beat also played a role in announcing routine state authority in the colonial countryside. In a spatial context where the white police officer was rarely seen, the subaltern constable's uniform took on the burden of representing racial authority. For a long time, the Madras constable was not attired in the khaki uniform in which he is familiar today, but instead wore blue and white. This was, in part, to retain his distinctive appearance and distinguish him from the Forest and Abkari official, who wore khaki. This changed during the turn of the century as the railway and reserve police divisions adopted khaki, but the regular police held out. In 1906, the Madras government clearly stated that it did "not approve of any rural police anywhere wearing khaki uniform." "It is important from the public point of view that our police should wear a uniform which cannot be mistaken," wrote one civil servant, in an internal memo.⁸³ But over the next decade, constables migrated to khaki shorts, their red turbans retained for distinctiveness, and in 1919 inspectors also switched from white to khaki, on grounds of "economy and cleanliness."⁸⁴ Government officials were less concerned about conspicuous footwear for policemen. Apart from constables in hilly terrain or chilly climates, it was only the reserve police of each district, armed and ready to be called out when order was likely to be disturbed, who were provided with boots; the ordinary constable merely wore sandals.⁸⁵ Constables usually undertook their village visits on foot.⁸⁶ Depending on their rank, inspectors used horses, increasingly giving way

to bicycles or motorbikes in the 1920s.⁸⁷ By the end of the decade there was further change with the advent of motor buses, bringing distant spaces more easily under state surveillance.⁸⁸

After 1947: Enforcing Development

The first few decades after independence witnessed some changes in police functioning, but the actual layout of stations did not change much. This was a result of several factors. The new force was twice as large by 1960 as the force of 1930, and almost completely Indian in composition, to the highest ranks.⁸⁹ An officialdom that was less anxious about its distance from rural society did not prioritize the time-consuming task of constantly optimizing station locations. Improved technology also alleviated the anxiety of distance. The police department sought to install telephones in every station across the province in the 1950s, and the goal was reached in the 1960s. Likewise, the police radio network was expanded in the first two decades after independence. Third, budget constraints continued to plague the institution, limiting its capital expenditure, much as it had in the first half of the century. But whereas the colonial police had spent the bulk of its budget on salaries, offices, and houses for its special forces, which were largely European in composition, the new leadership emphasized the construction of better-quality housing for the constabulary. In fact, through the first two decades after independence, providing quarters with electricity, running water, and sewage facilities for 80 percent of the force (from an existing level of around 50 percent) was a matter of high priority for the Madras police, and the budget for this was far higher than that for building new stations.⁹⁰

The decline in station construction in the 1950s and '60s meant that the colonial state's imprint on the land remained past 1947. In turn, this often meant that communities that had been targeted for surveillance by the colonial state stayed in the police gaze in independent India. This was certainly true of criminal castes, who were policed as "denotified tribes" once the CTA was repealed. But the endurance of station layout also affected castes that had not been technically notified under the Act (usually for financial reasons) but had still been criminalized in colonial discourse. In Mudukulathur, a stronghold of the Maravar community, the government had rescinded the CTA in 1929, proposing instead increased surveillance through "the construction of roads and the opening of police stations."⁹¹

The policing of this community thus was etched into the landscape, enabling continuity of practices through the shift of 1947. The idea that criminality was tied to caste was entrenched in the production of police knowledge as well, contributing further to the continuity of caste-based policing after the repeal of the CTA. Many who were earlier classified as criminal tribes were simply reclassified as habitual offenders by 1950. As of 1952, of the 5,268 persons who had been registered province-wide under the Habitual Offenders Act, 1948, 4,097 belonged to the denotified tribes.⁹² As late as 1964, the Madras Police Research Centre conducted a study of criminality among Valayars of Madurai “with an exhaustive report to serve as a guide to the investigating staff in handling Velaya (sic) crimes.”⁹³

The old landscape of stations and the persisting forms of record keeping and knowledge production underlay new priorities undertaken by the post-colonial police. Police activities after 1947 comprised a motley array that fit under the broader umbrella of “development.” Some older priorities, specifically securing private property and maintaining public order, continued undiminished. But new ones were added; notably, the postcolonial police extended protection to women and lower castes, at least at the level of rhetoric. Thus, unlike Part IV records of the colonial period, which had discussed castes with reference to their role in the agrarian economy, records from the 1950s onward expressed concern with the rights of “Harijans,” as Dalits were referred to in a Gandhian-nationalist vocabulary. These records discuss a range of issues including ritual discrimination, access to schools, and upper-caste sexual exploitation of lower-caste women. Police surveillance of sexual politics was not limited to issues of caste. Ensuring women’s freedom from sexual harassment in public spaces, across castes, entered the police radar after independence. Consequently, unlike the colonial police’s History Sheet, which inevitably targeted property offenders, the postcolonial police’s Rowdy Sheet often targeted gendered offenders.⁹⁴

Police concern with the moral offender in the early decades after independence is reflected in a slew of other issues that also rose to prominence in the police portfolio. These included enforcing prohibition laws, combating black-marketing, and suppressing prostitution in urban spaces. Of these, prohibition arguably had the most impact on routine police presence in the Tamil country. Madras Province had introduced prohibition of alcohol on an experimental basis in one district, Salem, in 1937, when the Congress government came to power after winning the first provincial elections held under colonial rule. After independence, the policy

was extended across the province—Tamil Nadu was one of the few states across India that stuck to this policy for several decades. Although the state government insisted that prohibition “revitalized the economic, moral and social life of the masses,” enforcement was always difficult, because people continued to manufacture illicit liquor or to smuggle it in from adjoining states, especially Pondicherry. While the Board of Revenue held overall responsibility for the policy, enforcement was transferred to the police department by 1955.

Prohibition was unpopular among the majority of the people, as evidenced by statistics of recorded offenses and from repeated exhortations in police and government reports for greater public cooperation.⁹⁵ Village Vigilance Committees, or *grama sanghams*, which included policemen and around five members of each village (distinct from *panchayat* members), were initially formed to spearhead the task. But government administrators complained that “members have preferred either to remain silent for fear of personal safety or to join hands with the offenders.”⁹⁶ With the gradual death of the bottom-up village committees, the Madras government moved to a top-down approach, using both the carrot and the stick to urge village officials to report instances of illicit distillation or sale of alcohol. This also met with little success. The Madras government’s attempts to deal with prohibition vacillated between a disciplining model that hoped, in vain, that all citizens would understand the benefits of temperance and improve themselves, and a policing model that relied on planting informers within villages. The police even formed armed “special raiding parties” to supplement the efforts of regular, unarmed, policemen in handling prohibition offenses. “It speaks well of our police force that no such gangsters like Al Capone and his likes, who mushroomed into prominence in America during the days of prohibition, have come into existence in our state,” wrote one senior police officer in 1968.⁹⁷

Besides necessitating increased and unwelcome police presence in villages, prohibition also tied police discretionary authority into village politics. Policemen were required to check whether legal *neera* licenses were being misused to manufacture alcohol, to select two members of each village to a Vigilance Committee, to report to the local magistracy officials in whose villages prohibition crimes had occurred, and so on.⁹⁸ Unsurprisingly, police knowledge production on prohibition became entwined with longer-standing caste biases. Thus, one officer noted of a Tirunelveli village that it was “a notorious marava centre and a prohibition blackspot

(sic).”⁹⁹ Another, Inspector Natarajan, brought together all moral offenses of the postcolonial era in the person of the low-caste Paradesi Thevar to claim that he was a “merchant in black market and (was) addicted to drinking and even molesting the harijans.”¹⁰⁰ Finally, prohibition had an insidious effect on the exercise of police power by enabling policemen to frame their use of discretionary authority more generally in the language of prohibition offenses. Occasionally, subjects did the same. Thus, one policeman asserted that Lakshmi Asari, a woman who had accused him of torture, was actually an illicit manufacturer of alcohol, who was filing a false complaint against him to exact revenge.¹⁰¹ On the other hand, Irulayee, whose son had been apprehended by the police for a petty crime, claimed that her child’s real “crime” was that he had not procured illicit alcohol for the policeman in question.¹⁰²

If enforcing prohibition laws provided one channel for police power to seep into rural life, the nuts and bolts of democratic governance provided another. Democracy in independent India was not only about the individual exercising the vote or competing for high office. Rather, democracy entailed a range of elections: from village-level panchayat office to national parliamentary office. Moreover, it required representatives of various political parties to visit the countryside before and during elections, at moments of crisis such as floods, and to celebrate occasions like the anniversary of Indian independence, birthdays of political leaders and so on. Providing security to touring politicians emerged as an area on which the postcolonial police force expended considerable time. But this was not merely a mechanical task; there was always discretionary authority involved. Determining whether to allow a certain meeting, where it could be held, whether to allow the use of loudspeakers, which candidate needed more security, which election ran a higher risk of fraud—apart from calling for manpower, these tasks also gave policemen proximity to, and stake in, political power.¹⁰³ Importantly, party politics were aligned with caste affiliations from the earliest days of the Republic, so that police involvement in electoral politics reinforced their involvement in caste politics. Equally, police knowledge of party politics was formed in conjunction with the institution’s historic knowledge of caste. The Part IV records for Rajavallipuram village clearly reflect the caste identities that underlay transformation in police priorities over the century. In 1931, police inspectors noted that the village was inhabited by “untrustworthy” Pillaimars and “helpless” Pallars. In 1953, the same castes are mentioned in the record, but in terms

of their political capital: the beat policeman now monitored Pallar and Pillaimar political factions led by the Harijan legislator R. S. Arumugham and the landed Subramania Pillai, respectively.¹⁰⁴

Conclusion

The distribution of police stations and beats brought state power into the twentieth-century Tamil countryside at the everyday level. This was true even in the colonial period, when, on account of their numerical disadvantage, the police force had to be selective about where to be and whom to watch. Routine police surveillance allowed the state to “see” its subjects, in particular those it had designated as criminal. For instance, the provincial police report for 1923 recorded that “the number of bad characters at large at the end of the year was 14,464. . . . Of these 1,411 or 9.8% were *out of view*.”¹⁰⁵ However, the colonial state’s gaze was not panoptic, all-seeing and steadfast. Rather, it was moving and rhythmic, directed from stations and along the beat, to target specified individuals and discipline specific activities.

Choosing spaces and subjects for surveillance required a careful construction of police knowledge, achieved through continuous records of crimes and criminals maintained at each police station for each village within its jurisdiction. Police knowledge of criminality largely conformed to broader characterizations of caste behavior that drew on both precolonial norms and colonial objectifications. The use of caste categories to organize society was especially relevant in policing since caste and class identities often overlapped in colonial India, and rural policing was geared to ensure the smooth functioning of the agrarian economy. In southern Madras, landholders often belonged to the highest castes and landless laborers were often Dalits. Likewise, trade was dominated by the Chettiar and the Nadar castes. The need for policing to secure harvests and trade in agrarian commodities thus dovetailed with its surveillance of specific caste groups.

After India won independence from colonial rule, the place of the rural shifted in the government’s imagination, from a site of resource extraction to one of development. In a way, the postcolonial government’s construction of rural India reified the space as much as that of the colonial rulers. In perceiving the village as an object of pedagogy, especially with regard to the benefits of prohibition, government policy in Madras provided for the renewed presence of the police in its rural spaces. Since the postcolonial

police inherited colonial record-keeping practices, caste continued to influence the rhythms of routine policing.

Throughout this period, the entry of the police—through its buildings, people, and knowledge practices—allowed state power to permeate the Tamil countryside. Police encounters with rural populations was not limited to moments of sudden and spectacular violence, when they were called in by the state to subdue protest. An old building that served as the police station in one village; a dusty board announcing the station's presence in another; a khaki-clad constable trudging his way to a distant village. These seemingly trivial actions, persons, and sites enabled inhabitants of the Tamil countryside to experience police authority at a quotidian level, proximately. This was by no means a distant state, inaccessible to rural inhabitants. Conversely, rural politics did not occur in a vacuum, distanced from the functioning of state power. Landed elites and traders often *called* for increased police presence to ensure the security of their harvests and their property. In so doing, they often drew on a vocabulary of caste and state power: they asked for police protection, as members of certain castes, from members of other castes.

Police presence in the villages of Madras was therefore not always forced from the outside. Neither were voluntary interactions with the police limited to those of the highest castes. Sometimes, rural inhabitants asked policemen to intervene in local conflicts, the outcome of which hinged on the advantageous application of police documentary authority. I now turn to this dynamic, which occurred in colonial and postcolonial Madras alike.

Police Documents

The Politics of “False Cases”

Stringer Bell: Word on the street is Omar ain’t nowhere near (the killing). . . .

Detective McNulty: We ain’t on the street. We in a court of law.

— *The Wire*, Season 2

Police kāraṇa FIR eḷutaviṭṭa, ampuṭuttāṇ. Ivaṇ eṇṇa 24 kolaiyā ceṅcāṇ? Nāṇ FIR eḷuti tūkku vāṅkala?

(If you allow a policeman to write an FIR, you’re done for. Do you think this guy committed twenty-four murders? Didn’t I write an FIR and get him the death sentence?)

— Inspector Peikkaman, *Virumandi* (2004)

THE SOUTHERN COUNTRYSIDE OF Madras has seldom been depicted as a rural idyll—in film or in the news of the past several decades. Going further back, judicial archives from the first half of the twentieth century also present a world abounding in crime. Goat thefts, altercations over farm boundaries, dacoity, assaults to intimidate a political opponent, female infanticide, and caste-based “honor killing”—the acts of violence that find mention in the documentary and visual archive for Madurai and its environs range from the petty to the grave, from the domestic to the political. As noteworthy as the abundance of crime is the frequency with which these crimes are referred to as “false cases.” The term “false case” means either that a registered crime was not taken up for investigation by the police, or, conversely, that a crime registered by the police was fabricated. Thus, an honor killing reported by someone but disregarded by

the police is a false case. A charge of multiple murders deliberately brought against someone who did not commit them, as in the film quote above, is also a false case.¹ False cases either created a judicial crime out of nothing, thereby bringing state violence to bear on a legal subject, or they ignored a crime, leaving popular violence unpunished by state law. Both seemingly diametrically opposite meanings of the term share the underlying notion that reports of crime written by the police—the infamous “First Information Reports” or FIRs—are deeds of power. In Detective Jimmy McNulty’s words in *The Wire*, a 2000s television show on law enforcement and the drug trade set in Baltimore, the courthouse produces a truth of its own.

This chapter argues that the prevalence of crime and the preponderance of false cases does not indicate simply that the state’s police apparatus was weak in the twentieth-century Tamil countryside or that its judicial system had gone awry, outmaneuvered by traditional power holders. To the contrary, I suggest that the filing of police reports—whether true or false—provided a mechanism for villagers to insert the disputes that were part of everyday life into the state’s legal apparatus and to make claims using the language of law and resting on the policeman’s exercise of discretionary authority. Bureaucratic reliance on “papereality,” whereby representation in words took “precedence over the things and events represented” implied that, in judicial perception, a crime had occurred only if there was a police report of it.² Conversely, a police report of a crime meant that a crime had in fact occurred. Participants in crime were not simply taking justice into their own hands; rather, as legal subjects, they were actively seeking to manage their visibility in the judicial record by negotiating relationships with the local police. By filing criminal cases, colonial subjects channeled the state’s legal authority and the force of judicial punishment into local politics. Judicial testimony from twentieth-century Madras indicates that registering criminal cases with the police was an *event* in rural conflict, not just a means of resolving conflict. This chapter argues that the documentary practices of the police were, in that sense, productive of popular politics. Equally, these negotiations for local power through registering cases reaffirmed the authority of the state in everyday practices that emerged around the figure of the policeman and in the space of the police station. Rather than diminish the state’s legitimacy, the iterability of the FIR—the possibility of its being forged or fabricated—allowed it to enter the everyday lives of communities. As Veena Das writes, “iterability becomes a mode of circulation through which power is produced.”³

The juridical authority vested in police documents was embedded in more fundamental shifts in the exercise of state authority that accompanied the colonial encounter. Radhika Singha has shown that in its establishment of criminal law and procedure over the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, the Company state also expressed its sovereignty and its monopoly over legitimate violence.⁴ In parallel, the Company bureaucracy grew, based on the idea that writing ensured accountability. What obtained instead, as Bhavani Raman demonstrates, was a pervasive scribal culture that invested documents and the colonial government with the power of discretionary authority, visible as a culture of corruption.⁵ At the juncture of these two sources of power stood the colonial police, gatekeepers to criminal procedure and, through it, to the force of law. For policemen were not only sanctioned by law with the authority to exercise violence; they were also petty bureaucrats who registered crime in writing. In so doing, policemen rendered persons legible to the state as criminals or victims, juridical subjects entitled to legal punishment or protection, respectively. In turn, colonial subjects exploited their relationships with local policemen to harness the power of the First Information Report (FIR). The colonial police were, therefore, by no means distant from rural society; rather police practice informed village politics. Colonized subjects repeatedly used the language of law in general, and criminal procedure in particular, to negotiate their societal positions, whether to maintain or to challenge existing relationships of power. The frequent tussles over false cases suggest that colonial subjects routinely deployed the resources offered by the judicial system in their politics. To that extent, the colonial police were not the representatives of a distant state that struggled to make inroads into rural spaces. Instead, as Nicholas Dirks writes, “law worked powerfully at the level of discourse” and rural inhabitants actively used the state’s policing machinery toward negotiating disputes and status.⁶

Not all legal subjects had equal access to police resources. Those of higher caste and class status were better able to summon the power of law against their opponents. Often, they were able to use this ability to cement their social position. Scholars of the Cambridge school of history writing have pointed to the strength of traditional power structures outside colonial capital cities, such that colonial policy barely made a difference to long-standing ways of life in rural India.⁷ For instance, despite acknowledging the increased strength of the colonial government by the early twentieth century, D. A. Washbrook foregrounds the role of local power structures over modern legal institutions that arose under colonial

rule.⁸ Admittedly, in southern Madras at this time, Brahmins and Pillais held privileged status, which they used to manipulate the judicial machinery. Admittedly, their privileged status was no colonial invention but was inherited from the precolonial past; in some instances, their privilege had lasted centuries. But this is not necessarily evidence of state absence. To the contrary, Brahmins and Pillais actively deployed tools of the colonial state—like the FIR—to perpetuate, to reinvent, their status as elites.

In addition to literate and landed elites like the Brahmins and Pillais, the middle-ranked Thevars and Naickers also used the tools of policing to hold on to their otherwise waning status. In large part, this was because in the colonial era, reports of crime were registered with the state police through the village headman, a post occupied by these middle castes as much as it was by the highest castes. After independence, the headman's role in reporting crime declined. Nevertheless, the coming of democracy gave the numerically superior Thevars political strength, which manifested locally as an ability to access police power and, consequently, to negotiate social status. To a lesser extent, other lower caste groups also benefited from the fact that they could now access the police directly rather than via the headman. The Dalit feminist Bama's autobiography recounts an incident from around the 1960s when, following an altercation between two Dalit communities in her village, members of the Chaaliyar caste went "at once . . . and placed a complaint against (the author's) community. It seems they had fabricated an elaborate case, putting in a little of what had happened, but also including a lot that had not."⁹ On the whole, however, Dalits were not as politically strong as those who stood above them in the caste ranking and, therefore, they were still disadvantaged in the politics of false cases. Additionally, the very rise of Dalit politics since the 1970s triggered retaliation from higher castes, through the use of FIRs among other things. For instance, Vasanth and Kalpana Kannabiran describe an incident where the upper-caste Reddis of Andhra Pradesh brutally beat up a Dalit boy from their village, "forced brandy down his throat, took him to the police station and asked the circle inspector to register a case against him that he had misbehaved with women in a drunken state."¹⁰ Conversely, cases of police refusal to file complaints from marginalized communities have also been reported by, among others, Anand Teltumbde in his account of the Khairlanji massacre of 2006, and P. Sainath in a report on atrocities against Dalit women in contemporary Rajasthan.¹¹ The incidence of violence against Dalits in rural India since the 1980s cannot be attributed to

an unchanging purity/ pollution barrier, as scholars of caste have demonstrated.¹² In line with this literature, this chapter spotlights the role of state institutions— manifested as police documentary authority—in shaping conflict, offering a historical genealogy to the contemporary entwinement of everyday politics in policing.

The Problem of “False Cases”

In the first half of the twentieth century, villages in the southern Madras Presidency were located at an average distance of about six miles from the police station to which they were attached. This meant that, typically, villagers did not directly report crimes at police stations themselves. Instead, they reported a crime to the Village Magistrate (alternatively known as the village *munsif*, the headman, or simply the VM) who would write down the complaint and send it to the police station through the village watchman (the *talayari*), who walked the distance. Collectively, the two officials were known as the village police. Central characters in the negotiations around false cases until the mid-twentieth century, the village police were not officially a part of the state police but were meant to assist the colonial constabulary in rural areas. Neither appointed nor remunerated in full by the government, they held hereditary offices and were survivors of a pre-colonial police institution, albeit one that had been significantly modified following the East India Company’s oscillating policy toward it in the early nineteenth century, when the Company had swung between criminalizing the institution and harnessing its potential. In the southern districts of the Madras Presidency, village police came from the higher Brahmin and Pillai castes, as well as the Thevar and Naicker caste clusters.¹³

Based on the village police’s report delivered at the station house, the station policeman would write the First Information Report for the crime and proceed to the village to conduct his investigation. The First Information Report, commonly known as the FIR, was a pivotal document in criminal procedure across British India, for it was necessary to trigger a police investigation. Necessary, but not sufficient. Although the Code of Criminal Procedure of 1898 required the policeman to *register* all complaints he received in the form of the FIR, it gave him the option not to *investigate* a case upon receipt of a complaint if it appeared to him “that there is no sufficient ground” for doing so.¹⁴ In police statistics, this was a “false case”; that is, a case that was registered but not investigated—a case, therefore, that

did not result in a criminal charge. In such cases, the policeman sent a note to the complainant indicating that his complaint was false, non-cognizable, a mistake of fact or law, or undetectable, and sent the magistrate with local jurisdiction a “Final Report” recording the case as false.¹⁵ Annual reports of the police administration of the Madras Presidency routinely listed statistics for “true cases” and “false cases”—the number of false cases was not insignificant, running into the thousands in most years. For instance, the presidency report for 1899 recorded the total crime reported for the year as 59,625, of which “the total of true cases was 43,030.”¹⁶ The following year, the Inspector-General of Police (IGP) for Madras reported that 10,756 cases had been referred by the police as false. “The fact that nearly one-quarter of the more serious cases reported to the police are false throws a vivid light upon the difference between police work in this country and Great Britain,” he complained.¹⁷ Specifically, annual reports also noted the number of cases that were “maliciously or wilfully false,” also numbering a few thousand a year for the presidency. For example, in 1901, there were 41,905 cases investigated across the presidency, of which 11,028 were dismissed as false; 4,672 cases were “*maliciously or wilfully false*,” of which 691 cases were from the southern districts that are the site of this study.¹⁸

The label “false” was not, however, limited to police statistics and reports. The adjective also abounds in judicial testimony and popular publications from colonial Madras, albeit to describe criminal charges and depositions—that is, judicial actions that *followed* police investigation. Put differently, cases that were legally “true” were frequently perceived as “false” by legal subjects. For instance, Muthiah Kudumban, accused of forming an unlawful assembly that abetted a murder in May 1940, stated as his defense in court that the prosecution witnesses had “instituted false case against (him).”¹⁹ Likewise, Naga Kudumban, the primary accused in this murder case, stated that the prosecution witnesses “had *wilfully* instituted false case,” mimicking not only the adjective but also the adverb used in official statistics.²⁰ Together, then, “false case” as a police description and “false case” as a popular reference indicate a dizzying symmetry of mutual mistrust between state and society. But to view the term through the lens of mistrust is to miss the extent to which the police institution functioned as an instrument of everyday politics, a revolving door that brought some subjects into the judicial channel (as the accused) and kept others away (from being plaintiffs).

A “false case,” as mentioned above, was technically one where the police had used their discretion to refuse investigation upon receiving a complaint. Colonial officials intermittently expressed concerns of police abuse of their discretionary authority, concerns that policemen might refuse investigation in legitimate cases. In 1897, the IGP for the Madras Presidency noted that policemen tended to use this provision improperly at times, and that “investigation, as a rule, should never be refused” unless the case was trivial, civil, or lacked evidence.²¹ The National Police Commission of 1902 raised an issue that arose one step earlier in the criminal investigation process. Based on its findings, the commission observed that “the complainant (had) often to pay a fee for having his complaint recorded” and “to give the investigating officer a present to secure his prompt and earnest attention to the case.”²² Further, the commission noted, in cases where the investigation had failed the officer sometimes “bullied or threatened” the complainant into acknowledging that the case was false.²³ The commission sought to set this issue right through a couple of broader initiatives: removing statistical tests to evaluate police performance; and limiting promotion of constables to Station House Officers, insisting instead that the higher ranked and better qualified Sub-Inspectors head all investigations.

These scattered efforts apart, official concern regarding false cases focused not on police high-handedness but on perceived fabrication of the original report of crime made to the police. In the early decades of the twentieth century, annual police administration reports unfailingly noted the number of false cases that had been “wilfully or maliciously” instituted, the reduction in their numbers, and the efforts of policemen to prosecute complainants in such cases. The 1902 Police Commission’s recommendations, too, grappled less with its concern that subaltern subjects failed to become legible to the judicial apparatus as plaintiffs than with its concern that colonial subjects, especially village magistrates, deliberately manufactured complaints. Consequently, the colonial government’s policing of false cases, whether these were attributed to police corruption or to village magistrates’ proclivity for fabricating complaints, began to rest inordinately on the moment of registering crime rather than on the subsequent lapse of investigation. In turn, the document used to register crime, the First Information Report (FIR), became an instrument of police accountability and, simultaneously, of corruption. The FIR functioned as an object over which power was negotiated by colonial subjects, an instrument

of popular politics. In so doing, it approached the other meaning of “false case” mentioned above—the popular understanding of the term to denote a fabricated criminal charge.

The colonial government’s attempts to reduce the fabrication of complaints through use of the FIR was part of a larger colonial endeavor to ensure accountability through documentation, a subject which has received considerable scholarly attention. The following section surveys this larger canvas of criminal codification in British India, and the institution of the FIR in particular, before examining the politics of false cases as they played out in the villages and police stations of the Tamil countryside.

Accountability through the FIR

The introduction of a uniform criminal procedure code across the Indian provinces was one of the key projects of the colonial government in the mid-nineteenth century. The project commenced under East India Company rule and was continued by the British Crown after the transfer of power in 1858. Scattered province-level codes outlining the procedure to be followed by the judicial machinery in the event of crime were replaced by the Code of Criminal Procedure in 1861; the act was amended considerably and passed in revised form as the Code of 1872, followed by further revised versions in 1882 and 1898. Legal codification in British India paralleled larger shifts in philosophies of colonial rule between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Colonial administrators and British parliamentarians of the late eighteenth century had advocated a conservative approach to colonial governance—one that entailed minimal interference in native custom—premised upon a recognition of cultural difference between the Occident and the Orient. However, by the 1830s, liberal Utilitarians, committed to introducing Western education and law to colonized peoples, had unmistakably gained ascendancy in shaping colonial policy.²⁴ Corresponding with this shift, personal law, which had been codified in the late eighteenth century by Orientalists like Sir William Jones, drew explicitly upon ancient Hindu and Muslim legal texts, whereas criminal codification in mid-nineteenth century India was strongly influenced by the Utilitarian doctrine—the Code of Criminal Procedure (CCP) counted among its authors the renowned Benthamite James Fitzjames Stephen. Ostensibly, then, procedural law in British India drew upon universal principles, and marked a significant departure from substantive personal law. And yet,

the liberal project in India was constantly challenged by the “rule of colonial difference,” the unbridgeable racial gap between the colonizer and the colonized, and the law was no exception to this persistent tension.²⁵ As Elizabeth Kolsky has shown, the CCP bore the imprint of notions of racial difference, instantiated in the creation of separate procedural requirements for Europeans settled in India, thereby enabling the routine expression of white violence upon colonized bodies.²⁶

In addition, cultural and racial difference in the colony augmented the use of writing as the primary instrument of accountability in governance and, specifically, in the CCP. Homi Bhabha argues that in the absence of representative institutions and reasoned debate to act as checks on executive authority, writing served as “a strategy of colonialist regulation.”²⁷ The importance of writing to ensure executive accountability was enhanced by the racial hierarchization that manifested as mistrust of the colonized native. The native policeman, in particular, was a split subject: in his uniform and with his pen and stave, he expressed routine colonial authority, but he was also visible in his racialized person as the duplicitous native. Writing practices were central to a colonial discourse that repeatedly recreated the stereotype of the lying native, even as they worked to tame his duplicity.²⁸ The use of writing to ensure accountability from policemen is seen across the CCP. For instance, when a policeman received an intimation of an offense, he could decide whether it was serious enough to be investigated at all, whether it was enough to depute a subordinate officer to the site to conduct the investigation, or whether he himself needed to go. Whichever decision he took, he needed to state in his report “his reasons for not fully complying with the requirements of that sub-section.”²⁹ Likewise, a policeman conducting a criminal investigation could, “by order in writing, require the attendance” of any person connected with the case.³⁰

The trope of fabrication of complaints—whether by the complainant, the policeman, or the two in collusion—placed an increased burden on police writing at the moment of registering complaints. Accordingly, successive enactments of the CCP as well as executive orders from the central and provincial governments over the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries sought to perfect the capture of crime on paper. The CCP established writing as central to ascertaining the truth of events reported by legal subjects to the police, making the act of crime registration an everyday performance of discretionary state authority. In colonial society, “perfect recordation” was an imperfect substitute for public speech,³¹ and the criminal event was

FORM No. 44. ORDER No. 128 (1).

ORDER No. 128 (1).

*Memorandum of Crimes and other Occurrences reported to
District of* 189 . *by* *in the*

No.	Number of occurrence.	Station-house.	District Office.	Date of occurrence	Tahsil	Station	Village	By whom reported	Property lost
		Property recovered							
		Persons concerned							
		Persons arrested with warrant							
		Do. do. without warrant							50
		Persons bailed by the Police							
		Persons how disposed of							
		Horses searched with warrant							
		Do. without warrant							

Nature of occurrence with concise detail.

N.B.—The full will be on foolscap size.

Date of despatch.

Register numbers and divisional letter.

FIGURE 2. Occurrence Report. *Orders of the Madras Police*, vol. 2, 1897, p. 50. © The British Library Board, V3462.

FORM No. 46. FORM No. 46. P.O. 263.

First Information Report.

First Information of a Cognizable Crime reported under Section 154, Cr. P.C., at Police Station

Case No. Circle District

No. Date and Hour of Occurrence.

To whom sent.	Date and Hour when reported.	Place of Occurrence and Distance and Direction from Police Station.	Date of Despatch from Police Station.

Date and hour of despatch.

(N.B.—A First Information must be authenticated by the signature, mark or thumb impression of informant and attested by the signature of the officer recording it.)

FORMS
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FORM No. 46—cont.

Name and Residence of Informant and Complainant. (1)	Name and Residence of Accused. (2)	Brief Description of Offence, with Section, and Details of Property carried off, if any. (3)	Steps taken regarding Investigation, Explanation of Delay in recording Information. (4)	Result of the case. (5)

(Signature.)
(Designation.)

(First information to be recorded on the attached page.)

Note.—The signature, seal or mark of informant should be affixed at foot of the information.

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ORDERS OF THE MADRAS POLICE

FIGURE 3. First Information Report (FIR) *Orders of the Madras Police*, vol. 3, 1926, pp. 43–44. © The British Library Board, V7470.

deemed to have happened when it was written down in the space of the colonial police station. Section 112 of the CCP of 1872 maintained the requirement from the CCP of 1861 that every complaint preferred to a station-house officer be reduced to writing, but also added that the complaint be “signed, sealed or marked by the person making it,” using the signature to ascertain juridical truth.³² Acknowledging the problem of widespread illiteracy, the CCP of 1882 nonetheless tackled the possibility of police fabrication by demanding that the complaint, once reduced to writing, “be read over to the informant” before the station-house officer obtained the informant’s signature.³³ In its final form, Section 154 of the Criminal Procedure Code of 1898 clearly spelled out the importance of writing:

Every information relating to the commission of a cognizable offence if given orally to an officer in charge of a police-station, shall be reduced to writing by him or under his direction, and be read over to the informant; and every such information, whether given in writing or reduced to writing as aforesaid, shall be signed by the person giving it, and the substance thereof shall be entered in a book to be kept by such officer in such form as the Local Government may prescribe in this behalf.³⁴

In addition to amendments to the CCP, executive orders issued by the provincial Madras government to its police force aimed to make the first report of crime function as a document that could overcome the problem of fabrication and determine the facticity of claims. This was especially the case with the recommendations of the 1902 Police Commission (the Fraser Commission). On the topic of crime reporting, the commission pressed principally for speed, asserting that “the sooner the report reaches the police station, the less chance there is of interested persons putting a wrong complexion on the case, and the greater likelihood there is of the offenders being apprehended and convicted.”³⁵ The concern here lay not with documentary practice *at* the police station, but with what had come earlier—the possibility that colonial subjects were manufacturing complaints, which were then transcribed into the judicial record by the state’s policeman. Therefore, even as the commission acknowledged that in the Madras Presidency “most of the reports of crime at police stations are received from village magistrates through *taliaris* and not from beat-constables,” they paid heed to complaints from police officers that the village police were lax in this task.³⁶ Accordingly, the commission formalized the role of the village police

in reporting crime, advising village magistrates to write a report as soon as a grave crime occurred and send it to the nearest police station through the *talayari*. In accordance with this recommendation, the state constabulary were repeatedly instructed to cooperate with the village police, who in turn were incentivized through monetary rewards to report crime promptly and punished if they failed to do so.³⁷ In the years following the commission's report, the police department's efforts to implement the new system bore fruit. Initial complaints about delinquency on the part of the village police in reporting crime quickly gave way to acknowledgment that they were now effectively discharging their task.³⁸ As early as 1905, police officials remarked on the slight improvement "in the punctuality with which first reports of crime were sent in by village magistrates," noting by 1921 that "reporting of crime by village officers is generally said to be satisfactory."³⁹

The commission's emphasis on speed in reporting crime manifested itself not only in repeated governmental injunctions to the village police but also in the very format of the first report. Section 154 of the CCP of 1898 required a written report when a crime was registered with the police but left its format open: the Fraser Commission filled this gap by prescribing a strict format for the report's contents, even providing a sample form that could be printed and distributed across police stations. The sample form appended to the commission's report was barely a page in length and titled "First Information Report," a term which was to become irrevocably associated with Section 154 of the Code.⁴⁰ In some respects, the FIR was merely another version of the "Occurrence Report," which had until then been used in the Madras Presidency to meet the requirements of the CCP.⁴¹ Much like the Occurrence Report, the FIR asked for only the basic details pertaining to the crime, including its place and date, description of offense, name of complainant, and extent of property stolen. But unlike the Occurrence Report, the FIR asked, in addition, for the "date and hour when reported." This entry, intended presumably to establish the veracity of the complaint, would prove to be the centerpiece of lengthy debates during criminal trials as to whether a charge was fabricated, as will be discussed later.

Finally, the commission asked that the initial report submitted by the VM also be factual and brief, much like the FIR. Previously, the Occurrence Report's format had been factual, like that of the FIR; however, there had been variability in the structure of the VM's original report to the police, which could be more elaborate. Partly this was because previously

the VM did not just report that a crime had happened in his village; he had actively participated in a criminal investigation too. In a circular sent to village magistrates of the Tirunelveli district in 1888, the government of Madras instructed the headman to

record the complainant's statement in full, and when identity is in question, to write down as careful and accurate description of accused as he can obtain. To this end, he should record in detail his age, height, shape, colour, marks, clothing and languages. In the same way, when a burglary has been committed, the size of the hole made should be recorded. The substance of what other witnesses have to say should be carefully heard, and the net result embodied in a careful and accurate occurrence report.⁴²

The village magistrate had thus exercised some discretion in determining the content of the report of crime. He had conducted a preliminary investigation into the case, heard witness accounts, and prepared a fairly detailed report of the crime. This, however, was not always appreciated by the state police, who associated the VM's investigation with delays in reporting and with fabrication of the complaint. The Presidency police report of 1903, for instance, complained that it was "the common practice, in fact the general rule for these officers, on receiving report or complaint of a crime, to proceed to the spot and hold an enquiry, making no report to the police until many hours, sometimes a day, afterwards. As a result the case is often spoiled, either by the village magistrate's carelessness in omitting essential facts, or by his rascality in wilfully giving a wrong direction to the investigation."⁴³

The Fraser Commission's insistence on speed in reporting crime resulted in the elimination of the VM's investigative functions. The VM was no longer to investigate a crime but only to report its occurrence briefly and promptly to the station policeman. This move was part of the commission's broader endeavor to standardize police functioning across the country; it also addressed the more specific concern that village magistrates fabricated evidence in criminal cases. Consequently, when the District Magistrate of Madurai instructed village magistrates on submitting first reports of crime in 1904, he adjured them to submit the reports promptly and to include details that closely conformed to the FIR's format.⁴⁴ "The report should be prepared within an hour of the laying of the information," he wrote, and contain the substance of the complainant's and other witnesses' stories, time

and place of offense, name and description of offender, description of property found on him, time of dispatch of the report to the police, and the name of the messenger carrying the report. In fact, the government declared that it was “not necessary for the village magistrate to go to the scene of crime before he sends his report unless it happens to be under his nose in the village. He should hold no investigation and examine no witnesses.”⁴⁵

The commission introduced simple measures toward disciplining village magistrates and constables to adhere to the new format. Bound books of trefoil report forms were supplied to all village magistrates to replace the manuscript reports they had been submitting until then, ensuring that the content of the report would adhere to the prescribed guidelines.⁴⁶ For the policeman, in addition to supplying the form, the commission suggested that alternate sheets of the notebooks that contained these forms be thinner and a carbon paper placed between them. This would allow the report of crime to be written in duplicate: the duplicate could be sent to the magistrate, ensuring that the first report of crime was identical in police and magisterial records, and providing an additional check against the possibility of the policeman’s tampering with the report.⁴⁷ The standardized format of the report helps explain the rapidity with which the FIR became the usual way of reporting crime across the country. The very mechanics of filling a pre-designed form disciplined policemen and VMs to recast their reports of crime as a fixed set of facts.

The first report of crime occupied a unique place in police records, since its authorship was, in effect, shared by the informant and the policeman, both of whom signed (or put their thumb impression on) the form. On the one hand, it was information of crime recorded by a state functionary; simply put, policemen actually wrote the report on official paper. On the other, the information had to be given by an informant (often the village police) who was not part of the state police; the information was necessarily collected *before* the police commenced their investigation. Commentaries on the CCP of 1898 and injunctions to the police repeatedly cautioned them that any information collected by the police as they commenced an investigation did not qualify as the first report.⁴⁸ Because of its material difference from other forms of police writing, the first report could be used as evidence in a criminal case, although only in a restricted manner. Specifically, it could be used “as a relevant fact” that established the identity of a thing or person or fixed the time and place of occurrence of the crime, under Section 9 of the Indian Evidence Act

of 1872.⁴⁹ Building on Akhil Gupta's analysis of bureaucratic writing, I suggest that the format of the first report—a standardized, replicable, portable form—strengthened its role as judicial evidence.⁵⁰ Certainly, it was summoned by judges as an arbitrating piece of evidence, a fact as it were, establishing the time of the crime and identity of the culprit in numerous court cases from the twentieth century.⁵¹ Although the first report of a crime did contain a contestable narrative of an event, one provided by the village magistrate and recorded by the state policeman, its standardized form helped mask this narrative so that it tended to appear instead as data. With its clearly defined categories that called for short responses, the form excluded detail and variation in reporting crime. It appeared as an anonymous document containing portable, standardized data (a time, a venue, a name) that answered evidentiary requirements and was legible to a court outside of specificities of context.

Within the first few decades of the twentieth century, the FIR's use had become widespread and it acquired a privileged position in establishing the bare facts of a case. Legal subjects accepted the value of the FIR as an essential document in staking their claims in the judicial system, even as they disputed the veracity of a particular FIR. Hence, the design of the FIR did not achieve its impossible goal of stabilizing juridical truth. Instead the FIR became a highly contested object over which power was negotiated. These negotiations display the extent to which actors with access to caste and state power held sway in rural politics. While village magistrates were prominent characters in these negotiations until midcentury, holders of elected office overshadowed them in the decades that followed.

The FIR in Village Politics

Judicial records of criminal cases from the first half of the twentieth century indicate that colonial subjects appropriated the idea that the FIR was central to authenticating the facts of a case, specifically the identity of the accused and the time of the crime. In 1937, the Madura Sessions Court convicted Balu Naidu, a weaver from the city, of having stabbed to death his ex-concubine Govindammal's paramour.⁵² Appealing the decision, Naidu pointed out that although the police had heard of the event from a passerby, they had not registered this information as the FIR. Instead, they had sent a constable to the site of crime and taken Govindammal's statement as the FIR. Naidu argued that the court had "failed to appreciate the evidenciary (sic) value

of the unexplained delay in the recording of the first information, while the occurrence has taken place in a big city, with electric lights and where the police station is within a few hundred yards off.”⁵³ Unlike in a town where a police station was only “a few hundred yards off,” in the countryside the timing of the FIR engendered politics centred on the village police. In a lecture he gave at the Vellore Police Training School in 1905, the police inspector Sanyasayya Naidu complained that “an ignorant . . . village magistrate will sometimes draw up a foolish report which will vitiate an important case; while an intelligent village magistrate . . . will either conceal certain facts, or add something which never occurred, to suit his own purposes. But the whole fabric rests upon these First Information Reports which are the basis of all criminal cases.”⁵⁴

Advocates painstakingly established or questioned the validity of a crime’s FIR by estimating the distance between the site of the crime and the nearest police station; rain, road, and river conditions; the path taken by the village *talayari* to reach the station; the state of his health; rising boils that slowed him down; potential scorpions that bit him en route, and so on.⁵⁵ Joint Magistrate Ramaswami’s *Magisterial and Police Guide*, published in 1931, contained detailed instructions on this subject for the policeman and for the court.

The distance from the village to the (police station) and the interval of time occupied in sending off the First Information Report and necessary for the journey on foot are points of importance which every Criminal Court is bound to examine with care. The distance is generally several miles at least and (village servants), especially at night, and in the small hours of the morning, do not hurry themselves. To (these village servants), time is of no importance.⁵⁶

Even as judges deliberated over the logistics of a trek, attempting to manage the problem of false cases by scrutinizing the timing of the FIR, witnesses and police officers presented false cases as entangled in village politics—in past enmities and, specifically, in the power wielded by the village magistrate through his ability to file police complaints. For example, in a case of murder that had occurred at 5:30 p.m. on 11 June 1940 in Gangakulam village, the VM’s report reached Sivakasi police station, two miles away, at 11:20 p.m. Although the court judgment carefully explained why the delay was justified to rule out the possibility of concoction, the accused, Chokkiah Thevar, simply stated that the prosecution witnesses

“depose against me on account of enmity.”⁵⁷ Similarly, Velmuruga Thevan, accused of murdering Ramaswami Naicken in December 1940, pleaded that he knew nothing concerning the case. “This case has been brought against us at the instigation of the V.M.,” he stated in the sub-magistrate’s court.⁵⁸ Likewise, Irulappan Servai, accused of having murdered the village magistrate’s father, Ramasami Servai, vowed that the VM had literally “written him” into the judicial record:

There is long-standing enmity between me and the headman. On account of that enmity, (he) has written (implicated by writing) me in this case, along with my youngest brother. Besides that, (he) wrote (implicated by writing) also my wife, my father and my brother-in-law. All have been falsely implicated.⁵⁹

The narrative of false cases as it appeared in testimony across criminal trials and in police writing indicates popular perceptions of who local power-holders were. The preeminent role of the village headman evidenced in these records corresponds with the increased socioeconomic stratification in the peasant economy of the Madras Presidency’s dry districts—which included large parts of Madurai, Tirunelveli, and Ramanathapuram—around the turn of the twentieth century.⁶⁰ D.A. Washbrook notes that agrarian expansion in dry districts, unlike in the wet districts, enabled the concentration of wealth and political power in the hands of the landed peasantry, so that “in the last decades of the nineteenth century the village headman, in some parts of Madras, was more powerful than he had ever been before.”⁶¹

The village headman’s power stemmed in part from his hereditary position of authority, caste status, and access to land; but importantly, in witness testimony, it also derived from his ability to report cases against his local opponents.⁶² In other words, traditional structures of authority in the Tamil countryside worked through the colonial state’s judicial apparatus to function in the first half of the twentieth century. “Domination, rather than being solid and stable under ‘normal’ circumstances, (needed to) be secured,” reproduced through everyday practices.⁶³ Records of criminal trials from this period suggest that although the headman’s position may have been hereditary, it was not always stable. Moreover, his power was frequently challenged by others who held power locally, often belonging to the same caste groups. For instance, Sangiah Thevan, a crucial prosecution witness in a fatal case of armed confrontation between two locally powerful groups in Khansapuram village in April 1929, noted

that he had acted as the village *munsif* “for one month about six or seven months ago.”⁶⁴ Sangiah Thevan’s testimony was concerned, above all, with establishing his credentials as a credible witness, by fending off allegations from the defense counsel either that he had filed false cases against the accused in his tenure as VM or that the accused had filed cases against him when they had held the office. To the historian, his deposition indicates the instability of the headman’s position, the shifting nature of local authority, and the use of police reports by different people seeking to consolidate their power. Likewise, in the murder of a village magistrate’s father, one of the accused, Angamuthu Servai, provided a history of past confrontations between his family and the VM’s. He mentioned past cases filed by his father and uncle against the deceased that had resulted in the latter’s serving a three-month prison term. “After this V.M. took charge of his work,” he continued, “three cases were filed against us and the three have ended in acquittal,” indicating that in his perception, the latter had used his bureaucratic authority to navigate a local dispute and consolidate his position.⁶⁵

Lodging a police complaint was, then, not simply the legal resolution of a conflict that had happened earlier or elsewhere but was in itself an act of conflict within a village, a moment where local power was visibly used to invoke the authority of state law. Filing complaints and giving evidence in court were important components of witness recall across criminal trials from the first half of twentieth century.⁶⁶ In witness testimony, details pertaining to a case and its outcome—whether the complaint addressed a major or minor offense, whether the crime was charged or not, whether the accused was ultimately acquitted or convicted, all of these appear less important than the actual act of filing the case or giving testimony. See, for example, excerpts from the lengthy deposition of the prosecution witness Sangiah Thevan in a murder trial from 1929:

There was a criminal case against Accused 1 in connection with the temple. It was a dacoity case. I was a witness against Accused 1 in that case. The police cited me and I gave evidence. I do not remember if Nallathambi Chetti and Padukolaikara Tevan were witnesses. The accused were acquitted in this Court. . . . Accused 2 did not file any case against me. He never filed a case against me. Accused 2 was an accused in the dacoity case. . . . I do not know if one Arunachala Pillai filed a bull theft case against Accused 4, 10 and 13. He did not file at

my instance. . . . Accused 9 is a witness against me in a bull theft case pending in the Srivilliputtur Magistrate's Court.⁶⁷

Inasmuch as filing a police case was an act of conflict, the memories of past judicial confrontation sustained conflict. The records of trials—like the one above, from 1929, and the one cited below, from 1941—show the striking extent to which witnesses and accused were already entangled in criminal cases against one another. “There was dispute between Subbiah Servai and Doraiswami Servai about the lands. . . . The deceased and I gave evidence on behalf of Doraiswami. That was ten or fifteen years ago,” said one witness for the prosecution.⁶⁸ “I was a prosecution witness in a case of theft against the younger brother of the accused. . . . I gave evidence in the theft case two or three months before this occurrence,” said another.⁶⁹ A third claimed that he had been “a prosecution witness in C.C. No. 406 of 1940 in the Taluk Magistrate's Court, where accused's brother was an accused.”⁷⁰ And so on. Policemen, judges, as well as participants in these long-drawn-out judicial battles usually attributed the persistence of conflict, and the related charges of fabrication, to the presence of “factions” in villages. David Hardiman alerts us to the problematic assumption shared across schools of academic thought that “India is, by tradition, a factious society,” so that factionalism is depicted “as a positive force, a cancer which spreads irresistibly through India's political institutions.”⁷¹ Rather than view factions as an unchanging essence of Indian village life that impeded judicial process, I suggest that factions were reproduced through judicial institutions and practices in colonial Madras.

Sangiah Thevan, Angamuthu Servai, Ramaswami Naicken—the men mentioned in these stories belonged to the Thevar and Naicker castes. Erstwhile “little kings” of this region, these castes were economically marginalized under colonial rule; some of them were categorized as criminal under the Criminal Tribes Act of 1911.⁷² Yet their precolonial legacy of political and policing power and their numerical superiority gave them status as dominant castes.⁷³ Their preponderance in village headmanship gave them access to police bureaucratic power, allowing them to maintain some rural dominance in the face of their economic marginalization. Furthermore, the rise in power of other caste groups, especially the Nadars, increased the stakes of capitalizing on powers that came with headmanship. In the 1930s, for instance, there was friction between the Nadars of Veerakanjipuram and the Naickers of Usimesapuram, a hamlet less than a kilometer

away. The Nadars, whose fortunes were rising, staked claim to a patch of land and a reservoir (tank) abutting Naicker property, while the Naickers claimed that “they had been in enjoyment of the tank from generation to generation.”⁷⁴ Several years into the inconclusive dispute, the concerned Nadars were charged with the murder of a Naicker. In court, they claimed that the VM Arumugam Pillai and the *talayari* Subba Naicker, in collusion with the village Naickers, had falsely foisted the case on them in retaliation for their property claims.

Occasionally, Nadars too sought paths to headmanship in order to challenge Thevar and Naicker authority and cement their rising fortunes. In Kalluppatti village, Kallars, a Thevar sub-caste, and Nadars, who had in recent decades overtaken them economically, experienced friction about their relative status in the late 1930s. On the evening of 20 May 1938, a young Kallar boy, Valathaiya Tevan, was found smoking a cigarette at the site of the Nadars’ Kalliamman festival.⁷⁵ When upbraided, he refused to leave. One Subbiah Nadar slapped the boy; the next afternoon, a group of Thevars of the village attacked Subbiah Nadar and fatally stabbed him. Before his death, Subbiah Nadar put his thumb impression on a declaration recorded by the village magistrate, also a Nadar, naming his assailant. The accused, Araikapandi Tevan, was convicted of the offense. Appealing for a remission of his sentence to the Madras government, Tevan pleaded that the dying declaration was a “concocted document,” that the FIR was submitted after a considerable delay, affording the Nadars time “to concoct this false case.”⁷⁶ The narrative framing in the petition—of Nadars gaining access to policing power and deploying it to their advantage—reflects the perceived value of police documents in the shifting relationship of power between Nadars and Thevars.

To Dalits, however, these politics were hard to reach. They had been weeded out of the village police by the end of the nineteenth century and were inadequately represented in the formal police, despite multiple representations made to the provincial government.⁷⁷ The very physical layout of Tamil villages, where Pallar and Paraiyar settlements were separated by a kilometer or so from the higher-caste settlements, rendered that much harder the former’s ability to loop the higher-caste village headman into a conflict. Yet although criminal cases in the archives with Dalits as prosecutors are fewer than those pertaining to other castes, they are not entirely absent. This suggests that although Dalits participated less than other castes in the politics around false cases, it was not entirely closed to

them. It did involve traversing some social distance, usually achieved by building relations with headmen belonging to higher castes. For instance, Muthaya Kudumban, (a Pallar) co-accused in a murder case in 1940, declared in court that “as (he had) married accused 4’s younger sister (they had) instituted false case against (him).”⁷⁸ Muthaya had a long history of criminal entanglement with the deceased and with his co-accused, all of whom were Pallar; but the magistrate of this village, who had allegedly filed the false case, was a Pillai, one of the highest castes. Alliances across castes helped Dalits not only in actively using criminal law against their opponents but also in warding off cases filed against them. In Rajavallipuram village, according to police journals, Maravars were supported by Chockalingam Pillai, an “unscrupulous” high-caste VM, who “arbitrate(d) mischief and violence against people of any caste who (did) not submit to their fancies.”⁷⁹ Pallars of the village strategically allied themselves with another high-caste male, Namasivayam Pillai. Importantly, Namasivayam Pillai had far closer ties to the state police than did the headman of this village, as evidenced by Inspector Gopala Pillai’s note that “Namasivayam and Avoodainayagam Pillai may be sought for help whenever police require help.”⁸⁰

A rarer case shows how Dalits occasionally gained access to the position of headman and used its attendant resources creatively to improve their social standing. Periyayya Servai, headman of Karseri village, was stabbed to death on the morning of 16 August 1940 by Pitchai Servai, another resident of the village.⁸¹ There had been a long history of conflict between Periyayya Servai’s and Pitchai Servai’s families on an intricate web of issues that included sexual relationships, landed property, and false cases. Importantly, the deceased Periyayya was seen as having used his position as headman to file cases against local foes and consolidate his power. For instance, he had implicated two of the accused’s brothers in crimes, of murder and theft respectively. The accused’s father had, in the past, complained to the district police that Periyayya Servai had threatened to entangle him with the law “and send him to jail,” adding that he was “highhanded and unlawful . . . by virtue of the position and power he wields as village munsif.”⁸² At first glance, this is a typical case of Thevar factional politics exploiting privileged access to village policing. The shared last name of the victim and assailant suggests that the two belonged to the same Thevar sub-caste, namely Agamudaiyar. And yet, depositions across cases over the preceding decade present a more confused picture.

Sometimes the headman and other members of his family declared themselves to be Agamudaiyar, but at other times they claimed to be Christian. On cross-examination in court, they admitted to being Padayachi, which, in the local ranking, was lower than Agamudaiyar. Meanwhile, other villagers saw them neither as Agamudaiyar nor as Padayachi, but as Pallar, the lowest in the local ranking. Subrahmania Velar, a witness in the murder trial, stated unambiguously that “there is no friendship between Periyayya’s family and my family nor acquaintance. He is of Pallar caste. I will not go to his house.”⁸³ In a similar vein, the father of the accused declared that he was the only Agamudaiya of the village, unlike Periyayya, who was (only) “a Palla by birth but surnamed as Servai.”⁸⁴ Periyayya’s family then had presumably converted to Christianity and assumed a higher caste name—suggestively, one which village headmen often held. Access to policing was seen as a valuable resource in boosting or consolidating one’s status. Therefore, on occasion, Dalits too accessed the village magistracy and through it the state’s judicial apparatus. But it is worth noting that Dalit negotiation of status in all three cases mentioned here did not repudiate caste hierarchy but worked within its framework. In the first two, lower-caste disputants employed vertical relationships within the village to access police bureaucratic authority, while in the third, Periyayya simply assumed a higher caste name (without much success locally). In a social context where, as Susan Bayly argues, the barrier between purity and pollution was hardening, middling and even high castes with a precarious hold on their status adhered to notions of caste hierarchy in allowing laboring castes access to the politics of false cases.

Scholars of colonialism and caste in south India, including Nicholas Dirks and Susan Bayly, have discussed the extent to which the bureaucratic state privileged the literate castes in nineteenth-century India, so that colonial rule consolidated a “Brahmin Raj.”⁸⁵ More specific to the judicial apparatus, Pamela Price and Niels Brimnes have written about landed, elite groups within the Madras Presidency who engaged in civil litigation around property and used colonial courts as a space of contestation of their social positions.⁸⁶ This chapter points to another realm of politics and judicial contestation—one that unfolded in the police station rather than the courtroom. Its participants were not limited to the elite, extending instead to nonliterate but dominant groups like Thevars as well as to the more subordinated Pallars and Paraiyars. These castes often lacked the financial muscle or literary capital required for lengthy civil litigation; nevertheless,

through their access to the village police, they too drew upon the new judicial instruments presented by the colonial state, in particular the FIR, for their social battles. The registration of false cases gave marginalized castes an alternative means of political participation, one that did not rely heavily on documentary or financial resources. Instead they utilized connections with policemen, who did not always belong to the highest castes.

In addition to mid-ranking and lower castes, the highest castes too participated in the politics of false cases—and the violence accompanying it. At the most basic level, cases tried in courts required lawyers, a professional class severely overrepresented by Brahmins in the early twentieth century.⁸⁷ Second, Brahmins and Pillais frequently occupied the position of VM or *karnam*, and thus directly participated in filing cases. Finally, Brahmins and Pillais deployed vertical relationships with Thevars, Pallars, and Paraiyars in their politics. For example, in a long-standing conflict between the Pillai VM and *karnam* in Manur, dating from at least the early 1930s, each formed alliances with lower caste groups in the village. In the late 1940s, when Pallars and Paraiyars of the village were litigating over a piece of property, the VM backed the Pallars and the *karnam* the Paraiyars. On 9 June 1951, there was a fire in the Pallar settlements of the village. The Pallars, through the VM, filed a case of arson with the police after a delay of ten hours, naming three Paraiyars as suspects. The case was discharged from the magisterial court because of suspect eyewitness testimony and the delayed FIR.⁸⁸ The discharge notwithstanding, one of the accused Paraiyars—Sivagurunathan—filed a case against his accusers, charging them with theft of his millet crop. This case was not even taken to court by the police. This back-and-forth among multiple individuals across castes played out not just through the filing of cases but also through actual acts of violence—cutting crops and setting a fire (which police suspected may have been arson, not an accident). Whether visible in judicial records as false cases or as real crimes, the politics of false cases thus sometimes entailed violence—murders, assaults, arson, petty thefts. A police inspector from Sattur commented quite vividly on this in the 1920s: “There are cases (of murder) in which the poor victim is inveigled and killed just for the sake of foisting the crime on to the enemies of the perpetrators . . . where a murder is committed for the sake of implicating false persons precious good care is taken to prevent delay and false clues are easily forthcoming.”⁸⁹ Violent politics did not always occur in an autonomous domain of subaltern politics, independent of state institutions. To the contrary, they

were at times informed by the logic of police power and involved actors across castes.

As much as judicial practice shaped the patterns of societal conflict, local actors and politics in turn reaffirmed state authority in the Tamil countryside. Besides being an integral part of local politics, the registration or dismissal of complaints was simultaneously an everyday performance of state power by policemen, who displayed their discretionary authority in deciding the veracity of cases lodged with them. Part IV records show numerous instances of policemen deciding not to investigate cases filed by certain villagers, on the grounds that they were registered simply as part of a local dispute. In Thazhiyoothu village, whose VM was a Muslim Rowther, the inspector dismissed as false “a dispute between family members . . . reported as a case of housebreaking by Mohideenamma.”⁹⁰ In Manur and Nagaram villages, police were alert to running feuds between upper-caste Pillai VMs and *karnams* who were “trying to entangle (each) other in some criminal case or other.”⁹¹ To some extent, police discretion in filing cases extended across castes and religions, simply reflecting their familiarity with the politics within the villages that they monitored. But often it also intersected with caste norms, adversely affecting Thevars and Dalits in particular. In 1926, a two-day Pallar conference held in Madurai passed a resolution asking the Madras government to recruit Dalits as constables “in large numbers” and complained that “the practice of bringing false criminal complaints” against them had become “very common.”⁹² If Dalits experienced criminal cases brought against them, the criminalized Thevars contended with getting their criminal complaints dismissed as false. When Picha Thevan, a resident of Pillayarkulam village whom police records describe as having “liberal habits” including promiscuity and the “vice of drinking,” filed a complaint against Arunachala Thevan and fourteen others, the local police attributed it to the faction between the two parties and refused to investigate the case.⁹³ Jonathan Saha argues in the context of colonial Burma that malfeasance among subordinate officials in the quotidian practice of law was not merely a matter of incompetence or corruption; it was a performance of state power that was constitutive of everyday state authority.⁹⁴ Likewise, police constables in twentieth-century Madras who dismissed one case as false and registered another as true were neither indifferent state actors disconnected from social hierarchies nor passive instruments of an ossified caste order, symbolic of an absent state.⁹⁵ Rather, they were actively exercising caste *and* state authority.

After 1947: Political Office and Police Access

Upper-caste participation in the politics of false cases appears especially vividly in a case from 1954, soon after independence. This was not coincidental: the land redistribution law proposed by the new socialist government was threatening the security of upper-caste landholders across the province. In some Tirunelveli villages, Brahmin and Pillai landholders threatened to evict their Thevar and Dalit laborers when they negotiated for land or higher wages.⁹⁶ The laborers, formally organized under the banner of the District Kisan Sabha and supported by a Dalit MLA from the region, A. S. Arumugham, were gaining some traction in their struggles. The landlords responded by calling for “firm and steady police action.”⁹⁷ Their call was heeded. In just one village, 114 laborers were arrested for picketing. In addition, the landlords also “intimidated the peasants with hired goondas and police help” and “foisted false cases” on them, according to the District Kisan Sabha.⁹⁸ Thus, access to police power helped people hold onto caste and class privilege when these were threatened in a suddenly expanded political arena. For others, notably the numerically strong Thevars, the expansion of the franchise reinforced both political power and access to police authority. In her ethnography on inequality and ritual in a Tirunelveli village in the 1980s, Diane Mines mentions a revealing episode.⁹⁹ A Pallar male walked into the sacred space of a temple, to which caste norms denied him access. Affronted, the Thevar headman called the police, falsely charging the Pallar with intent to steal the temple’s brass vessels. The ease of the transaction makes explicit the extent to which policing aligns with broader axes of power; in postcolonial Madras, the combination of caste authority and political leverage was particularly potent in invoking police resources.

In line with this shift in the decades after independence, the VM’s centrality in harnessing police connections gave way to that of elected officials. Postcolonial citizens allied with *panchayat* heads and local representatives of political parties, not the VM, toward working the politics of false cases. Consider a criminal case from 1956 in which the Tirunelveli court found two men, Sankaralinga Tevar and his father, Rangasami Tevar, guilty of fatally stabbing two others, Kanniah Tevar and his father, Sudalaimuthu Tevar, in a village fight that occurred on a Saturday afternoon.¹⁰⁰ Some themes from the first half of the century were still in evidence, including the existence of a dense network of past conflicts between members of opposing groups and the central role of what was seen as biased,

false witness testimony in reproducing conflict. In this case, unlike earlier ones, key participants in the dispute were united not by a factional alliance centred on a village headman but by affiliation with a political party, the village Kisan Sangam (Farmers' Union). Correspondingly, prosecution testimony was challenged as being biased against those not belonging to the Sangam, with the president of the organization, Vaithilinga Tevar, depicted as a key power holder in the dispute. In fact, the absence of the VM at the scene of the crime was commented upon in court by the defense. Suggestively, Vaithilinga Tevar had earlier been a police constable, a point which the defense exploited to suggest a nexus between the police and the prosecution. Thus, the case points to the emergence of an arena of power at the intersection of policing and political heft.

Apart from easing access to the politics of false cases, political influence in democratic India also attenuated the cost of violent politics. Sankaralinga Tevar, the accused in this murder case, was given a death sentence by the lower court in Tirunelveli; on appeal, the High Court at Madras upheld the sentence. Under colonial rule, the next step would have been to take the case to the Privy Council in London, usually unsuccessfully. Instead, Sankaralinga Tevar's family used their political connections, including to a member of the Madras Legislative Assembly, to petition the Governor of Madras for a commutation of the sentence. The petitions cited the tender age of the accused as grounds for mercy, but also suggested that the activities of the Kisan Sangam, to which the deceased and prosecution witnesses belonged, were questionable. They wrote that the Sangam was an organ of the Communist Party (CPI) and that its members had murdered the accused's uncle, a rich landholder. In alluding to the CPI and to landlord-tenant disputes, the petitioners may have consciously been playing on the sentiments of the ruling party, which had been at loggerheads with the CPI since independence, precisely over what it saw as the latter's tendency to foment unrest among agrarian laborers. The petitioners were partially successful in their mission: Sankaralinga Tevar's sentence was commuted by executive pardon from death to a life term. His participation in deadly politics had not cost him his life.

Hence, through the political shifts of the mid-twentieth century—as universal adult franchise opened up new political avenues and as local authority migrated from the headman to the *panchayat* president—inhabitants of the Tamil countryside continued to use police documentary authority to manage power. These enduring battles over the FIR, which at times

entailed excursions into violent politics, reveal how legal discourse permeated the negotiation of conflict within popular consciousness. As Jean and John Comaroff argue, the routine politics of violence in the postcolonial world stem not from a disavowal of the law but from making a fetish of it—a preoccupation with “‘the law’ and the citizen as *legal* subject.”¹⁰¹ Indeed, the two arenas—of legal battle and political competition—were not separate from each other. Postcolonial citizens frequently deployed the resources offered by the judicial system to supplement electoral gains, and vice versa. Moreover, the ties between political office and the politics of false cases were not limited to the village. These ties were noticeable at the highest levels of provincial office as early as 1957, during the second national elections, when sparks flew between the ruling Congress Party and the opposition Forward Bloc. The conflict, to be discussed in detail in Chapter 5, unfolded between the Chief Minister of the province, K. Kamaraj, on the one hand, and a Forward Bloc Member of Parliament, U. Muthuramalinga Thevar (UMT), on the other, as they vied for a legislative seat in the Ramanathapuram district. In parallel, the conflict also played out between supporters of their respective parties—as a battle for votes as well as on the terrain of violence and law. When a local Congress leader, Immanuel Sekaran, was murdered in the course of the extended conflict, UMT was tried for abetting the murder. UMT’s defense was that Chief Minister Kamaraj and Home Minister Bhaktavatsalam (under whose portfolio the police fell), perceiving him as a political threat, had pressured the local police to fabricate the case against him. The judge was appalled by the allegation against the highest powers of the land; however, after some equivocal discussion, he determined that the criticism of “‘the FIR as a belated and fabricated document” was unfounded.¹⁰²

The link between political and legal finagling reached its nadir during the Emergency of 1975–77, when the central government under Indira Gandhi used the state’s judicial machinery to subdue all opposition. During these months, the police and magistracy used extraordinary legal instruments, notably the Maintenance of Internal Security Act of 1971 (MISA), to detain political prisoners. Yet even draconian laws had to be implemented by the regular police, who used familiar methods in doing so. The Shah Commission, instituted to look into the excesses of the Emergency, noted in 1978 that the police had arrested a number of persons under false charges so as to detain them under the MISA.¹⁰³ Despite its being brought to light, the nexus between political and legal power did not end overnight with the

Emergency. In an implicit acknowledgment of the ties between police registration of cases and political maneuvering, the Tamil Nadu government ordered the withdrawal of all cases registered against workers of political parties in the period leading up to the national and state elections of 1977.¹⁰⁴ Although the government justified its action as releasing these accused workers—numbering a few hundred—from the burdens of appearing in court so that they might have time for campaigning, MLA J. James of the Janata Party, who had raised the issue in the Legislative Assembly, claimed that the police “knowing fully well that the accused implicated (sic) are not connected with the occurrence, still they registered the cases against the innocent people on political reasons.”¹⁰⁵

Conclusion: FIRs Today

In the aftermath of the Emergency, there was more explicit recognition of the workings of police power in popular discourse than in past decades. Tamil cinema, for instance, which had portrayed the police as impartial soldiers of justice throughout the 1950s and '60s, now depicted policemen as symptoms of a rotting political and legal order. Various aspects of policing were targeted for critique across films: here I examine one film, *Virumandi*, from which the opening quotation is excerpted. The film exposes the discretionary state authority embedded in the FIR through its plot and in its very narrative structure. Set in two villages in early twenty-first century Madurai, the film portrays the attempts of Kothala Thevar, a wily landholder, to acquire a large plot of fertile land inherited by Virumandi Thevar, a naïve casteman.¹⁰⁶ In the course of Kothala Thevar's machinations, he and his supporters kill twenty-four people in a midnight clash. The local policeman, Peikkaman, also a Thevar, is in cahoots with Kothala Thevar and files an FIR charging Virumandi Thevar with the crime. The local court finds Virumandi guilty on twenty-four counts of murder and sentences him to death. Kothala Thevar escapes with a life sentence. Thus, the charges faced and judicial penalty received by the two protagonists rely heavily on their respective proximity to police power. Miming the problematic truth of the FIR, the film itself is structured as two competing narratives of a sequence of events, the first forty-five minutes from Kothala Thevar's perspective and the second from Virumandi's. Both characters run through the same sequence of events—a bullfight, a funeral, a romance, and a brawl—that lead up to the murders and the criminal trial

that follows. But the events, the duplicated scenes, are presented in diametrically different narratives in the two tellings. Online commentaries speak of this as depicting the “Rashomon effect” in Tamil cinema, but it is noteworthy that the movie makes no pretense that Kothala Thevar speaks the truth.¹⁰⁷ These are not two different memories of an event, these are two different *legal narratives* of an event.

Virumandi is also attentive to the casted nature of police politics. Kothala Thevar, Virumandi, and Nallamma Naick, another key actor in the dispute over the land, are all from the Thevar and Naicker castes, castes most closely associated with precolonial and colonial village policing as well as with politics of violence. But this is not simply “irrational violence and gore” that occurs by virtue of its setting in the “rustic down South (with its) incongruous blend of modern gadgets and traditional practices” as the film critic for *The Hindu* colorfully put it.¹⁰⁸ Rather, the film locates violent Thevar politics in its broader context of judicial authority, which draws in diverse actors. For instance, the lawyers representing the duplicitous Kothala Thevar are (literate, nonviolent) Brahmins, fully familiar with how disputes unfold at the intersection of state and caste power.¹⁰⁹ Additionally, although the obvious villain in the story is the manipulative and avaricious Kothala Thevar, the soundtrack completely ignores him to portray the police inspector Peikkaman as the villain.¹¹⁰ *Virumandi* is thus not about ahistorically violent castes disconnected from modern state power, but rather shows the complex reproduction of violent caste politics in contemporary society.

Drawing upon police reports and judicial testimony, this chapter has drawn attention to a realm of politics that became legible to the state through the mediation of village police and state policemen—acts that had not occurred appeared on the judicial record as crimes through the registration of complaints, and acts that had occurred failed to appear on the judicial record when complaints were declared false, unfit for investigation. Dalit writing and reportage from the 1990s onward offer more direct evidence of the use of judicial instruments in reproducing, sometimes strengthening, caste hierarchies. Such caste politics do not occupy an autonomous, traditional (and often rural) space untouched by modernity. Rather, politics at the margins are intimately connected with modern state institutions like the police and draw upon judicial procedure for their sustenance. By examining police procedure at the moment of registering cases, this chapter offers a genealogy of the role of state authority in reproducing

relationships of dominance and subordination within postcolonial society. In this reading, false cases are not simply a manifestation of a flawed police institution; they indicate the blurred line between state institutions and societal practice, the everyday practices of a disaggregated state. In twentieth-century Madras, filing cases with the police was an event in conflict, and repeated allegations of false cases indicate the extent to which subject-citizens employed the judicial apparatus to negotiate their disputes. Conversely, deciding whether to investigate a reported crime was an exercise of police authority that helped constitute the everyday state in colonial and postcolonial India.

The use of police discretionary authority was not limited to acts of writing. The mere threat of filing a criminal charge enabled police use of physical violence on legal subjects in the course of both routine surveillance and criminal investigation. I now move to discussing these acts of violence, which often stayed off the written record.

Routine Coercion

Scarred Bodies, Clean Records

AT AROUND 5 P.M. on 25 July 1956, Ponniah, the police constable of Melur station, found four boys playing cards for money at the town bus stop. The four boys—Sundaram, Nagarajan, Shenbagam, and Mani—were in their early teens and had among them cash of 12 annas 9 pice.¹ The constable seized the cash and marched the boys to the station, where a case was registered against them. But before putting them behind bars, the station Sub-Inspector asked the four boys to perform *ucki*, a punitive exercise that required them to hold their earlobes and squat. Mani, one of the boys, was a little unwell and unable to do the exercise. Annoyed by his disobedience, Sub-Inspector Mani allegedly kicked him a few times. Later that evening, the boys were released on bail of 50 rupees, posted by a neighboring fruit vendor, Raju Ambalam, who employed one of the boys as his assistant. Four days later, following complaints of severe abdominal pain and two futile trips to doctors, Mani died. A magisterial inquiry launched into the Sub-Inspector's conduct exonerated him of fatal violence: "I think that the Sub Inspector could not have, at the worst, intended to do anything more than to chastise the boy. It will be unreasonable to assume that he did it with any serious intent to cause injury," ran the report.²

But why did the Sub-Inspector even need to chastise the boy? The time and space of violence in this instance lay in a procedural no-man's-land. This was neither a moment of crime prevention nor one of investigation. This was neither the outdoors—where the police were allowed to use force in overwhelming criminals, nor the lockup—the feared space of interrogation. The instance suggests individual misconduct, a departure from the law, an aberration. On the other hand, the incident also smacks of normalcy: in the pettiness of the crime, the nature of the extralegal punishment (an act routinely performed by devotees in front of an idol at a temple and by errant students in front of a teacher at school), the predictability of

the acquaintance posting bail, and the reaction of the magisterial officer investigating the case. Further weaving the incident into the fabric of everyday life was Mani's mother Irulayee's assertion that the Sub-Inspector had kicked her boy not because he was found gambling for a few annas, but because he had failed to acquire arrack for him—an illegal good whose procurement required committed but clandestine social networks in an era of prohibition.

A normal act of violence, then, but presumably an illegal one that can be pinned on the individual, not state law itself. However, Veena Das and Deborah Poole propose that actors such as policemen are able to cross the line between “legal and extralegal forms of punishment” precisely because of their role as “representatives of the state.”³³ Sub-Inspector Mani enacted violence *as* a law enforcer—in his uniform, within the police station, and supported by an array of policemen including the constable who had apprehended the boys and the station writer who registered the crime. The explicit pretext for the violence was that the boys had engaged in a crime, i.e., gambling. Finally, the policeman was protected from punishment by the law, which invariably excused police violence as the collateral damage of law enforcement. Police violence, even in its apparently illegal manifestations, was thus backed by legal authority. In turn, legal authority was rooted in social spaces and hierarchies. The target of violence in this case was a young boy, likely of low caste and class stature, as evidenced by his mother's name and his spending his free time playing cards at a bus stand. The boy's low social standing increased his chance of getting sucked into the networks of police power, in an illegal alcohol procurement operation, and as the recipient of force. Equally, Mani's mother's low status impeded her attempts to get justice for her son's death. The magisterial officer investigating the case dismissed her testimony swiftly: “this woman's evidence did not impress me.”³⁴ The caste of the policemen in this case is hidden from the archival record, but often policemen capitalized on their middling or high caste status in addition to their official authority in performing violence on those who stood below them in social ranking. If the policeman personified the intersection of bureaucratic and caste authority, the object of his violence personified the intersection of legal and caste vulnerability—as a criminal suspect and as a person of low caste/class status. Ordinary police violence was not simply an unavoidable aid in law enforcement; it was as much or more a performance of power by state agents upon the bodies of marginalized subject-citizens.

The quick exoneration of Sub-Inspector Mani in a case of patently un-sanctioned violence renders meaningless the prolonged attempts to circumscribe the exercise of police force in colonial and independent India. In these discussions, police force exercised outside the station, in prevention of crime, was sharply distinguished from police force exercised inside the station, while investigating crime. The use of police force in maintaining public order was legally justifiable, though not ideal, whereas the legal ban on custodial violence was relatively unambiguous. In public discourse as well, the use of violence in maintaining public order was effusively praised or grudgingly excused as a lawful exercise of state force, whereas custodial violence was consistently described as an abuse of police power—by government officials, the press, and, in a later era, by human rights activists. However, the two forms of violence converged in significant respects. At one end of the spectrum, preventing crime often translated to maintaining order by coercively curbing the politics of the marginalized, as will be seen in the following section of this chapter. At the other end of the spectrum, although police reports cited the need to extract information from criminal suspects as the primary reason for custodial violence, archival evidence of actual cases suggests that this too was often simply a performance of state power on the bodies of marginalized subjects, as will be discussed in the second half of the chapter. Scholarship on violence in the modern liberal state also points toward the blurring of the line between the two forms of violence, suggesting that torture is an expression of state authority as much as ostensibly lawful exercises of police authority. Challenging torture's exceptionalism, this literature has shown that torture is imbricated in the law and in the politics of liberal democracies, that it is central to modern regimes that habitually deny its practice.⁵ In this framing, rather than being an exception to the law, torture simply sits at one end of "a continuum of acts" of excess state violence.⁶

Underlying the legal distinction between the two forms of violence was the fact that one occurred in custody, invisible to the public eye, in secrecy, while the other occurred in the public eye. But this dividing line may also be too sharply drawn. In rural India, a public act of petty violence was not always conspicuous, and rarely drew enough attention to be censured—by the press or by the courts. In order for routine police violence to be policed, it had to be visible to literate and financially privileged audiences, especially under colonial rule. Conversely, custodial violence was not always invisible in colonial India and in the first couple of decades after

independence. Sometimes it was literally visible, as when police tortured suspects in station verandas, in front of other suspects, and so on. But even when there were no eyewitnesses to custodial violence, tales of violence escaped the walls of the station so that friends, family, and neighbors of the victims heard about it. Popular narratives of both forms of force—the one legal and public, the other illegal and secret—converged to reveal subaltern subject-citizens' experiences of state sovereignty. Public, legal displays of force were at times seen as inscrutable; private abuses of power were associated with a larger judicial authority. In local gossip and rumor, police force was murky, yet backed by state authority. Subaltern subjects like Mani and his mother, frequently exposed to policing and aware of the judicial protection the police enjoyed, understood everyday police violence—whether explicitly sanctioned by the law or not—as state violence. This chapter brings together “legal” police violence, discussed in the first section, and “illegal” custodial violence, discussed thereafter, to present both as the routine exercise of combined state and caste authority.

Preventing Crime: Force outside the Station

By definition, prevention of crime called for discretion in the exercise of police authority. In order to avert crime, policemen on the beat could undertake a range of actions—simply being present to watch potential offenders, issuing a warning to someone, and, at the extreme, preventively arresting someone. All these actions invoked the force of law, but abstract law was not the only force to which legal subjects were vulnerable. The law enforcer, the embodied policeman, could also enact violence on them. Although not explicitly sanctioned by law, these fleeting moments of violence were rarely remarked upon in judicial writing, let alone punished. In part this was because these acts were subsumed under the discretion inherent in preventive policing, so that routine police violence was, in the final analysis, often deemed legal. In part it was because the objects of violence were those already marginalized by their class and caste, and therefore lacking the resources to take a policeman to court.

Section 107 of the Code of Criminal Procedure of 1898 (CCP), at the start of the chapter on “Prevention of Offences,” sanctioned a magistrate, when informed of someone *likely* to breach the peace or “do any wrongful act,” to bind over that person for up to a year.⁷ Since local police often provided the information upon which the magistrate acted, Section 107 fell squarely

in the gray zone of police discretionary authority. A commentary on the CCP published in 1937 cautioned readers that such preventive jurisdiction constituted “a powerful adjunct to executive authority, salutary if used in moderation . . . though harmful if resorted to immoderately.”⁸ Caste communities designated criminal by the colonial government—Kallars, Maravars, and Koravars in the southern districts—were especially vulnerable to the use of Section 107 of the CCP. For instance, in 1907, local government officers noticed that Maravars of a few villages in Madurai were holding nightly meetings. Although the meetings were peaceful, held to “raise the moral status of (the Maravar) class,” the officials concerned exchanged a flurry of letters among themselves and asked local policemen “to keep an eye on the movement,” in case the Maravars needed to be bound over.⁹ This was not an isolated incident. In January 1909, a special, temporary police force was commissioned in the Madurai district to tackle the problem of cattle theft, believed to be committed by criminal castes.¹⁰ In the three years of their functioning, the force, rather than arrest those formally charged with theft, bound over around two hundred persons for between one and three years each under the preventive sections of the CCP. In so doing, policemen often skirted legal norms. On one occasion, they arrested six Kallars as suspects in dacoity cases, but lacking “any satisfactory evidence on which to charge” them, the district police superintendent simply imprisoned them using the preventive provisions of the law. In light of the authority wielded by the special force to bind over criminal suspects, even tasks that stayed within the confines of legality appear suspicious, as for instance the force’s “‘mission’ work in constantly visiting, advising, and warning the criminal Kallars.”¹¹ In this context, the exact meaning of the verbs of persuasion used here—advise and warn—lie open to interpretation, as will be discussed.

The use of the preventive sections of the CCP was not limited, either in its agents—to special police forces, or in its targets—to the so-called criminal castes. Records maintained by policemen at individual police stations provide evidence for the routine use of coercive preventive policing. In particular, Part IV of the Station Crime History, which comprised descriptive notes and journal entries on each village within a station’s jurisdiction, points to police use of Section 107 to contain caste conflict. Part IV records included periodic updates (a few times a year) filled in by successive police inspectors on the state of affairs in a village, directing extra police attention and force where required, so that brewing local hostilities would not erupt

into conflict. The cadence of these police updates—between warnings that the beat policeman needed to keep an eye on someone and reassurances that everything was alright—points to the role of routine, coercive police authority in maintaining caste order.

As discussed in Chapter 1, the very layout of stations and beats enabled the police to monitor vulnerable times, spaces, and communities (harvests, festivals, criminal and laboring castes). But in addition, policemen also sent out extra beats when they noticed behavior that deviated from the norm, actions that could disrupt the status quo. When Pallar laborers in Chatram Kudiyiruppu village briefly struck work in 1938, demanding a higher share of the harvest yield, the landlords got around the issue by hiring local Maravars instead.¹² Cornered, the Pallar laborers returned to the fields, but hostilities among all three castes persisted. The admonition to his subordinates from the (Brahmin) police inspector, Padmanabha Iyer, that they “visit this village often and be in touch with the feelings from time to time and take timely action,” especially during the annual harvest, shows his concern with the police task of maintaining peace.¹³ But police concern with keeping peace inevitably meant a concern with maintaining overlapping caste/class hierarchies. To achieve this, Inspector Padmanabha Iyer asked his men to give “necessary *bundobust*” and take “timely action,” both vague instructions that captured the discretionary essence of preventive policing.¹⁴ A final point to note here is the long-standing nature of routine policing: as early as 1932, six years before the Pallar strike, local police records had already commented on their potential politicization, noting that “one Mr. Ramasubba Ayyar of the *Agraharam* (was) setting up the Pallars against the Maravars”¹⁵ The maintenance of caste hierarchies in this village required the active and running support of a coercive state apparatus; it was not an automatic function of traditions that existed in a putatively autonomous domain of religion.

Resistance to caste norms was not only articulated through violent encounters. A widespread act of resistance in the southern districts was mass conversion to another religion— usually Christianity or Islam around the turn of the twentieth century. But the renegotiation of status did not materialize at the moment of conversion.¹⁶ Rather, it required sustained effort on the part of the converted communities to acquire recognition from other communities as not impure—to be allowed access to certain schools, certain village paths, certain surnames. These prolonged confrontations manifested to the police as a steady murmur of unrest. Station records show

that the beat policeman was well-attuned to this unrest and quick to put it down. When conflict broke out in 1937 in Thazhiyoothu village between two groups of Nadars, one of which had recently converted from Hinduism to Christianity, the local inspector recorded that “both parties (had) been personally warned that they would be run in under 107 CPC and are quiet now.”¹⁷ The tactic presumably worked, because eight months later, Inspector Padmanabha Iyer noted that “there (had) been no trouble in this village between the (Roman Catholic) converts and the Hindus after the warning given by the (Circle Inspector).”¹⁸

Police intervention was particularly obvious when caste conflict took the shape of competing rights to village spaces—temples, streets, burial grounds, and so forth, since these constituted a direct threat to public order. Limited to minor violence in individual villages and usually quelled by local policemen, these interactions rarely, if ever, caught the attention of newspapers or government officials—both based in towns some distance away. But the prolonged nature of these conflicts, which sometimes simmered over two decades, indicates that caste order in rural spaces was not static, even when “nothing changed.” Furthermore, it shows the ways in which caste dominance and resistance were spatially rooted and violently performed. Thus, over the 1930s and 1940s, police sent extra beats, filed minor charges, and “warned” participants in numerous conflicts among Maravars, Nadars, Pallars, Paraiyars, and recent converts across villages in the southern districts. In Sankarankoil, the conflict was over temple funds and construction; in Mavadi, it was over the burial ground. In Therkukulam, it was, in sequence, over Muslims’ rights to drive manure carts through Pallar fields, to bury a child in the Thevar plot, and to build a mosque near the village church and the temple.¹⁹ The Therkukulam Muslims, who were Pallars who had converted to Islam only recently, were foiled by the police in every one of these attempts. Reinventing caste status required confrontation not only with other castes, but also with state force which, contrary to the fiction of its distance from community-based politics, was enmeshed in it. Having said that, it bears repetition that the Therkukulam Pallars’ act of conversion itself was a protest against caste hierarchy as was the spatialization of this protest through demands for new burial spots or sites of worship. In addition, it is noteworthy that whereas their initial antagonists were Hindu Pallars, whom they had just edged out in the social order, by the 1940s the Muslims were confronting the higher-ranked Thevars, suggesting that their social standing had indeed gone up a notch.

Although Section 107 of the CCP equipped policemen with a legal means of maintaining order, crime prevention did not always require judicial action, as seen in the examples above. Just the threat of arrest sufficed. Thus, rural order was often achieved through mere police presence, through the bodily practices of the policeman. In situations where police feared disruption to order, additional beats and increased deliberateness in watching selected targets served to mark the body of colonial subjects, even if not literally. Instructing its men on surveillance, the *Madras Police Orders* of 1897 emphasized the need to make “the suspected party feel that he has been marked.”²⁰ Police journals also repeatedly mention the act of “watching.” For instance, in the conflict between Hindu and Christian Nadars mentioned above, the inspector noted that “the village should be frequently visited and the feelings watched.”²¹ The verb is ubiquitous in Part IV records: “S.I. will watch the situation;”²² “the situation is, however, needs (sic) frequent watch;”²³ “S.I. shall watch the feelings between the parties;”²⁴ and so on. The repeated use of the verb “watch” might be inconsequential: it might be interpreted as procedure, a routine instruction from a supervising inspector to a beat constable, or it might simply speak to a limited English vocabulary among those making the journal entries. On the other hand, “Close Watch” was a category used in police surveillance instructions and resource planning. Its occasional appearance in Part IV records, for instance in 1937, when Inspector Padmanabha Iyer wrote, “Rama Koravan and his brothers . . . were registered as C.W. suspects. . . . They are under close watch,”²⁵ suggests that the typology of surveillance was not restricted to policy, but also translated to practice, that some rural actors—here, three men of the criminalized Koravar caste—were indeed closely watched. More broadly, the detailed, but relatively distant, plans made by senior, European, police officers to manage populations in order to ensure the smooth functioning of the colonial economy (discussed in Chapter 1) transform in Part IV journals into the more immediate, bodily practices of the local, high-caste, Sub-Inspector. Records of police surveillance thus give us a glimpse into the everyday life of colonial governmentality, where state surveillance appears in its disaggregated form, as embodied police practice. In particular, it indicates that governmentality in the colonial context relied on policing by the state, and not simply on the conduct of self-governing subjects.

There is no mention of overt coercion in police surveillance registers, but the tangibility of the police body in these records hints at its use as

an instrument of the state, not merely for seeing but also in enacting routine violence on the bodies of subjects. Moreover, the possible euphemism “warning” is frequently used in the surveillance records: “there is no sign of ill-feeling at present, after the warning given by me”—in a conflict between Maravars and Pallar Christians of one village.²⁶ Understandably, the notes don’t always mention what exactly the “warning” was. In some instances, it meant that someone would be bound over, but it may have also implied threats of violence, or a judicious combination of the two tactics. This is especially likely given the ease with which police accounts of surveillance slide between “advice,” “warning,” and use of direct force. For instance, after intervening successfully to “restore goodwill” between two groups in Chittanpacheri, the police noted that “the S.I. must visit this village often and be in touch with the feelings and satisfy himself that the compromise is genuine.” But, he continued, “*at the slightest manifestation of trouble*, there should be no hesitation in taking security action. . . .”²⁷ Likewise, one inspector cautioned his juniors to be present for two local temple festivals that occurred in quick succession. “A little tact is quite enough to manage both, provided the leaders are kept well-in-hand. No extra force is necessary as the (armed Special Reserve) is right at hand for emergencies.”²⁸ Police “tact” was sufficient when underwritten by state force.

In police writing, their intervention in societal conflict was not always threatening; sometimes the language used to describe it is charmingly conciliatory. Following a conflict in Melapillayarkulam village in 1938, the inspector noted that “both the parties were advised to sink their differences and live amicably. They have promised to do so.”²⁹ In a neighboring district, “a faction between the Sambans (low-caste Christians) and the Naicks of Muthulingapuram . . . was effected to a compromise.”³⁰ To the historian, the vocabulary of social harmony seen in these police records suggests instead the effective functioning of the strong arm of the state: the maintenance, in fact, of Order.³¹ This discourse of Order that runs through police writing of the 1930s and 1940s closely echoes middle-caste nostalgic narratives from the 1950s and 1960s of a once harmonious caste order. But this latter-day fiction of Pallars who were once unquestioningly obedient to Maravars, or Sambans who were once unquestioningly obedient to Naickers, is belied by the prehistory of discontent revealed in the Part IV records cited here.

Interventions by the police to defuse societal tension were not always successful, and cases of failure are more easily found in centralized government archives. For instance, the provincial government’s *Fortnightly*

Report from 1930 mentions that Tiruchuli “was the scene of a small riot between caste Hindus and ‘untouchables’ arising out of a private quarrel. The affair was not serious, although the police had to open fire, and order was quickly restored.”³² Such reports, which show police intervention once a conflict had erupted, suggest at first glance that the police were distanced from society and unaware of its fault lines. However, the evidence from police station records suggests that the police surveillance of villages happened regularly, and was influential in checking caste conflict, especially in contexts where lower-caste groups were not radically politicized.³³ Part IV records that contain consecutive journal entries noting “nothing of importance,” “no trouble,” or “nothing special” in a village point to the effectiveness of the police beat in keeping resistance in check. Centralized records of violent caste conflicts may therefore be read as much as an indication of the heightened political mobilization of the conflicting parties as of police absence in the colonial countryside. Lower castes usually entered the government records only when they were strong enough to violently resist linked caste and state authority. At other times, the police gaze and staff were effectively deployed to maintain order.

That said, even the disputes that made their way into Part IV station records throw light only on legal subjects who were actively confronting police authority. Expressions of police power that were resisted through the “weapons of the weak” are largely absent from written records.³⁴ The most conspicuous absence here is of patriarchal power, evidence of which slips in rarely and unobtrusively. In 1929, the Madras government recorded a case of petty embezzlement in the police force.³⁵ On 1 November 1928, the Sattur station head constable had entrusted Constable Krishnan Nair of Vembakottai station with 70 rupees, to be delivered at his station toward expenses. Constable Nair absconded with the money. He was found five days later, having spent the bulk of it “for the liquidation of debts and on women.” A brief note on his past conduct included the fact that he had been demoted in the past for “neglect of duty and assault on a korava woman.”³⁶ Koravars were criminal tribe members from among the lowest castes; the woman referred to was thus triply subaltern—by gender, caste, and criminalization under the law. This rendered her vulnerable in her interaction with the upper-caste constable who embodied state, caste, and masculine power. The assault she faced entered the written record, in a quick five words, only when 40 rupees, which the police department could not recover from the constable, had to be written off by the government.

Paradoxically perhaps, the most ordinary forms of police force appear in records of excess violence, but as asides. Excess violence was narrativized as sensational in both colonial and postcolonial India, suggesting that such violence was not perceived as normal. All the same, I look at an instance of excess violence—not so much to retrieve its contested and unusual aspects, but to pull out its uncontested, normal aspects, which act as better indicators of experiences and expectations of routine police coercion. A very public case of police violence, dubbed the “Nanguneri Murder Case” in local newspapers, occurred in 1930.³⁷ Chellamuthu Nadar and his wife, Lakshmi, laborers on Ceylon plantations for almost two decades, were briefly visiting India to meet family in their native village in Travancore, a princely state adjoining the southern Madras Presidency. The journey took them through the Tirunelveli district. On alighting from their train at Tirunelveli Junction, they had to take a bus to Nagercoil, the town closest to their village. Their travails began here. They were hustled into a bus, not one of their choosing, by the bus operators. En route, the bus conductor and a constable on board jeered at them for their naivete. The couple tried multiple times to get down, but the constable, Swami Tevar, “employed force” and “handled them roughly,” to prevent them from doing so.³⁸ After a couple of hours, the couple had had enough and dismounted in the bazaar street in Nanguneri town. But their woes continued. A few constables, not on duty and not in uniform, “indulged in acts of petty oppression” for the next five hours, including “pushing and beating” Chellamuthu Nadar.³⁹ “The ringleader in administering violence” was Constable Ramiah Pillai.⁴⁰ A larger crowd of around forty people watched the drama. By this time, the couple, strangers to the region, were terrified. A sub-inspector now intervened to provide the couple accommodation in the police quarters for the night, probably against their will. As they were being taken there, forcefully, Chellamuthu Nadar, who presumably had reached the end of his patience by this time, tried to escape. In the process, he pulled out a knife, fatally stabbing Constable Ramiah Pillai, and inflicting injuries on a couple of others, including a perfectly innocent bystander. Chellamuthu Nadar was charged with murder, but the Tirunelveli Sessions Judge, Chandrasekara Aiyer, acquitted him of all charges. Not stopping with that, the judge unapologetically made the trial a public forum to advocate against police oppression, summing up his judgment in this manner: “I daresay that this case will attract the attention of the proper authorities and lead to a searching departmental investigation into the conduct of the policemen concerned.”⁴¹

It was the escalation of events, the climactic, scandalous occurrence of murder that gave this story of routine police oppression textual presence—whether in contemporary newspapers and governmental records or in later historiography. Here, I do not discuss this final act of murder or the trial that followed it, both unusual events. Instead I focus on the aspects of the case that are represented by its participants as occurring in the normal course of things. For instance, the court's judgment as well as local newspapers highlighted the fact that Chellamuthu Nadar and Lakshmi looked like "illiterate and unsophisticated coolies." In other words, the victims' subalternity took on the explanatory burden for provoking the constables' jeers and force. In addition, witness accounts in court indicated that Chellamuthu Nadar was simpleminded. The validity of this assessment notwithstanding, it was seen as added justification for the treatment Nadar received. The Tirunelveli DSP, J. M. Green, defended the conduct of his men by pointing to Nadar's questionable intelligence, adding for good measure the cultural singularity of the colony and the relative backwardness of the rural as factors that normalized the episode. "It is well known that the treatment of those who are half-witted in this country, is, at any rate, in rural parts, rough and ready and harsh in the extreme. They get very little sympathy or consideration and are generally tied up in a house so that they may not give trouble," he wrote, adding that he considered it "grossly unfair to twist mere uneducated, ill-considered roughness, which, after all, is only the average nature of the country folk, into 'tyranny.'"⁴²

Since Chellamuthu Nadar was the one who stood trial for murder, he is discussed considerably more than is his wife, Lakshmi, in judicial and police records. With that caveat, one persistent narrative in police accounts is that she was the smart wife of a dim-witted man—for instance, that she took the initiative to find accommodation for the night in the police quarters whereas her husband panicked and stabbed the constable. In concluding his judgment, the judge added another perspective to the story, suggesting that the constables plagued the couple because they coveted Lakshmi's jewels, or Lakshmi herself.⁴³ An internal government memo on the affair supported part of the judge's guess: "I doubt very much whether the jewels worn by the woman were in any way responsible for the constables' behaviour. It is more likely that when the suspicions and indecisions of the husband suggested that he was perhaps a half-wit, the possible abduction of his young and personable spouse may have occurred to more than one of them as an appropriate finale to the affair."⁴⁴ The almost indifferent tone

of the government memo stands in contrast to the judge's activist tenor; its very nonchalance, however, alludes to the commonness of sexual assault. Police sexual oppression finds little mention colonial governmental records, as mentioned earlier, but this passing reference suggests that it just did not make its way into written documents.

After 1947: Continuities and Changes

The use of subtle coercion in the course of the policeman's regular beat continued after 1947 but shifts in the state's structure and priorities were reflected in the targets of police surveillance. First, party affiliations became important conduits of authority and, concomitantly, of confrontational politics. Police surveillance was therefore frequently deployed by those in power against their political opponents in the newly formed Madras State. Second, and relatedly, in the years of transition to independence, i.e., the late 1940s, there was intense ideological rivalry between the ruling Congress Party and the opposing Communist Party of India (CPI).⁴⁵ Among other things, the CPI participated in a brief moment of radicalism in agrarian labor, which the Congress Party strove to suppress. Labor struggles were therefore a second target of coercive police surveillance. Finally, and over a longer trajectory, the new democratic, socialist state declared its commitment to gender and caste rights in a way its colonial predecessor had not. Accordingly, sexual offenders and those violating the rights of the lowest castes now entered the police radar as they never had earlier. Through these changes, caste continued to inform the patterns of policing. In part, this stemmed from overlaps between class and caste, since the laboring classes, especially in agriculture, came predominantly from the lowest castes. In part, it stemmed from the specificity of postcolonial politics in Madras province, where caste played a key role in determining party affiliations.

The primary opposition parties to the ruling Congress Party in Madras in the first two decades after independence were the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam and the Communist Party of India (CPI). Governmental and police distrust of the Communist Party arose not only from rivalry over political office but also from larger concerns for social order. Pursuing its commitment to social equality and redistribution, the CPI participated in radical labor politics in the first years after independence, as Shalini Sharma shows.⁴⁶ In contrast, the trauma of the Partition made the maintenance of order a central preoccupation for the young nation and the ruling

Congress Party, which therefore policed labor and the CPI down to the village level. For instance, in 1959, noting hostilities between members of the Congress and CPI over the village *panchayat* elections, the inspector of Vachakarapatti station cautioned his subordinates that the “village need(ed) close and constant watch. The sub-inspector should see that beats are marched to this village on alternative days and should be in touch with leaders of both the parties.”⁴⁷

Policing labor automatically meant policing caste politics. In Chatram Kudiyiruppu village in 1954, when Dalit laborers agitated for better wages and service conditions,

. . . police had to interfere to prevent any untoward incident. The RDO Tirunelveli compromised the landlords and the tenants and they yielded to the decision of the RDO. Though the situation is calm yet there may arise troubles and hence the landlords and the village officers should be contacted every now and then.⁴⁸

As in earlier instances, the prose of counterinsurgency is hard to decipher here, for the text does not specify the precise manner of police “interference.” But the fact that the police were ultimately able to ensure calm and that the concerned parties “yielded” to the RDO’s decision is suggestive of the use of coercion. As is the linguistic slip made by the inspector when he notes that the RDO “compromised” the landlords and laborers, rather than bring about a compromise between them.

Its intolerance of radical class politics notwithstanding, either the compulsions of electoral calculations or the idealism of a new nation engendered some concern for lower-caste rights in independent India. In early 1952, when “feelings got strained” between two communities in Kanarpatti village because Masana Kone “was keeping” a Harijan girl, this relationship between a mid-caste male and a lower-caste female was clearly a sensitive issue at the local police station, involving as it did the sexual politics of caste hierarchy.⁴⁹ Inspector Natarajan warned the parties that they would be bound over, thereby bringing about temporary quiet. A few months later, he wrote that though there was “no trouble between the Harijans and the other caste Hindus . . . the situation need(ed) careful watch by the local police.”⁵⁰ In another instance from 1967, when hostilities erupted between two neighboring hamlets—one dominated by Maravars and the other by Dalits, “beats were served regularly to (both hamlets) to remove the scare from the minds of Harijans.”⁵¹

Routine violence, on occasion, spilled into excess in independent India too. Similar to the first half of the century, this occurred when force was folded into what was seen as the policeman's legitimate function—surveillance in order to prevent crime. The targets of coercive surveillance continued to be from the marginalized sections of the population, specifically poor, lower-caste males. But there were crucial differences. First, coercive surveillance justified itself by targeting certain moral offenders—those who broke liquor prohibition laws and those who harassed women—as much as it did property offenders. Second, party politics was an important arena in which to articulate opposition to excess force, as seen in the example below.

On 1 November 1959, *Kalyana Parisu*, a Tamil hit, was being screened at Shri Ram Talkies in the town of Sivaganga.⁵² It was a Sunday and the day after Deepavali, an important festival. At around 10 p.m., just before the night show was to start, a large crowd had gathered at the venue. From here onward, the narratives as to what happened diverge. According to some, there was a “brutal *lathi* charge” by the police; various witnesses at the inquiry that followed claimed that Sub-Inspector Natarajan and other policemen had hit them with a belt, a stick (*kambu*), an iron rod (*kamb*), and the iron bumper of a bicycle. Quite differently, the magisterial investigation into the affair concluded that “the police party on *bundobust* duty had to employ a little excess force in their anxiety to maintain law and order.”⁵³ Rather than attempting to retrieve “what actually happened,” I examine below how its participants represented the incident toward retrieving routine aspects of police force.

The first issue that arises is categorizing the incident. The Revenue Divisional Officer (RDO) who conducted the inquiry that followed used “Police Torture” as the subject of his report, and quite casually used “torture,” “*lathi* charge,” “beating,” and “assault” in the actual report itself. The Ramanathapuram Collector referred to the incident as an alleged “police assault.” V. R. Mookayya, president of the Sivaganga All-Party Committee, which spearheaded the protest against the incident, simply referred to it as “*sambavam*,” an incident, in his petition to the government. In their defense testimony, the concerned policeman described the occurrence as a “false charge,” reducing the event to a nonevent, a mere judicial fabrication. In the Tamil Nadu Archive, the record is indexed as “*Lathi* Charge Enquiry.” Without reading too much into the actual terms used in each of these records, I suggest that the absence of a clear classificatory term for the incident reflects its murky

legal status. In the maintenance of public order, the use of an unquantifiable “necessary” amount of force is legal, but the moment where this crosses to the illegal end of the spectrum is not definable.⁵⁴ Hence, one defense witness at the magisterial inquiry clarified that the police “did not *lathi* charge the crowd as alleged but simply pushed the people in an attempt to form queues,” as did another, who testified that “the police were simply pushing the crowd this side and that side to ensure that they did not mingle with the females.”⁵⁵ In line with this, the final verdict reached by government after the magisterial inquiry into the incident was one of police “tactlessness” in performing their duty.

Beatrice Jauregui’s rich ethnography of the provisional authority wielded by policemen in contemporary Uttar Pradesh highlights the notion of *jugaad* (making do, improvisation) central to routine police functioning.⁵⁶ In particular, she points to the routinized and collective legitimation of corruption that imbues the exercise of provisional police authority with virtuous agency. But the line between *jugaad* and coercion is a thin one, as Jauregui acknowledges: “The idiom of *jugaad* as virtuosity is a moral game changer, if also a moral danger.”⁵⁷ A legal subject who is unable to strike a deal with her local policeman is vulnerable to police violence. On the other hand, a policeman who is unable to strike a deal with someone more powerful than he is also vulnerable to retaliation. The magisterial inquiry into the *lathi* charge in Sivaganga reveals precisely this everyday dynamic of struggle for authority between policemen and others. The SI argued that some of the prosecution witnesses had had run-ins with him in the past, for a variety of infringements, and that therefore their evidence could not be taken at face value. For instance, he had “reprimanded (PW9, Balakrishnan) several times for keeping benches in front of his tea shop . . . causing obstruction to public and traffic.” Similarly, he had charged PW15, Raju, for keeping cycles in front of his shop. What did these “reprimands” mean? Was Raju running a prosperous cycle shop and ignoring the need for space of women using the street? Alternatively, was Balakrishnan barely making ends meet, so that, unable to afford a license fee or a weekly bribe to run his tea shop, he was exposed to police force? We don’t know. But there were also relatively powerful offenders among the prosecution witnesses—those violating the liquor prohibition in force and those holding local political office. That they may have used criminal procedure to get back at a conscientious policeman by falsely charging him with assault is certainly possible. The specificities of local

machinations leave no trace in the written record, but the tentative nature of everyday policing, which relied on the use of some force against certain vulnerable subjects remains.

For the magisterial inquiry into the alleged assault, the prosecution had lined up twenty witnesses. Just as some of their evidence was dismissed as prejudiced, others' evidence was dismissed as mercenary. Drawing attention to their low-class status, the RDO argued that these witnesses must have been paid to testify: PW1 had no work, PW5 had "no acknowledged means of sustenance whatsoever," PW6 did "coolly work by taking others (sic) goods in his cycle," PW7 was a bus conductor, PW11 was unemployed and owned no property, PW12 "(did) not own any properties. He (took) fish load on his cycle from village to village and earn(ed) a precarious living." And so on. The quick dismissal of the subaltern as lacking politics, and instead driven by narrowly defined economic concerns, begs the question of how she can be heard or receive judicial redress.⁵⁸ Another ground on which the RDO dismissed prosecution witnesses' testimony was that they had "sustained only simple injuries like bruises and scratches and . . . did not attend any hospital for treatment." The judicial process's reliance on the body to stand evidence and its deafness to the subaltern voice is discussed in greater detail in the next section. Here, I point out only that in instances of routine force that left no "adequate" mark on the subaltern victim's body (as opposed to deaths in custody or police shootings), neither the subject's body nor her words could bear witness to her pain.⁵⁹

This is not to say that victims' voices went entirely unheard. Political parties in independent India quickly picked up stories of police oppression and censured any signs of governmental indifference to these stories. In this instance, the Sivaganga All-Party Committee organized a public meeting and a *hartal* in the days following the alleged *lathi* charge. In voicing their disapproval, party members relied not only on victim accounts of coercion but also on rumors in circulation. In his two-page petition to the government demanding action against the accused policemen, Mookayya, president of the All-Party Committee, wrote, "There is a rumour floating around in the town that superior officials, treating this incident as a trivial matter, have decided that no enquiry is required."⁶⁰ To those not in power, police coercion, however routine, could not be overlooked. Equally noteworthy is an assertion made by a prosecution witness, Suyambulingam, member of the local Communist Party, that SI Natarajan (the policeman in this story) was also responsible for the highly controversial police

shooting that had occurred in Mudukulathur (a village about 60 km away) two years earlier.⁶¹ “The SI is not afraid of anybody. It is he who shot at Mudukulathur and he is also going to shoot one or two persons here also (sic),” he said at the inquiry.⁶² The Mudukulathur shooting, which will be discussed in Chapter 5, had triggered statewide concerns about the opacity of police force. Suyambulingam’s remark at the magisterial inquiry, linking the Mudukulathur shooting with the Sivaganga *lathi* charge, is probably treated as an irrelevant digression by the RDO, for the comment does not make its way into his final report. Indeed, the two incidents were quite dissimilar in terms of the preceding context and police procedure that led to violence. But Suyambulingam’s linking of the two episodes points to the ways in which subjects narrativized police force and, specifically, judicial tolerance for police force. In postcolonial India, these narratives functioned as forms of resistance: although disregarded in the judicial process, they were integrated into political discourse. I return to this theme in the next section, in the context of custodial violence in postcolonial India.

Investigating Crime: Force inside the Station

Custodial violence was an unremarkable aspect of state functioning in colonial and postcolonial India, but there were a few moments over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries when the matter attracted special attention from the public and the government. The first was in 1855, toward the end of the East India Company’s regime in India, when the Madras Presidency government faced severe criticism from London about the practice of torture in its territories. Consequently, it appointed a commission to inquire into the matter. The commission’s investigation revealed that torture was systematically practiced in the Madras Presidency, with the connivance of European officials, to two ends: to extract an inordinately high land revenue from peasant cultivators and to extort confessions from suspects in police cases. Soon after the 1855 investigation, the entire police organization in Madras (and across the country) was revamped, a number of procedural reforms were instituted, and concerns about torture became more muted. However, they did not end, and the issue resurfaced in the first two decades of the twentieth century, following the Second Police Commission of 1902. Torture also attracted public attention during the Indian Emergency of 1975–77. Police torture was rampant in these twenty-one months when the political opposition was targeted, the

writ of habeas corpus suspended, and the rights of a free press curbed. Following the infamy of police action during the Emergency, the regulatory landscape of policing in India changed marginally toward restraining the use of force. In this section, I focus on the period between 1900 and 1975, which has received less scholarly attention than the nineteenth century or the post-Emergency era.⁶³ Despite the transition to independence that occurred along the way, this period witnessed considerable consistency in the regulatory landscape pertaining to torture, as the postcolonial government took serious notice of the issue only after the Emergency.⁶⁴

Although both the colonial and postcolonial Madras governments were aware of the prevalence of torture, they participated in a “discourse of denial” which, as Jinee Lokaneeta points out, was essential for maintaining the state’s legitimacy. When the colonial government did acknowledge the existence of torture—typically under political pressure from the British parliament—its politics of denial took the form of presenting torture as a precolonial remnant that would inevitably fade away under enlightened colonial rule. This narrative suffused the 1855 Torture Commission’s report and seeped into governmental writing of the twentieth century as well. Consider, for instance, the assessment of the 1902 National Police Commission:

Actual physical torture is now rarely resorted to; but it is easy, under the conditions of Indian society and having regard to the character of the people, to exercise strong pressure and great cruelty without having recourse to such physical violence as leaves its traces on the body of the victim.⁶⁵

The ambivalence in this sentence on whether torture occurred in British India is partially explained by the “catching up” narrative of colonialism, in which torture was a past practice that the sustained effort of the colonial state was steadily eliminating. It also becomes less confusing when we keep in mind John Parry’s caution on how often debates about torture turn into debates on language, so that the narrower the definition of torture, the less a state is obligated to acknowledge its violence.⁶⁶ Hence, according to the 1902 Commission, “strong pressure and great cruelty” did not amount to torture. In independent India as well, it was usually pressure from the political opposition that forced the provincial government to face the reality of torture. Interestingly, at such moments, government officials attributed police oppression to the continuation of colonial styles of policing,

pointing to steady improvements in police attitudes since independence!⁶⁷ The perpetual politics of denial notwithstanding, torture existed and was spoken about in colonial and postcolonial Madras.

The most common explanation presented by police officials and the press for the prevalence of torture was that policemen used violence to get confessions from criminal suspects. In turn, the colonial policeman's proclivity to extort confessions was attributed to a number of factors, both cultural and rational, including his lack of training and poor pay, Oriental culture more broadly, and misplaced incentives in evaluating policemen. Some commentators saw all of native society as apathetic, its members refusing to cooperate with the police during a criminal investigation, thus necessitating the policeman's reliance on confessions as evidence.⁶⁸ Others focused on the native constable himself—his inadequate training and his presumed cultural proclivity to use violence as a shortcut in his investigations, remarking that “the police officer, owing to want of detective ability or to indolence, directs his efforts to procure confessions by improper inducement, by threats and by moral pressure.”⁶⁹ In addition to these presumed cultural factors, the 1902 Commission also addressed institutional defects, noting that policemen succumbed to extorting confessions because they needed to show good results in investigations in order to get promoted.

In the colonial government's understanding, then, the policeman, propelled by his cultural otherness and incentivized by a flawed assessment system, used torture to gain confessions and solve cases. Accordingly, over the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a stream of regulatory measures focused on a) making the confession ineffectual in conviction, b) disconnecting police performance evaluation from conviction statistics, and c) restricting the conditions under which a confession could be extorted. The Indian Evidence Act of 1872 decreed that a confession by an accused person would be irrelevant in a criminal proceeding if it appeared to have been obtained through coercion.⁷⁰ Furthermore, it specifically disallowed the use of any confession made in police custody, unless it had been made in the presence of a magistrate.⁷¹ In parallel, the Madras government passed numerous orders forbidding courts to accept confessions made to policemen as evidence. The very frequency with which these orders were circulated in the nineteenth century suggests that they did not have much impact on the occurrence of torture. Since magisterial confessions, unlike police confessions, could be used as evidence, and the government feared that the policeman could intimidate the prisoner into confessing in front

of the magistrate, regulations were also passed to limit which magistrates could record confessions and how such confessions should be recorded.⁷² In another attempt to discourage policemen from extorting confessions, the government stopped evaluating their performance based on the number of cases they had successfully detected. Apart from reducing the judicial and remunerative worth of the confession, the government also sought to police the police more closely. Legal codes and executive orders set out in detail the procedure to be followed by a policeman in arresting a criminal suspect. Notably, the police were allowed a maximum of twenty-four hours in the station to interrogate the suspect in order to determine whether he could be charged with an offense.⁷³ The proscription of police confessions and the twenty-four-hour limit on custody were specific to the colonial context, tools to curb use of violence by a police force seen as culturally prone to it. Significantly, these rules deviated from contemporary English criminal procedure, which had no set guidelines on the permissible duration of police detention of criminal suspects at the station or on the evidentiary value of police confessions.⁷⁴

The colonial government's position on torture thus largely focused on the native constable and his investigatory practices, making them perpetual objects of colonial pedagogy. This narrative of the untrained constable did not end in 1947; it was merely reincarnated as the narrative of the underpaid constable. The persistence of this image of torture as individual error had multiple representational consequences. Under colonial rule, it was a racialized narrative that distanced the colonial state from the native constable, exculpating the alien regime of its violence and shifting that burden on to native actors.⁷⁵ But torture was not unique to the colonial state. The representation of torture as individual departure from the law served to hide the scaffolding of violence on which sovereign power rested in colonial and independent India alike. It assumed a clear line separating the agent of violence—the policeman—from the abstract institution he represented—state law. Because the force of law was embodied in its spaces and its actors, police custodial violence *was* legal violence. The inequality of power between state and suspect in the space of custody made torture possible. The invisibility of that space to the public eye made judicial sanction near impossible. But to say that torture was illegal, though hard to punish, does not fully capture the problem of the persistence of custodial violence. Jinee Lokaneeta points out that an undue preoccupation with the police—whether at the institutional or at the individual level—distracts us from

the extent to which jurisprudence itself is “ambivalent toward the infliction of pain and suffering in the context of interrogations.”⁷⁶ She contends that violence is not simply a consequence of the gap between legal theory and police practice; rather, the liberal state is unable to contain excess violence even at the level of jurisprudence.

But jurisprudence’s justification of police violence in the service of a specific and desired end, i.e., acquiring information, is itself disingenuous. Unpacking the historical and cultural specificity that marks the seemingly universal category of torture, Talal Asad notes that modern hostility is not to pain in general but to pain that is perceived as excessive or gratuitous. Accordingly, “treating pain as a quantifiable essence,” liberal states defend their use of violence by calibrating the amount of pain “required” to secure information, terming only anything in excess of that quantity as torture.⁷⁷ Even as the narrative of the errant constable seeks to deflect attention away from state violence, its utilitarian framing of torture as a calculated transaction—one where the policeman expended violence *toward* retrieving information, getting a conviction, and so forth—aligns (albeit uncomfortably) with this broader, jurisprudential framing of torture as necessary, rational state violence.⁷⁸ But the oft-repeated rationality of violent interrogation—whether at the level of the individual policeman or at the level of an abstract state—is questionable. The 1855 inquiry into torture in Madras concluded that policemen used torture to extract revenue and extort confessions—a rational explanation. But Douglas Peers’ analysis of this report makes the suggestive point that there was a paradox between “the low rate of convictions (and) the frequent use of torture.”⁷⁹ A government inquiry into torture from 1912 made a similarly revealing observation, that “in none of the cases (of torture) were confessions recorded by the police.”⁸⁰ Factors such as conviction rates are, in fact, quite inadequate to explain custodial violence, which was often irrational and excessive. In her study of torture, Elaine Scarry observes that the seeking of information, which “masquerades as the motive for torture is a fiction.” Rather, she argues that “a perceptual shift . . . converts the vision of suffering into the wholly illusory but, to the torturers and the regime they represent, wholly convincing spectacle of power.”⁸¹ Torture, then, is not merely an attempt to retrieve information, an unacceptable means to a necessary end; it is as much a performance of power. Marked as it is by “apparent lack of intention and moderation,” torture manifests sovereign power.⁸²

Seeing torture as a performance of state power rather than as individual error also helps blur the line between (legally ambivalent) police violence inside the station and (legally sanctioned) police violence outside the station. In practice, both forms of violence frequently drew on similar discourses that upheld hierarchies of class, caste, and gender to criminalize subaltern politics. Biases of caste, class, and gender were evident every step of the way in an occurrence of torture—in determining which cases triggered police investigation, who was retained in the station for violent interrogation, who was able to file a case against the police for custodial violence, and how the courts treated the victims of torture. Torture was by no means a contextless ragbag of isolated acts committed by errant individuals. It was systemic violence that relied on state power and social inequality.

Consider a case of custodial violence from 1917, occurring in the course of police investigation into a case of theft reported from a village in the Tirunelveli district. After a preliminary visit to the village, Sub-Inspector Subramaniya Ayyar and a few other constables proceeded to a neighboring village, where they established themselves in the house of a local man, Subba Naicker. The policemen had three women brought to the house, confined them there for a couple of days, and “ill-treated (them); that is to say their ears were twisted; they were slapped on the cheek; their fingers were twisted; they were made to inhale chilly fumes etc.”⁸³ According to some witnesses, including the women themselves, the police also beat them with a cane, a shoe, “knocked (Veerammal’s) head to the wall,” and “tied a string round the right breast of Lakshmi and on her raising a cry, the pressure was removed.”⁸⁴ The fact that the police were interrogating suspects not in the station but in someone’s house was not unusual. Annual police reports from colonial Madras routinely listed statistics of the number of policemen admonished for “wrongful confinement” of suspects. The issue of executive orders explicitly targeting wrongful confinement also suggests that the practice was common.⁸⁵ The prevalence of wrongful confinement directs our attention away from the narrative of the untrained constable as sole explanation for torture. Instead, the dispersion of torture across socially privileged spaces indicates its links to the ownership of private property, and sheds light on the imbrication of state authority in social hierarchies.

The choice of suspects brought in for questioning in this instance points to the workings of gendered power. The three women—Chellathai, Lakshmi and Veerammal—were the wife, sister, and cousin (and allegedly

concubine), respectively, of one Muthusamy Naick, ostensibly the real target of police ire. In the judicial trial into police torture that followed, the explicit narrative framing the entire case was one of conflict between two village factions. In this framing, the case was presented either as one where 1) the police, siding with faction A, had used coercion to foist a charge of theft on faction B, or as one where 2) faction B, realizing that the police knew of their guilt in the theft, had foisted a charge of torture on the police. In both versions, legal subjects associated torture with intimidation, not with information-seeking. Significantly, the real or fabricated target of police intimidation in this case was not the target of police investigation. The man Muthusamy Naick was being investigated; his wife, sister, and female cousin were being intimidated. Torture here was an act of power targeting subaltern subjects, not a technique in interrogation.

On the first evening of the women's confinement, one of them, Chelathai, was allowed to go home as she had left her three-month-old child there. She spent the night with her child and was brought back to the site of confinement the next morning. This arbitrary act of kindness might speak to the confidence of police and caste authority, in that the Brahmin Sub-Inspector Ayyar was able to summon Chellathai back to a space of known subordination. It could speak to the ordinariness of police violence, in the ease with which it integrated itself into the routines of everyday life, such as feeding an infant. In addition, Thomas Blom Hansen writes that "insofar as sovereignty is constituted by the capacity for excessive violence, abstaining from violence, or acts of generosity toward subjects, become perceived as equally excessive and lacking in rationality . . . (adding) to the mystical aura of sovereign power that also underpins the actions of the modern state."⁸⁶ The policeman here was not merely investigating crime, he was enacting sovereign authority. Importantly, this was sovereign power that stemmed from Subramania Ayyar's role *as* a police inspector, as an agent of law enforcement. In the trial that followed, Subramania Ayyar was acquitted of violence, and sentenced only to three months' simple imprisonment for wrongful confinement. Even this mild sentence was overturned by Judge Walsh of the appellate court in Madras city. Ayyar's acquittal was not unusual. Given that police violence always occurred in a confined space, invisible to outsiders, colonial evidentiary protocol discounted subject testimony in cases of custodial violence. Instead, as will be discussed soon, it privileged medical reports, which could never prove beyond reasonable doubt that the police had caused violence.

Ayyar's case was unexceptional in its acquittal of the accused policeman as well as in its use of torture to display power rather than to recover information. Most instances of custodial violence recorded from the southern districts in the colonial period as well as in the first two decades after independence occurred on the heels of minor crimes that did not demand urgent or complex investigation.⁸⁷ In some instances, police violence appears to have been purely punitive. Inasmuch as torture was performance of power rather than a shortcut to investigation, the objects of police violence were largely from marginalized sections of colonial and postcolonial society. Women, children, the poor, and the low-caste appear most often in accounts of torture. (Significantly, in one of the few cases I found where the charge of torture was proved in court, the complainant was "a respectable resident of the village," owning five acres of land.⁸⁸) Consider a police investigation from 1923 that resulted in a custodial death.⁸⁹ Sub-Inspector Sundaram Iyer and Constable Subramania Ayyar suspected one Vellasami Kone in the murder of a Nadar woman of Uppathur village in the Ramanaapuram district. They also suspected that Vellasami Kone's servant, Mariappa Samban, a Christian Dalit, had played a secondary part in the murder. Police efforts at coercion over the next few days targeted Mariappa Samban more than they did his higher-caste employer. (Mariappa Samban's political leanings, evidenced by his attendance at an Adi-Dravida conference, likely swelled local and police grievance against him). Apart from targeting Mariappa Samban, the police threatened his relatives too. Upon discovering that Mariappa Samban was away at a wedding during the initial investigation, they told his relatives that "they would be put to a lot of trouble if they did not secure the presence of Mariappan." Accordingly, "in order to avoid the troubles of the police, (they) brought Mariappan . . . and handed him over to the police constable Subramania Ayyar."⁹⁰ The wording in a related magisterial report into Mariappa Samban's custodial death is suggestive:

Three of them, Santhyavu, Mookan, and Arulappan (father of the deceased Mariappa), further state that they were compelled by the Ayyar constable, under threat of being beaten and molested, to produce Mariappa before them.⁹¹

This paraphrasing of the testimony is explicit about how exactly the police threatened Mariappa Samban's relatives—with use of force on their

bodies. It also indicates how the Dalits of Uppathur village referred to the concerned policeman, i.e., as “the Ayyar constable.” It is unlikely that “Ayyar” here refers to the constable’s last name (which also happens to be Ayyar); rather, Ayyar is a colloquial way of referring to any Brahmin male. In the Dalit subject’s narration of the event, the “Ayyar constable” held the power. Only the policeman’s occupation and caste mattered, not his individual identity. This reading fits police violence into larger structures of societal inequality, directly countering narratives that portray torture as individual error. True to Mariappa Samban’s relatives’ concern that the constable’s coercion was backed by judicial authority, the trial that followed exonerated both policemen of all charges. To achieve this favorable outcome in a case where the cards were stacked against him, Sub-Inspector Sundaram Iyer deployed an array of tools to which he had privileged access as a high-caste officer of the state: these included legal literacy, connections with members of the local judiciary, and, possibly, coercion of other witnesses who could testify to his innocence in court.

Subject-citizens’ understanding that the person inflicting bodily violence acted as an official of the state is suggested also by the recurrent use of the term “booted leg” in accounts of police torture through the twentieth century. Boots are not commonly worn in India, least of all in the southern Madras Presidency, where the weather is invariably hot. More to the point, most constables in colonial Madras wore only sandals, not boots. Yet the word, which has no Tamil equivalent, makes an appearance, untranslated, in Tamil accounts of police violence as much as in reports written in English. The policeman’s boots—like his attire, his turban, and the station house—represented the coercive power of the state in the person of the policeman. Thus, one victim of custodial violence claimed in 1929 that the policeman “pressed his chest with his boots.”⁹² While visiting a suspect’s house in 1955, the Sub-Inspector apparently kicked another “in his stomach (sic) with his boots.”⁹³ In 1967, Sanjeevi testified that a Sub-Inspector had “kicked him with his booted leg on his back.”⁹⁴ And in 1973 the Communist Party’s Tamil newspaper carried a piece that underlined the excess in police violence, epitomized by the absent boot.

Comrades Sundararaj and Krishnan, hailing from M. Pethanthi village near Virudhunagar, were walking down the by-pass road. The police Sub-Inspector and five policemen beat him right there *with a furious rage*. When Sundararaj questioned the police as to why they

were beating them *without reason*, all the policemen together attacked him and *pressed on him with their booted legs*. Unable to bear this attack, Comrade Sundararaj fainted. Immediately they took him in a rickshaw to the police station. There too, they *attacked him terribly*. He was gravely injured on various parts of his body. His fingers were *terribly wounded because of being tepped on with booted legs*.⁹⁵

Punishing/Protesting Custodial Violence

Although custodial violence was criminalized by the colonial and post-colonial governments, its perpetrators seldom received judicial penalty, for multiple reasons. First, filing a case against a policeman was no easy matter, especially for a subaltern subject. The process, which entailed filing reports, seeking governmental sanction to prosecute the policeman, and generally wading through bureaucratic red tape, required legal literacy, political muscle, and financial stability. The provincial government did try to address several of these issues over the course of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: it shifted the investigating agency away from the police toward the magistracy and the judiciary, it urged the magistracy to expedite the inquiry process, and it sought to make investigation automatic rather than requiring a complaint from the victim. But even if a case of custodial violence did reach the criminal court, another obstacle made judicial redress almost unattainable: the space of custody was invisible to the judicial process through the lens of evidentiary protocol. In a society perceived as culturally prone to perjury, colonial courts privileged “scientific” medical evidence over witness testimony, and scientific evidence rarely proved the use of police force beyond reasonable doubt. This evidentiary problem survived well into the postcolonial period and was addressed only in the 1990s.

Technically, the only witnesses to custodial violence were the torturer, the victim, and his/her body. Admittedly, the native constable was not trusted as a credible witness, but courts paid even less regard to the voice of his victims, who were inevitably subaltern. Only the evidence offered by the body was considered impartial in the judicial court. Accordingly, through court rulings and executive orders, magistrates, judges, police officers, and government officials steadily reinforced the dominant status of medical evidence during the late nineteenth century.⁹⁶ By the early twentieth century, the primacy of medical testimony in attesting to torture had

been consolidated. Yet ironically, the body almost consistently failed to provide judicial proof of the violence it had endured. Medical evidence failed to corroborate allegations of torture in all but one of the dozen cases I came across in the archives, pronouncing “simple injuries” (when the victim survived the torture) or “death by asphyxiation” (when she did not).⁹⁷ Sometimes, the victim survived to provide testimony in court; sometimes there were even eyewitnesses to the violence (when a policeman hit his victim in the station veranda, when there were other arrestees inside the station, etc.). Even so, courts routinely dismissed the testimony of victims, their friends, and family, in favor of medical evidence. As late as the 1970s and 1980s, Lokaneeta writes, the Supreme Court “often disbelieved and delegitimized narratives of torture by unduly focusing on ‘inconsistencies’ in the stories of what the Court termed ‘shady’ and ‘unreliable’ characters.”⁹⁸ This was not simply a judicial preference for objective evidence; it was insidious bias against the subaltern extending from police violence to police exoneration.

Ironically, although the claims of victims who survived custodial violence were frequently dismissed, the victim’s voice had a better chance of being heard in cases of custodial death. Police torture usually intended to hurt, not to kill, since a death left the policeman with a body on his hands and the prospect of punitive proceedings. But if violence turned out to be fatal, staged suicides were the standard way of avoiding controversy.⁹⁹ They gave the victim the guise of voice and displaced the agency for the violence from the state to its subject—at least in the governmental and judicial record. One instance from the archive indicates a subaltern appropriation of this tactic of redirecting the agency for violence. Around 2:30 a.m. on 28 November 1923, a constable found a man hanging dead from the neem tree in the compound of the Sholavandan police station in Madurai.¹⁰⁰ The man, who had been registered under the Criminal Tribes Act of 1911 had, according to the rules, reported himself at the police station that night, but then fallen asleep in the station veranda instead of returning home. The police inquest the next day returned a verdict of suicide, based partly on the testimony of local *panchayatdars* that the deceased had had a disagreement with his concubine. The postmortem confirmed the inquest finding of death by hanging, and “no suspicion of foul play was elicited.”¹⁰¹ A letter was later found in the clothing of the deceased, indicating that he had planned to commit suicide. The story ends there, somewhere inconclusively. The man, unnamed in the government report, may in truth have

killed himself after a quarrel with his concubine. But if so, why did he choose to do it within the premises of the police station? The harsh policing of criminal tribe members, including the requirement to report all their movements to the police, has been commented upon both by contemporary critics and in the historiography. The protagonist of this story did achieve some retribution for this unremitting surveillance through his act of dying. Anti-colonial nationalists created a fuss and called for an explanation for his death from the government. In addition, “there was a lot of vague talk and obstruction to the holding of the inquest.”¹⁰² And although they were ultimately exonerated, the police were called upon by the Madras government to give an account of the events.

Unlike courts, which were hampered by evidentiary protocol and assumptions about subaltern character, colonial and postcolonial publics could and did recognize the occurrence of torture. Sometimes this was simply because they had witnessed the violence. To cite just one among several examples, when Chellathai, Lakshmi, and Veerammal were confined by the police in a villager’s house in 1917, neighbors heard their cries and saw them being beaten from across the courtyard of the house and from the road.¹⁰³ Presumably, in most cases of custodial violence, bystanders and neighbors, relatives and friends of victims, discussed what had occurred. But neighborhood conversations did not end there; instead, they merged into “a lot of vague talk” (as in the incident mentioned above) and rumors of torture that circulated more widely, so that a subject-citizen’s inability to see torture did not mean she did not know about it. To the contrary, as Michael Taussig writes in the context of torture in the Latin American rubber plantations, narrative strategies played an important role in mediating a culture of torture: “It is in the coils of rumor, gossip, story, and chit-chat where ideology and ideas become emotionally powerful and enter into active social circulation and meaningful existence.”¹⁰⁴ To the colonial government, however, rumor and gossip only diminished the facticity of allegations of custodial violence. Consider two appeal petitions that the Madras government received in 1901 from convicts claiming that they had confessed to murder under police duress.¹⁰⁵ One convict, Nallama Naick, wrote, “4 or 5 constables threw me down, tied my legs and hands, and drove needles into my nails. They burnt the wound caused by the bill hook.” The other, Periyakaruppan Asari, professed a strikingly similar fate, claiming that the police had taken him to a room, driven needles into his nails, burnt his leg with a firebrand, and cut his little finger in order to make him admit

to the crime. The two crimes had occurred at places a hundred miles apart, but both prisoners had spent time, while waiting for their appeal, in the same jail. The police dismissed the allegations of torture, asserting that it was “a reasonable presumption that the charges were suggested to them in the jail.”¹⁰⁶ Government officials wondered whether it was “a regular ‘trick of the trade’ on the part of the petition writers” that caused such allegations to be consistently made in appeal petitions. Whether the allegations were true or false, whether they had been suggested by professional petition writers or not, the fact remains that people spoke about police torture, and in ways that foregrounded excess state violence on the body.

Conversations about torture were not limited to gossip and rumor in colonial Madras. Nationalist newspapers railed against custodial violence and legislators occasionally spoke about it. But such instances were rare and limited to urban spaces; more importantly, the colonial government was not answerable either to the newspapers or to legislators. In independent India, in contrast, speaking about police force was an important avenue of political participation enabling victims of police violence to seek restitution—not in the judicial courts but through political channels. In particular, parties in the political opposition used instances of police violence to question the legitimacy of the party in power. CPI leaders regularly held public meetings and published news items protesting instances of custodial death.¹⁰⁷ In 1959, when Andi Kudumban, a Dalit agrarian laborer died in custody, his nephew sent a telegram to the Minister of Harijan Welfare to demand an inquiry into his uncle’s death.¹⁰⁸ In 1967, when Sanjeevi, a 25-year old DMK cadre member was assaulted in his local station, he petitioned a member of the Madras Legislative Assembly, who, in turn, sent a letter to the Chief Minister of the state, complaining about the violence he had endured.¹⁰⁹

These actions, whether of registering a complaint with the bureaucracy or of creating political noise, did not happen in a vacuum. They drew on popular forms of politics, specifically, on the rumors and “vague talk” dismissed so easily by colonial authorities. In independent India, as tales of police torture entered popular conversation, they gained political and juridical meaning. Friends, relatives, politicians and, sometimes, perfect strangers escalated cases of custodial violence to the government on hearing conversations about them in public spaces. Andi Kudumban’s nephew heard of his arrest from bystanders at the village tea shop from which his uncle had been apprehended by the police, and then sent a telegram to

the government to inquire into the death. When Nagarathinam was eating breakfast at a restaurant, “he heard people talking about a boy called Mani died (sic) due to the beating of the Sub-Inspector of Melur.”¹¹⁰ He then met with Mani’s mother, at whose request he sent telegrams to numerous senior police and magisterial officers. The fact that he was getting his breakfast—“taking tiffin in a hotel” in the local idiom—when he heard about the affair is not irrelevant; “taking tiffin” was an occasion and a (male) space of everyday socialization. In postcolonial India, politics was not limited to newspapers or legislative chambers; rather, less elite spaces like the tea shop and the corner restaurant were crucial sites where people spoke about state authority.

Wayside chitchat could also engender more radical politics than telegrams to government officials. News of custodial deaths spread rapidly in the neighborhood of police stations, causing angry crowds to gather in protest. Construction workers who saw the policeman beat Andi Kudumban immediately ran to inform the village *Panchayat* president. The word spread and soon a large crowd gathered outside the police station. When Veerabhadran, a handcart vendor from Theni town, was arrested for petty theft in June 1969, his family and others in the town heard that he was being tortured. Two days later, he was found dead near the station, his body bruised (indicating torture), an empty bottle of pesticide near him (suggesting a staged suicide). The news “spread like wildfire”; people gathered outside the station to protest the killing and demand punishment for the policemen. The two policemen in the station called for armed backup who, on arrival, fired at the crowd, leaving one dead and several injured.¹¹¹ In 1971, when Chinnaperumal, accused in a burglary case, was declared to have committed suicide in a Tirunelveli police lockup, a crowd of 500 people demanded a confrontation with the constables responsible for the death; this incident also ended with a *lathi* charge and police fire.¹¹² The extent of popular conversation about police violence witnessed in the 1960s and 1970s does not just put paid to colonial assumptions about apathetic natives, it indicates the functioning of a very participatory democracy. In a landmark 1996 judgment on custodial violence, the Supreme Court introduced an “arrest memo” to be signed by a witness at the time of arrest in order to circumvent the opacity around the process. Lokaneeta points out that in introducing this safeguard, the Court indirectly acknowledged “that an incident of custodial death and torture became an issue only when the public protested against it.”¹¹³

The emergence of new avenues to voice grievances notwithstanding, there were limits to who could exploit them. In particular, men had better access to the politics of public spaces, and relatedly, to the political connections required to expedite inquiries. For instance, it was Andi Kudumban's nephew, a member of the local Harijan Welfare Association, who pressured officials to institute a case against the concerned policeman. In contrast, Andi's wife played almost no role in the proceedings that followed his death. The magisterial officer who inquired into the case summed up her deposition, and her minimal role in the events pertaining to her husband's death, as follows: "Witness 3 is the wife of the deceased . . . stated that the deceased went for picking cotton on 28-3-59 morning. She later heard that the policemen took him and her husband was dead."¹⁴ Likewise, Mani's mother did not herself demand an inquiry into her son's death. Mani was fatherless, and it was Nagarathinam, a (male) resident of the town who, though not related to Mani in any obvious way, sent a telegram to the government demanding an inquiry.

Exerting pressure on the government machinery could only expedite a magisterial or judicial inquiry into a case of custodial violence; it could not guarantee an outcome favorable to victims or their families. More often than not, courts continued to rely on medical evidence to acquit the accused policemen. After the postmortem, Andi Kudumban's family refused to take his body for burial, and the village headman had to perform this task. This is mentioned in the magisterial report simply as a procedural detail, perhaps to explain what had been done with the body. But why did the family refuse to take their husband's, father's, uncle's body? Can this act be read as a protest against the death and the futile inquiry that followed it? If so, it was a poignant protest, for it exposed the fact that Andi's body held little ability to obtain justice for him.

Conclusion

The transition to independence by no means ended the display of sovereign violence by the police. The Indian Emergency only brought the issue—especially custodial violence—under a harsher spotlight. The number of recorded deaths in police custody in Tamil Nadu was six in 1974, ten in 1975, and ten in 1976.¹⁵ There was thus a rise in police violence during the Emergency months, but this was not a binary shift from nonviolent law to violent lawlessness. Sovereign violence was woven into routine law enforcement,

and did not occur only in exceptional periods when the rule of law was suspended. It occurred in colonial and independent India; it occurred inside and outside the police station. This chapter has framed everyday acts of police violence as a performance of state authority rather than as individual failing on the part of policemen: whether occurring lawfully, outside the station, or less lawfully, inside the station, violence occurred in the performance of routine police tasks. Policemen exercised their authority *as* agents of the state, rarely facing judicial penalty for use of force. Records of oral narratives also suggest that subject-citizens perceived police violence as state violence rather than as acts of oppression by isolated individuals.

Less noticed forms of violence, such as those examined in this chapter, targeted segments of the population already marginalized by virtue of race, class, caste, gender, or political affiliation. The routine performance of sovereign violence repeatedly helped redraw the axes of power along which society was divided, in colonial and postcolonial India alike. When subject-citizens were less marginalized, or more politicized, the state needed to invoke emergency provisions explicitly to maintain order. I discuss this in the next two chapters.

PART II

Policing Popular Politics



“Unlawful Assembly” in Colonial Madras

We, as British Government, cannot certainly be accused of limiting the right of public meetings, freedom of speech and freedom of right in the press. I do not suppose that any other country in the world would hold such liberal views—views as liberal as we do in these respects. What happens when there is an abuse of such rights? We have seen it constantly happen. . . . it seems to me that we have got to make the public realise that if they choose to abuse the rights that we have given them, if they chose to defy constituted authority and to set at defiance law and order, they have got to pay for it. It is very objectionable but it is necessary.¹

THE DATE WAS 1 APRIL 1908, the speaker the Governor of Madras. He was addressing a small delegation of Indians from the southern towns of Tirunelveli and Thoothukudi. The “objectionable but necessary” action the Governor was referring to had occurred a couple of weeks earlier, when the Madras police had fired on nationalist processions in both towns, killing four persons and wounding many others.² The government argued that the shooting was justified because its colonial subjects had abused their right to public assembly: in Thoothukudi they had refused to disperse when commanded to, and in Tirunelveli they had burned records in multiple government offices. In addition to firing on the gatherings, the government had stationed extra police forces in both towns in order to prevent recurrences of such incidents. The cost of the additional police would be shouldered by the inhabitants of the towns through a levy, called the “punitive police tax.” The purpose of the Indian delegation was to seek exemption from the tax by arguing that the towns were normally peaceful and did not require extra policing. The delegation was not successful in its efforts: the punitive police forces were quartered in the towns for six months, at the end of which a permanent addition was made to the district’s armed police reserves to preserve order in the future. Extra, armed policing had become part of the landscape in a region that had expressed protest.

Although the British Indian government proclaimed the right to public debate and assembly, its practice of liberal principles was always limited by the fact that it was a regime of conquest.³ Drawing upon an Orientalist perception of popular assemblies as impulsive and potentially violent, the police routinely criminalized and suppressed certain public gatherings, even when they were peaceful and abided by the law. The Madras police's tolerance of public assembly depended considerably on the nature of the assembly: its size, its demands, and the general political climate. If local governmental authorities interpreted an assembly as a challenge to state authority or to public order, they deployed one of many policing mechanisms to simply prevent it or, failing that, to quell it. By resorting to a spectrum of policing measures, the colonial government maintained public order amid popular protest, not just by responding to moments of violence but more continuously.

This chapter, set in colonial Madras, deals with the popular politics that confronted state, caste, or class authority in public spaces to become direct objects of police control. Villagers and town dwellers periodically congregated on streets, in marketplaces and parks, at magisterial offices and courthouses, and outside factories and textile mills, for various reasons: members of a community celebrated a festival lavishly to assert their social status, laborers demanded higher wages or better hours, nationalists protested against foreign rule. The public gatherings that I discuss generally conformed to the law and to norms of civic engagement. They may be classified under what Ranajit Guha called "Rightful Dissent," which he describes as the idiom of resistance derived from British political traditions: leaders spoke, audiences listened, and processions marched. "There was an awareness, in this idiom, of the legal and constitutional limits imposed by the colonial authorities on its articulation."⁴ Yet even when public assemblies adhered to constitutional forms, they caused anxiety to colonial authorities. In colonial writing, mass gatherings were usually indistinguishable from "crowds," which were perceived as nonpolitical, manipulable, and prone to irrational violence.⁵

The fear of the crowd translated to legal and police practice. Magistrates could pass temporary executive orders that bypassed due process and preemptively limited subjects' right to public assembly. This provision, enabled by Section 144 of the Code of Criminal Procedure of 1898 (CCP), was used frequently in colonial Madras to prevent the articulation of demands. Likewise, the Police Act of 1861 allowed the police to circumscribe

the route and timing of a procession, monitor it, or simply disallow it if they expected it to cause a breach of the peace. Application of these preemptive legal provisions sometimes curbed protest; however, at other times, it pushed protest into a space of more confrontational politics that was policed through use of direct force. A public gathering that took place in violation of preemptive orders was automatically categorized as “an unlawful assembly.” Further, *any* assembly of more than five that threatened the peace, in the assessment of the police and magistracy, could be declared an unlawful assembly and dispersed by an indeterminate amount of force, including police fire. Finally, in the aftermath of a confrontation, the colonial government could station additional armed police forces in areas it deemed to be “in a disturbed or dangerous state.”⁶ These forces acted as conspicuous signs of state authority and subdued protest for extended periods of time. All of these policing mechanisms shared characteristics reminiscent of state action in times of emergency: they were justified by the rationale of necessity; they were deployed not by legal process but by executive decisions; they were temporary measures, justifiable only so long as it was “necessary” to deploy them; and they involved the use of force.⁷ The continual use of exceptional policing mechanisms to monitor popular politics sheds light on the violence of “normal” legal authority in colonial India.

Even as the colonial government’s response to public assembly moved between tolerance and outright violence, popular expressions of resistance veered between “Rightful Dissent” and more violent forms of protest. People who had gathered in protest occasionally showered stones on policemen, attacked other adversaries, or burned shops and government offices. These moments of protest were labeled “riots” and were put down by police or military force. But the riot was not an impulsive moment of insanity, nor was it a regression to premodern political forms. Historians of modern South Asia have explored the politics of communal and nationalist riots to throw light on their imbrication in modern forms of politics, their complex prehistory that involved a variety of social, economic, and ideological factors, and the *mentalités* of the rioters.⁸ In line with this literature, this chapter stretches the moment of the riot to study its pre- and post-history. Here, I focus more on the *forms* of rioting that were constituted in a long-drawn-out relationship to colonial policing than on the substantive politics of the rioters. In his study of the policing of mass demonstrations in modern democracies, P. A. J. Waddington observes the shift in the forms of industrial conflict in England, from stoning and shooting in the late

nineteenth century to less confrontational interaction by the early twentieth century. This shift occurred as forms of protest became more institutionalized—protestors gathered in designated streets, at certain hours, and limited themselves to peaceful protest; equally, the police became more tolerant of such institutionalized protest. Waddington attributes these shifts to the political system's ability to incorporate different groups and issues into institutional channels, and contrasts this situation with those that obtained in the British colonies, "where the established social, political, and economic institutions (were) perceived to be under threat . . . (to) encourage more confrontational methods of public order policing."⁹ The pages that follow describe the colonial state's fragile tolerance of institutionalized forms of protest in twentieth-century India, and the ways in which mass politics moved into the confrontational terrain of riots and police shootings.

Consider, for instance, the riots and police shootings in the adjoining towns of Tirunelveli and Thoothukudi, with which I began this chapter. The riots took place on 13 March 1908. But the interaction between the inhabitants of the towns and the police had commenced at least two weeks earlier, and was to continue for several more months. Beginning in late February, both towns had witnessed heightened political activity. The Congress-led nationalist movement had entered its Extremist phase in the Madras Presidency: Bipin Chandra Pal was touring Madras; Subramania Siva, a local nationalist hero had just risen to fame; and V. O. Chidambaram Pillai, another Congress nationalist from the region, was voicing his protest against British monopoly in trade. In a related chain of events, the labor movement had also intensified, partly triggered by the speeches of V. O. C. Pillai and Subramania Siva.¹⁰ On 27 February, over a thousand workers at a Thoothukudi textile mill went on strike. As soon as the District Magistrate received notice of the strike, he sent for extra police protection for the town. The police forces arrived that very afternoon. That same afternoon the District Magistrate also passed an order under Section 144 of the CCP prohibiting public meetings of any sort in Thoothukudi. The use of Section 144 was a preemptive move against the escalation of protest in a vibrant political climate which threatened the authority of the colonial government. The next morning when the magistrate toured the town, he decided that it appeared quiet—"even the strikers had not shown any symptoms of being disturbed in their minds."¹¹ He therefore rescinded the Section 144 order. Over the next few days, nationalist meetings were held in both Thoothukudi and Tirunelveli. Meanwhile, the strike, which had lasted almost ten

days, ended on 7 March when the management made a few concessions to the workers' demands regarding wages. On the 8th, V. O. C. Pillai gave a rousing public address condemning the bans imposed on his nationalist activities by the colonial government. The next day in Tirunelveli there was to be a procession carrying Bipin Chandra Pal's portrait. However, in light of the heightened political temper that followed V.O.C.'s speech, the magistrate passed an order restraining the procession. A loyalist subject's account of events a few days later illuminates the balancing act performed by the government between allowing subjects' right to public assembly and suppressing protest. Even though there had been absolutely no popular violence at this point, the apprehension that "people might get out of control" appeared reasonable to this writer, as seen below.

It was a matter of some concern to Mr. Wynch (*the District Magistrate*) . . . whether a large number of persons should go in procession on that day. It was decided that that should be stopped, not that there was an objection to a procession as such, but that a large procession like that should not take place at that time when several speeches had been delivered, at a time when reasonable apprehensions were entertained that people might get out of control. . . .¹²

The prohibition on public assembly was only temporary. Public meetings and processions were resumed in both towns on the 10th and 11th: a peaceful procession of 700–1,000 people welcomed V. O. C. Pillai to Thoothukudi (from Tirunelveli) on the 10th, shouting "Vande Mataram" as they passed through the streets. In Tirunelveli, small meetings were held in the riverbed, attended by 300–500 people. These meetings proceeded peacefully until the next act of policing. This happened on the 12th, when V. O. C. Pillai was taken into preventive police custody under the security sections of the CCP. It was at this moment that the temper of protest suddenly quickened. On the 13th, the shops in the bazaars in both towns were shut; those that did not close voluntarily were forced to by nationalists. The mill workers went back on strike. The police made twenty to thirty preventive arrests in the course of the day. Some prominent residents of Thoothukudi called for a public meeting on the evening of the 13th, to advise people to desist from further meetings until things had settled down. The Thoothukudi Divisional Magistrate, Ashe, passed an order restraining the meeting—its peaceful intentions notwithstanding—just before it was scheduled to happen.¹³ Since people had already begun assembling, he went

to the meeting site with his police officers to disperse the group by use of force. There was a scuffle and the police fired, injuring at least two persons. Meanwhile in Tirunelveli, the peaceful meetings of the preceding week had given way to a large gathering near the railway station.

The road there is a most congested one. There is a level crossing and at train time there is a block for 20 or 25 minutes, and people get collected very soon easily. There it was, where there are 50 or 60 bazaars, this thing first commenced.¹⁴

The people who had gathered then marched into the town; on the way, students from the local college joined the procession. The procession then, in sequence, attacked four governmental institutions, symbols of state authority: the municipal office (whose records were burned), the post office (whose thatched shed was burned), the police station dispensary, and the *munsif's* court. By this time, the police (who had been misdirected to the station bazaar) had arrived. They fired, killing four and wounding many more.¹⁵ The shootings left both towns stunned, and the protests ended overnight. Firing on the crowd was not the end of the state's retaliation against the public outburst. Several participants in the riot were sentenced to various terms of imprisonment. Subramania Siva and V. O. C. Pillai were prosecuted for sedition and sentenced to transportation for six years each.¹⁶ And finally, armed additional forces—the “punitive police”—were stationed in Tirunelveli for six months following the riot, at the end of which a permanent addition was made to the armed police reserve of the district.

Arguably, a “riot” had occurred, inviting state retaliation to restore order. Yet the sequence of events leading up to the police shooting shows that this was not the first moment of state intervention, necessitated by an impulsive riot.¹⁷ Nor was it the last. Rather popular protest and its policing had shaped each other over the course of the preceding fortnight and would continue to do so after the riot. As will be seen in other cases discussed below, there was a cadence to the policing of public protests in colonial Madras. Often, the tempo of public protest increased in tandem with its policing until the shocking moment of riot and police shooting. Equally characteristic was the “perfect quiet” that marked the days after the shooting, a forced hibernation of protest.

The chain of events that took place in Tirunelveli and Thoothukudi in February-March 1908 was punctuated by distinct moments of policing. First, on 27 February and 9 March, the magistracy used Section 144 of

the CCP to place restrictions on lawful public processions. Both restrictions were governmental reactions to popular politics, a way of restraining vibrant labor and nationalist politics. Second, in a preemptive display of state authority, extra armed police forces were called to provide additional security to the town even before the riot had happened. On 13 March, these police forces were able to use firearms to disperse the public. Finally, the riot was followed by the stationing of additional police forces in the districts, a visible warning against any further dissent. This course of events was not unusual; rather, the policing of protest in twentieth-century Madras was often marked by the use of Section 144 and the stationing of additional police forces as a preventive or punitive measure, as well as the more spectacular use of firearms on public gatherings. The following pages draw upon legal texts, newspapers, and governmental, judicial, and police records of a number of cases to explore in greater detail each of these policing mechanisms, through which the state first criminalized popular dissent and then used force to subdue it.

Deferring Protest: Section 144

Section 144 was part of, and the only section within, Chapter XI of the CCP, which was titled “Temporary Orders in Urgent Cases of Nuisance or Apprehended Danger.” As the title of the chapter indicates, Section 144 was to be used only in urgent cases, “where immediate prevention or speedy remedy (was) desirable” to preserve peace. The provision enabled the local magistrate to temporarily circumvent the judicial process, after hearing the case of only one party if necessary, and pass executive orders that directed “any person to abstain from a certain act.”¹⁸ Magistrates, with the aid of the police, often used Section 144 in situations where they feared that crowds participating in public demonstrations might turn violent, resulting in what they termed “a breach of the peace.” In effect, Section 144 helped keep nationalist protest, labor politics, and caste disputes in check.

In order to prevent misuse of magisterial authority, the section mandated (and legal scholars emphasized) that the deployment of Section 144 had to be very specific: it could only be directed against a person or group of persons regarding a certain act, or visiting a particular place.¹⁹ In addition, the provision, being an extrajudicial, emergency one, was strictly temporary: an order under Section 144 could remain in force for a maximum of two months. But there was an escape clause that allowed the order to be

renewed “in cases of danger to human life, health or safety, or a likelihood of a riot or an affray.” This exception to the two-month limit was frequently used by magistrates to extend restrictions to public assembly in the face of anticipated disturbances. When extended repeatedly, as often happened with caste disputes, Section 144 was no longer a one-off encounter between a community and a distant colonial state. Rather, it served to shape the running interaction between subjects and state, as well as the modes of public participation of certain communities. This dynamic was pronounced among castes that either aspired to a higher social status or were threatened by the newcomers, and included Nadars, Konars, Thevars, and Chettiers in the southern Madras districts. The lowest castes (Dalits), so noticeable in discussions of coercive surveillance and custodial interrogation in earlier chapters, all but disappear in records of Section 144 from the colonial period—an eloquent absence indicating their clear subordination to other castes.

Since the mid-nineteenth century, communal disputes over social precedence had frequently manifested themselves in competition over public spaces, especially the street.²⁰ This stemmed from the discrepancy between the colonial government’s avowed treatment of all subjects as equal and its promise to recognize and leave undisturbed customary privileges of (unequal) communities, guaranteed by Queen Victoria’s Proclamation of 1858. This policy ambiguity was directly reflected in battles over the street, which could be interpreted in colonial law either as a public space equally accessible to all subjects or as a customary space reserved for certain castes. For communities like the Nadars, the claim to public space was part of a broader set of tactics that allowed them to assert a new caste status. Once a low-caste group known as Shanars, Nadars took advantage of opportunities available in the late nineteenth century—including conversion to Christianity, Western education, and urban entrepreneurship—to improve their socioeconomic standing.²¹ Importantly, Nadars did not fully reject caste ideology in improving their social position. Instead, they worked within caste norms and Sanskritized: they changed their dietary practices to give up meat and alcohol consumption, and their sartorial practices to demand that their women be allowed to cover their upper bodies.²² Nadar efforts at social mobility thus actively deployed the language of caste. Caste identity was arguably even more vital to Thevars and Konars who were being economically edged out by Nadars. Speaking in the language of custom (guaranteed by the Queen’s Proclamation), Thevars and Konars

asserted their historically superior caste status to retain what they saw as their prior rights to public spaces, and to cling to their threatened social position. Consequently, there were periodic conflicts between these castes over the right to streets until as late as the 1940s.

These conflicts were not limited to urban settings. They occurred sporadically across towns and villages, enabling the consolidation of a higher caste identity for the Nadars and the realignment of new caste hierarchies within the region. In Karisalkulam village, for example, there was a prolonged negotiation between Konars and Nadars over access to some streets.²³ The Konars, who saw themselves as belonging to a higher caste than the Nadars, petitioned the local magistracy on 25 August 1899 demanding that the Nadars not be allowed to take their wedding or funeral processions through a certain street. The magistrate attempted to determine through a court hearing whether the street was private, in which case customary practice would be determined and legalized, or public, in which case regardless of custom he would recognize the right of Nadars to take their processions through it. Nevertheless, three days later he passed a temporary order under Section 144 of the CCP prohibiting the public from gathering in numbers larger than fifteen within the village limits. This was a preemptive measure justified by the ostensibly imminent danger of a serious public disturbance if the Nadars did take their wedding and funeral processions through the contested street.²⁴ The Section 144 order automatically shifted the identity of the Nadars, from a caste community gathered in public spaces to an "unlawful assembly."

In April 1900, the magistrate, after an inconclusive judicial process, decided that the street was public unless proved otherwise by the Konars; therefore, the Nadars could use it for their processions. Yet in the months that followed, restrictions were placed on Nadar processions, since their attitude in conducting them "was calculated to disturb the peace."²⁵ Magistrates and policemen kept watch every time the Nadars traveled through the disputed street, a punitive police force was stationed in the village, and several members of both communities were bound over to keep the peace. Finally, in October 1900, the magistrate used Section 144 once again, this time to restrain the Nadars from accessing the street, asserting that it was likely to cause a breach of the peace. The order, which had a maximum validity of two months, was renewed multiple times, all the way from October 1900 through February 1902. By this time, the magistrate was not prepared to renew the order again, for "to do so would be illegal." He therefore

reinterpreted the civil proceedings that had earlier sought to determine whether the street was private or public. This time, the magistrate passed an order prohibiting Nadar processions, putting the onus on the Nadars of proving in court that the street was public. The Nadars, who lost the case in court, then petitioned the Madras government, claiming that they had been “deprived of their rights and privileges which as lawful subjects of His Majesty they are entitled to enjoy.”²⁶ The government, however, declined to intervene since counter to the petitioners’ claim, “peace and tranquility [did not] now reign in the village.”²⁷ The executive decision in this case was based on the need to maintain order, not on the juridical rights of a community to a public street. Acquiring equal rights to public spaces relied more on policing than it did on legal claims.

While the government’s privileging of policing over litigation in resolving disputes between communities suggests a rigid adherence to existing social orders, in reality the status quo was often challenged and occasionally changed. Furthermore, colonial subjects were not simply passive objects of policing; communities used the preemptive aspect of Section 144 creatively to negotiate their status, as evidenced both by the Konar demands to the magistrate in the example above and by the case below, in which the Nadars were pitted against Chettiars. Although the continuity of Nadar struggles in public arenas seems at first glance to demonstrate social stasis, the very fact that the Nadars’ had moved by the late 1920s from conflicts with the Konars to those with the higher-ranking, wealthier Chettiars points to their social mobility over the preceding two decades. Consider an event that took place in Arupukkottai, a town that had recently risen to prominence as a Nadar center. Here, Chettiars actively provoked the use of policing so that they could maintain their caste standing vis-à-vis the Nadars. On 6 October 1928, local Chettiars attacked a festival procession of Nadars, injuring some people and breaking several musical instruments.²⁸ Over the next couple of days, there were minor affrays between the two groups. In a more serious clash on the 10th, both groups attacked each other, burned houses, and destroyed property; in addition, one person was stabbed. On the 12th, the police, fearing a riot the following day (also a festival day), urged the magistrate to declare a Section 144 order prohibiting Nadar processions from passing along streets where Chettiars lived. Twice in the months after—March 1929 and September 1930—the police asked for Section 144 to be applied, restricting Nadars from taking processions along Chettiar streets during two contested festivals. In

addition, the police made security arrangements to forestall any popular violence. Another festival, previously undisputed, took place on 2 October 1930. The police did not deploy Section 144, but as the Nadars reached the end of their procession, which had progressed only through their own streets, some Chettiars attacked them with stones and killed one person, ostensibly unprovoked. The Nadars' explanation for the attack was that the Chettiars, "finding that every time they caused a disturbance, they gained some ground by way of prohibitive orders being passed against the Nadars in the interests of peace, repeated the same tactics in order that, one by one, the festivals of the Nadars may be prevented by executive orders."²⁹ The comment indicates first, that the politics of the street occurred in conjunction with policing procedure. Far from existing in a distinct realm from the state, communities deliberately drew the state, through its police, into their conflicts. Second, even privileged groups like Chettiars mobilized around caste to preserve their social station.

Although Section 144 was termed an emergency provision, the ability to deploy it was not limited particularly carefully. According to the CCP, it could be exercised by a district magistrate, a chief presidency magistrate, a sub-divisional magistrate or any other magistrate specially empowered by the local government. In 1909, the government expanded this group, authorizing deputy *tahsildars* and sub-magistrates to pass orders under Section 144.³⁰ In 1918, the District Magistrate of Ramanathapuram suggested to the government of Madras that the power to pass orders under Section 144 be limited to first-class magistrates. He observed that he received numerous appeals against orders passed by lower magistrates whom, he thought, used the provision "improperly or recklessly," and "in cases where there was no urgency; where there would have been plenty of time for a full enquiry by the magistrate before any order need have been passed."³¹ The Ramanathapuram District Magistrate's letter challenged governmental fears about the volatility of the public, indicating that public politics were in fact shaped in response to policing. Contrary to the belief that the public might be more disposed to violence if they knew that most magistrates had lost the power conferred by Section 144, he asserted that people engaged in violence when provoked by the sudden passing of *ex parte* orders. The Madras government rejected the magistrate's "dangerous" suggestion out of hand.

Somewhat similar to Section 144 of the CCP was Section 30 of the Police Act of 1861, which pertained directly to the regulation of public assemblies. Section 30 allowed police superintendents to direct the conduct of all

assemblies and processions on public roads and to prescribe their routes and timing if required. If a police officer expected a procession or assembly to cause a breach of the peace, he could require its participants to apply to him for a license that specified the conditions under which the procession could take place. If a procession violated the terms of its license, it would be deemed an unlawful assembly and the police officer could order it to disperse. Section 30 of the Police Act, in combination with Section 144 of the CCP, made crowds an object of finely calibrated policing, and criminalized their politics, at least temporarily.

The need to apply and pay for police licenses to hold ceremonies in public spaces impacted how communities coalesced around their caste identity: did they celebrate a wedding inside someone's home, or did they have the police connections and financial means to bring a procession out on the streets? Importantly, it impacted how unequal caste communities competed for public arenas, in large villages as well as in small towns.³² For instance, citing tension between Nadars and other castes in Kallurani village, the government of Madras imposed Section 30 on the village in 1936. It made it compulsory for all processions to ask for a police escort as a condition of obtaining a license; the payment for the escort was to be recovered in advance from the applicants.³³ These fees, consisting of approximately 40 rupees for a wedding procession and 400 rupees for a festival procession, were not trivial. About eight policemen from the regular force were deputed to escort wedding processions, while almost fifteen policemen, including several from the armed reserve police, were deputed for festival processions. While Section 30 was, like Section 144, intended to be a temporary restriction, to be imposed only when the police feared a breach of the peace, the order was extended every year until as late as 1945; thus, it was in force in Kallurani village for almost a decade.³⁴ In 1939, the District Superintendent of Police observed that "the Nadars (were) minimizing the number of processions on account of the heavy cost they have got to pay as *bandobust* fees, and it may be that in course of time that processions will be given up."³⁵ No procession had been taken out to celebrate the Tiruvadhurai festival in 1938, while another annual festival, which usually lasted seven days, had been curtailed to five. The other castes of the village had similarly cut down public celebration: except for one marriage procession, they had not conducted any other in 1938.

In addition to caste politics, the government of Madras used preventive policing to keep labor movements in check. From the 1920s to the 1940s,

in particular, there were several disputes over workers' wages and hours in the textile mills of the Madurai and Tirunelveli districts.³⁶ Interaction between the managers and laborers involved multiple moves and counter-moves including dismissal of employees, lockouts, strikes, indefinite mill closures, and arbitration by governmental committees. During these extended negotiations, the state's policing machinery was periodically deployed to maintain order and keep protest in check. Magistrates passed preventive orders detaining labor leaders and policemen stood guard at factories, ensuring that strikes did not get out of hand too often.³⁷ In addition to summoning general police control, magistrates also effectively deployed Section 144 and Section 30 to contain labor unrest. In July 1939, after three to four months of dispute at the Madura Knitting Company, the government passed a Section 144 order restraining workers from picketing, making several preventive arrests for good measure.³⁸ Unsurprisingly, picketing "almost completely collapsed" within a couple of weeks. While class did not overlap with any one caste in the industrial setting, the policing of labor was likely to affect the lower castes the most. Moreover, labor and caste politics shared some actors, notably Muthuramalinga Thevar, who will be discussed more in the next chapter. An influential leader of the Madurai mill unions, Thevar also agitated against the forced registration of Kallars under the CTA. He therefore appeared prominently on the government radar, periodically triggering responses from the police. To name just a couple of instances, in November 1936, an order under Section 144 was passed prohibiting him from making speeches that were purportedly agitating workers, while in June 1939 he was charged under the security sections of the CCP.³⁹

Even if its desire to maintain order resulted in a general bias against workers, governmental intervention in labor disputes was not always in favor of management.⁴⁰ This was especially true when voting (albeit limited) was introduced, as is evident in the events of a labor dispute that occurred in 1937–38, almost immediately after the first elected Congress government came to power in the Madras Presidency. In the Papanasam Mills in Tirunelveli, a series of strikes over wages were called from November 1937 on, involving at various times 6,000 and 10,000 workers. About 4,000 workers in mills owned by the same firm in Madurai also went on strike in January 1938. In response, management closed the mills indefinitely. Even as it acknowledged that the situation was quiet, the government passed a preemptive order under Section 30 requiring licenses for processions

that were related to the strike.⁴¹ Neither the management nor the workers blinked for a few more months, until management finally decided to re-open the mills (without having conceded to any of the labor demands) on 1 April, convinced that there was a pool of workers who were willing to return to work. Several workers expressed their opposition to this move and the District Magistrate, reluctant to deploy extra police forces to the mills, asked the management to postpone the opening by a few weeks. Meanwhile the wage issue was referred to a government arbitrator, to no avail. Additionally, management decided to lay off 2,000 workers and re-open on 20 April. Fearing that the more militant strikers would agitate under these circumstances, the government passed an order under Section 144, but against management this time, delaying the opening of the mills by a month.⁴² Under pressure from the government, management finally granted some concessions to its labor force. The Section 144 order was then withdrawn and the mills resumed operation, after almost six months. In this instance, Section 30 of the Police Act and Section 144 of the CCP had arguably served their purpose of preventing violent confrontation between management and labor. Occasionally, however, subjects gathered in public in defiance of Section 144 orders. In such instances, public gatherings, whether violent or not, legally transformed into unlawful assemblies, as examined in the following section.

The Unlawful Assembly

The use of the term “unlawful assembly” can be understood as part of a larger strategy of colonial rule, whereby the state criminalized political dissent through legal mechanisms. Articulation of opposition in public spaces was frequently criminalized in a regime of conquest: by declaring a public gathering unlawful, the police could use arms against a group of people without facing punitive legal action. There were numerous ways a public assembly could be declared unlawful in British India. First, those who chose to gather in defiance of prohibitive orders passed under Section 30 of the Police Act of 1861 or Section 144 of the CCP were deemed to be participating in unlawful assemblies. Since both of these were executive provisions, they did not permit legal challenge from the parties they impacted. Thus, the Nadars and other communities of Kallurani village, discussed in the previous section, had no avenue to challenge the restrictions on their public celebrations for an entire decade. Likewise, although

Section 144 was intended to be a temporary ban on public assemblies *while* a legal resolution for an issue was sought, caste groups that were not affluent lacked the resources to fight judicial battles. In these circumstances, the government, by passing a Section 144 order, in effect closed all lawful avenues of popular politics. Even when a community possessed resources, there often was no clear legal answer to an issue that pitted the customary precedence of one caste against the right to equal access of the other, resulting in a ban being renewed as a matter of course. This was the situation with the conflict between Konars and Nadars of Karisalkulam village discussed earlier, where the futility of the legal process resulted in the village being policed for years. Disputing parties occasionally sought to end the stalemate by circumventing the legal process and appealing directly to the provincial government, as did the Nadars of Karisalkulam. But the Madras government was, as a rule, reluctant to intervene in caste disputes until they became a problem of public order—which they periodically did.

It is worth repeating that a caste conflict became a matter for police intervention simply because a community protested an executive ban, even if it did so peacefully. Of course, communities turned violent on occasion, but here too, it often followed the policing of protest. Caste violence was not unrelated to state action, but was interlaced with the use of police force. This is what happened in Villur village in August 1903, when members of the Agamudaiyar caste attempted to contest the wealthier Chettiars, only to be fired upon by the police because they had defied a Section 144 order, thereby becoming “unlawful.” In July of that year, a dispute had broken out between the Chettiars, who wanted to rebuild a ceremonial gate, and the Agamudaiyars, who objected to the construction since it would block a public path they used.⁴³ Both groups approached the local magistracy to secure their rights. The magistrate went back and forth on his decision: first he passed an order under Section 144 prohibiting the Chettiars from rebuilding the gate, asking them to approach a civil court to establish their rights. Two days later, he rescinded this order, instead prohibiting Agamudaiyars from obstructing the construction, and asked them to approach the civil court to establish *their* rights.

Accordingly, the Chettiars decided to construct the gate but, fearing protest from the Agamudaiyars, sought police protection as they got to work. A force comprising around fifteen policemen arrived at the site on the morning of 3 August 1903, when the construction was scheduled to begin. That very morning, some of the Agamudaiyars had petitioned the

District Magistrate, seeking a stay on the construction. After submitting the petition, they returned to their village to find the policemen and the Chettiars preparing for the construction. The Agamudaiyars asked the police inspector, Shanmuganatham Pillai, to wait for the magistrate's decision. Inspector Pillai refused, claiming that the magistrate had sanctioned the construction, and had had the magisterial order proclaimed by beat of a tom-tom at the site and in the village. "This had no effect, but rather the reverse, for a large number of Agamudaiyar women came with their water-pots and sat and lay down all over the site of the *vadivasal* (the gate)."⁴⁴ By sitting down at the construction site, the Agamudaiyar women were challenging the legitimacy of the Section 144 order and of police support for the Chettiars. In addition to being part of a process that defined caste identity and claimed access to public spaces, the "riot" also marked a moment in the negotiation between the state and its subjects over how and where protest could be articulated. As David Arnold writes of the Villur incident, "police partisanship in such disputes, as well as long experience of their high-handedness and *zulum*, often transformed a dispute from a peaceful, if heated altercation into a violent confrontation, and from the defiance of a village elite to an attack on the police."⁴⁵

The inspector asked the women to clear the place; when they refused, he pressured them to give their names, threatening them with imprisonment. The women stoutly refused, expressing their opposition to the construction and their willingness to go to jail. The inspector then advanced toward them, breaking their pots with his shoes and the end of his carbine. The women abused him and threw mud in the air in protest. At this point, the narrative in the judicial record of the case briefly diverges: the police claim that the crowd started throwing stones at them and at the Chettiars, while the Agamudaiyars deny this assertion. The inspector warned the Agamudaiyars that they were an unlawful assembly, and that if they did not disperse, he would order the use of firearms. The warning had no effect: the inspector fired; one died, another was injured, "and the riot was quelled."⁴⁶ Seventy-one of the "rioters" were brought up for trial, charges were framed against sixty-five of them, and fifty-eight were found guilty — "a most satisfactory ending of the incident," according to the annual police report.⁴⁷ I return to the judicial criminalization of protestors in the next section.

Apart from violation of Section 144 and Section 30 orders, a broader definition of an unlawful assembly came from the Indian Penal Code of 1860 (IPC). Chapter VIII of the IPC defined an assembly of five or more

persons as unlawful if the common object of the persons composing it was “to overawe by criminal force, or show of criminal force” the government or any public servant, to resist the execution of any law, to commit any mischief or criminal trespass or other offense, to take possession of any property, or deprive any person of the enjoyment of a right of way, of which he was in possession, or to compel any person to do what he was not legally bound to do.⁴⁸ Furthermore, an assembly that was not unlawful initially could subsequently become so. When force was used by any member of an unlawful assembly, all its members were guilty of rioting.⁴⁹ Expansive as the scope of the IPC definition was, there was yet another, sweeping definition for the unlawful assembly. The CCP empowered the police to ask “any assembly of five or more persons *likely to cause a disturbance of the public peace*” to disperse, and if they did not, to use force to disperse them.⁵⁰ This legal sanction made permanent the possibility of deploying police force on colonial subjects.

In September 1918, there was indeed a case where the police fired on a peaceful assembly gathered in the premises of the Madurai district court. Like the Tirunelveli protests of 1908, this event had a long history and took place at a time when both the nationalist agitation (specifically the Home Rule Movement) and the labor movement were in the ascendant in Madurai. There had been labor disputes in the Madurai mills since June 1918. J. N. Ramanathan, one of the labor leaders had been prohibited by magisterial order from making public speeches within ten miles of Madurai.⁵¹ In addition, the government had filed sedition charges against another popular labor leader, Dr. Varadarajulu Naidu, for his speeches during the strike at the Madura Mills. Caught between acknowledging the seriousness of the movement and denying its legitimacy, the Governor of Madras described Dr. Naidu in a self-contradictory phrase as “a rather mischievous agitator, who, though he can hardly be classed as a leader of opinion, has attained considerable notoriety in this presidency.”⁵² On 30 August, there was a temporary truce in the labor dispute, with management offering to increase the scale of pay. But ten days later, one of the leaders in the strike was dismissed for alleged misconduct and over 200 workers struck, demanding his reinstatement. Meanwhile, the Home Rule Leaguers were also conducting meetings, some of which expressed their sympathy with Dr. Naidu and tried to collect funds for his defense.

The trial of Dr. Naidu commenced on 26 September. Conducted as it was in an atmosphere of disaffection with the government and the mill owners,

the trial caught the attention of the local population. The district magisterial and police forces heard rumors, authenticated by “responsible men,” that the shops of those who did not close as a sign of sympathy with Dr. Naidu would be looted. As a precautionary measure, they posted a strong force of constables in various centers across the town, a visible display of state force. “No disturbance of any sort took place in the town but in the afternoon the court premises . . . (its verandas, staircases and compound) were crowded with a vast number of thousands of persons who were quite uncontrollable,” recounted the District Magistrate four days later. A crowd, even when it showed no signs of violence, was perceived as inherently uncontrollable. The magistrate rode on horseback around the town and to the court to inspect the crowds, a presence that must have been forbidding. He was “greeted with some hoots and shouts of *Bande Mataram*.”⁵³ Within the court premises, he observed that a large crowd surrounded the District Superintendent of Police, some of whom pelted him with stones. “It was alleged that he (the DSP) handled the crowd roughly, but he was simply riding through the crowd to get down into the town to see that no disturbance took place.”⁵⁴ The police officer and magistrate conferred and telegraphed the Madras government asking for two hundred troops for ten days, since “riots threatened.”

The military troops arrived the next morning, the second day of the trial, and the magistrate rode around the town once more, this time with the Army Major in command. A crowd of a few thousand had gathered in the courthouse premises by the early afternoon, waiting for Dr. Naidu to appear after the day’s proceedings. The estimate of the number of people present varied wildly according to who reported it—a witness at the magisterial inquiry that followed said there were 1,500–2,000 people present, nationalist Home Rulers claimed there were around 4,000, the District Superintendent of Police said there were 7,000–10,000 people present, the Deputy Inspector-General of Police estimated the crowd at 10,000–15,000, while the District Magistrate rather loosely estimated it at 25,000—numbers that seem to reflect the respective speakers’ fears of the crowd. Witness testimonies agreed that regardless of its size, the crowd, though noisy, was not violent (at least until the bayoneting started). The Deputy Inspector-General of Police, later describing the “attitude of the crowd,” recollected that “the crowd was orderly and in hand.”⁵⁵

A contingent of the reserve armed police was standing in line, forming a cordon about fifty yards from the courthouse. When Dr. Naidu appeared,

the crowd cheered and came forward to greet him, breaking the cordon. The police cordon pushed back by thrusting out their bayonets and walking into the crowd. Some people started pelting them with stones. The police officer issued a warning command, “Mob-firing” (a command to fix bayonets and move forward), which one of the constables wrongly interpreted as a command to fire. Other constables then assumed the order had been given and fired for a few seconds before they were commanded to stop. Two persons—a constable and a bystander—were killed in this accidental shooting.⁵⁶

There was vociferous condemnation of the Madurai incident, which stood apart from other incidents of police shooting because the police had fired on a peaceful assembly.⁵⁷ “Every reader of a newspaper would have fairly mastered the facts” of the incident, said one legislator, while debating the issue in the Madras Legislative Council. Several nationalist leaders, civic associations, and newspapers demanded a public inquiry into the shooting, in vain. The father of the boy who had been fatally wounded demanded a judicial investigation of the police.⁵⁸ The magistrate, however, dismissed the demand, citing the CCP provision that protected policemen from criminal prosecution for firing on any assembly of more than five persons that was *likely* to disturb the peace. In the wake of the incident, Ramachandra Rao, a senior administrator, suggested the need for the government to draw different rules for “cases where police are called in to disperse riots and cases where, as in Madura, people are assembled peaceably to witness judicial proceedings or to attend public meetings and the police have merely to maintain order.”⁵⁹ Rao implicitly linked the colonial context to the rules of policing crowds, when he added that “one is distinct from the other. Some distinction of this kind seems to have been drawn in England with reference to public meetings.” In the present instance, he argued, the police need not have carried cartridges or buckshot since there was nothing “which gave any apprehension to the police of some big disorder in the compound.”⁶⁰

While it was impossible to determine the precise amount of force that could justifiably be used against a crowd, it is noteworthy that the law allowed for an easy move between civil/police and armed/military force in handling domestic disorder.⁶¹ Chapter IX of the CCP, which provided the guidelines for the state to deal with unlawful assemblies, first required the magistrate or police officer to command the unlawful assembly to disperse.⁶² If the assembly did not disperse, the officer could use “civil

force” to disperse it, i.e., police force, without calling the army.⁶³ If this did not work the magistrate could call for military force, though the military were to use “as little force and do as little injury to person and property, as may be consistent with dispersing the assembly.”⁶⁴ Finally, no magistrate or police officer acting in good faith under these provisions could be deemed to have committed an offense.⁶⁵ Though the CCP did not specify what it meant by “civic force,” executive orders of the government supplemented the legal code to clarify the meaning and extent of permissible force.⁶⁶ If force was needed to disperse an unlawful assembly, policemen first were to use their *lathis*. If this failed, they could resort to firearms after issuing a clear warning. No more shots were to be fired than absolutely necessary, and shooting had to cease as soon as rioters showed signs of dispersing. Police fire was to be directed at the thickest part of the crowd.

These rules would suggest that policemen typically carried arms, but this was not the case. In reality, the very fact that armed policemen were usually present at a public gathering indicates that the colonial state perceived crowds as a threat to order. In the memorandum appointing the First Police Commission of 1861, the government of India stated that “all duties of Police are of a civil character. . . . The Police should be no stronger than is needed for purely Police purposes, and . . . they should not be maintained in time of peace at a strength which can only be needed in time of rebellion or invasion”⁶⁷ This conception of a “civil police” resulted in the formation of a force that was fairly limited in numbers and ordinarily did not carry or possess arms. Yet the organization of the police allowed for these limitations to be circumvented during public gatherings (i.e., when the colonial administration anticipated a disturbance), so that extra policemen were deployed and their supply of arms increased. The type of arms borne by the police was to depend on local need, and ranged from truncheons for “a generally peaceful and unarmed population” to muskets and bayonets “where there is a chance of their often having to deal with armed or desperate men.”⁶⁸ Every station had a supply of firearms and sidearms, which the police were to take out when conditions demanded it.⁶⁹ In addition, armed reserves were to be maintained at the headquarters of each police district for any unexpected protests.⁷⁰ These were “police reserved for special emergent duty . . . necessitated by the principle that it is the function of an efficient police, not only to prevent and detect crime, but also to secure the peace and tranquility of the country.”⁷¹ In addition to the regular force

and armed reserves, the government could “in case of emergency” channel police forces across the provinces of British India.⁷²

This structure allowed for a ramping up of police numbers as well as of the arms they wielded. The police typically used these provisions on occasions of public gatherings in anticipation of riots. For example, members of the armed reserve police were sent to Villur village on the day in 1903 when the Chettiars were to build the ceremonial gate and, as we saw earlier, did put their arms to use. Likewise, armed reserves were called during the Gandhian mass nationalist movements, even when a particular gathering was not displaying violence. In Bodinayakanur, for instance, where nationalist crowds were picketing liquor stores during the Civil Disobedience movement in August 1930, armed forces stayed on duty as hundreds of volunteers peacefully protested for several hours over two days.⁷³ According to later police reports, after the police had made multiple arrests “the crowd developed into an unruly mob which tried to rush the police party.”⁷⁴ The police charged with their *lathis*, the people threw stones at them, and the police fired on the crowd: two persons died and several were injured. Occasionally, in addition to the armed police, military troops were summoned in anticipation of public disturbances—as happened during Dr. Naidu’s trial in 1918 and a conflict between Nadars and Maravars of Kamudi in September 1918, when protests over grain prices were erupting across the province.⁷⁵

The policing of protest did not end at the moment of police violence on crowds. The final section of this chapter examines how the colonial state shaped popular politics in the aftermath of a riot.

After the Riot: “Perfect Quiet”

Police shootings usually brought protest to a grinding halt under colonial rule. Following the Tirunelveli shooting of 1908, an inhabitant of the town stated that “after the mob was dispersed some of us went into the town and we saw that people had become sufficiently stunned and they were not likely to create a disturbance. . . . Since the incident both towns have been quiet. There is no feeling at all in the people; no feeling of unrest which is likely to explode into an outburst or disturbance.”⁷⁶ Another commentator noted that “notwithstanding that they (sic) were dead bodies which were not removed and notwithstanding that there was no constable the whole town was quiet.”⁷⁷ The district police superintendent’s report, written the

day after the Bodinayakanur violence on Congress nationalists in 1930, concluded “with the gratifying information that the situation was then quiet and was apparently not likely again to become serious.”⁷⁸ The perfect quiet that followed riots can be interpreted as colonial subjects’ response to state violence rather than as a sign of passivity or lack of political consciousness. Police and government officers, however, read the silence as an indicator of the impulsive nature of the riot, to suggest that it had been merely the action of a few “rowdies” or “instigators” and not a political act. For instance, on the morning after the firing in the Madurai court premises in September 1918, the District Magistrate

rode round the town . . . and found the town absolutely quiet. A great majority of the crowds are not interested in the case in any way. Unfortunately the weavers have little work to do owing to the high prices of the yarn, and they told me of this when I was leading them away. They said they came to it as a sort of *tamasha*.⁷⁹

Attributing public gatherings to mischief workers ignored the participation of those who were voicing a political opinion. In addition, it ignored the forms of political participation engendered by casual gatherings of people in public spaces, and how the politics of a crowd could transform or manifest more explicitly over the course of a few hours. For instance, in the days preceding the Tirunelveli riots of 1908, political speeches were addressed to relatively small audiences of around 300–500, which assembled in the riverbed, a site that did not symbolize colonial authority. On the day of the riot itself, which was the first day of the Tamil month, the crowd first gathered in the market, near the railway station. Elite observers cited these three factors (it was an auspicious day, people needed to shop, and the trains’ schedule forced a gathering of people at the market) to argue that the assembly was incidental and that the crowd lacked political purpose. But the fact that the people proceeded from the market to systematically attack four governmental institutions suggests that the protest was in fact targeted against symbols of state authority.⁸⁰ Even on occasions when participants may have joined protests to be part of a public gathering rather than because they were agitating for a cause, this still spoke to a certain popular conception of who constituted the public. Consider Periyannam Chetti, a groundnut seller, who was among those shot in the Madura court compound in September 1918. Chetti said in his deposition that he “never used to go away (from his site of work) but I went on that

day unfortunately. I saw large number going, so I followed. I was near the banyan tree in the compound." Viewing the public as something enacted, Sandria Freitag notes that "even ostensibly passive observers, by their contributions to the density of the crowd, the level of noise and the exercise of their gaze" still contribute actively to its construction.⁸¹ Thus, Periyanam Chetti's decision to move with a certain crowd, to a certain building rather than away from it, points to the importance of a nationalist public in early-twentieth-century India.

Apart from dismissing the politics of riots, the colonial state also criminalized it. Victims of police fire were termed "rioters" and criminal charges filed against them. In a 1909 riot between Muslim Labbais and Padayachis of Nambutalai village, fourteen persons were charged and eleven convicted to sentences ranging from transportation for life to two years' "Rigorous Imprisonment."⁸² In a 1910 riot between Paravar Christians and Muslim Labbais of Pottalpudur village over the construction of a church, the police fired on the protesting Labbais, injuring three men. Twenty-six Labbais were prosecuted in court, of whom nine were convicted. In a conflict between Hindu and Christian Pallars of Elayarasanendal village that same year, twenty-eight persons were prosecuted and nineteen convicted.⁸³ In 1931, police fired on a procession that included Nadars and caste-Hindus in Chintamani village, killing five and injuring seven. Charges were filed against more than forty rioters.⁸⁴ The list continues.

The tendency of the Madras police to view native society through the lens of caste meant that even riots rooted in a complex of issues—including but not limited to caste—were framed solely as communal disputes.⁸⁵ In September 1918, when the entire province was reeling from famine, World War I, and the influenza pandemic, there was a riot in Kamudi involving almost a thousand people.⁸⁶ The riot took place in the bazaar on the day of the weekly market, in an urban center dominated by trading Nadars surrounded by countryside numerically dominated by impoverished Maravars. The multiplicity of factors notwithstanding, the Ramanathapuram District Magistrate A. F. G. Moscardi declared with confidence that the disturbance "was not connected with the high prices or with the political unrest; but was a recrudescence of the old anti-Shanar feud."⁸⁷ Framing it as a Nadar-Maravar riot had direct consequences on the judicial process that followed, which exclusively targeted Maravars. This was not unusual: in the aftermath of riots, police often charged members of one caste while marshaling those of another as prosecution witnesses, thus perpetuating

caste-based animosity. In the 1903 Villur riot, charges were presented against sixty-five people who had participated in the protests, every one of whom was an Agamudaiyar. A staggering fifty-eight of the sixty-five were found guilty.

The punitive action that followed a riot was gendered in its targeting of men over women, drawing on a perception that violent politics of the street was masculine. The nitty-gritty of judicial prosecution of riot participants strengthened this assumption. In large confrontations where identifying individuals was impossible, police often simply rounded up the men of a particular caste for trial. Moreover, the spatial configuration of Indian villages, where certain villages were dominated by certain caste groups, aided police apprehension of suspects of a certain caste. Following the Nadar-Maravar riots of 1918, the District Magistrate described the brutal police reprisal and consequent scene of desolation in the surrounding villages:

The method generally adopted was to take out a sufficient force and surround any Marava village which was known to be the residence of men who had taken part in *any reported offence*. This had to be done at night, for no men were to be found in the villages in daylight; and in some cases, the villages were found empty even at night. . . . The moral effect of these nocturnal raids was more important than the arrests effected by them. . . . It may now be said that the trouble is over.⁸⁸

Evading police arrest and prolonged judicial trials, men absconded from their homes for weeks, months, and sometimes years. The consequence of judicial violence was therefore felt not only in the immediate aftermath of a riot but for long afterward. It was felt not only by those who had actually participated in protests but by those who fit a certain caste and gender profile. Finally, this form of state violence impacted not only the men on the run but also the women who stayed behind to tend fields in the villages now bereft of men. On the rare occasion where female participation in the politics of the street was recognized, the judicial apparatus still had trouble in acknowledging it. In 1903, criminal charges were filed against the Agamudaiyars of Villur village who had protested against the Chettiars' gateway construction. In his verdict, the judge dismissed the possibility that the women who participated in the protest may have displayed any agency. He wrote:

A large number are women who obstructed the police at the *vadivasal*. Undoubtedly they were members of the unlawful assembly,

they obstructed the police in their duty, they abused them, and threw stones and mud. I am however disposed to believe that they were instigated thereto by their husbands and brothers and I am not inclined to treat them too severely.⁸⁹

The policing of public protest did not therefore stop at the moment of violence. Rather, the judicial reprisal that ensued also served to curb protest in the aftermath of a riot. In addition to these measures, riots were frequently followed by the stationing of additional police forces in the disturbed regions. Section 15 of the Police Act of 1861 authorized the state government to declare any area under its authority "to be in a disturbed or dangerous state" and quarter additional police forces in that area for a specified time period.⁹⁰ The cost of such additional police was to be borne by the inhabitants of the disturbed area through a tax levy. Stationing additional police forces in an area that had witnessed a public protest was at once a precautionary and a punitive policing measure. It was punitive because the inhabitants of the affected area would bear the cost of the additional police, a cost that punished the participants, victims, and bystanders (and sometimes those barely involved) in public disturbances. No wonder then that police and governmental records, public petitions, and newspapers inevitably referred to the "punitive police," though the term is not mentioned in the legislation itself. Following the Maravar-Nadar riots of 1899, punitive police forces were stationed in several parts of the Tirunelveli and Madurai districts. Over fifty policemen were stationed at Virudupatti at the cost of 800 rupees per month, recovered from the inhabitants of the area.⁹¹ Quarters were built for the European officers of the special police at Aruppukkottai at a cost around 5,000 rupees.⁹² A couple of years after the stationing of the forces, the District Magistrate asked that they be disbanded from Tirumangalam Taluk, which had not been much affected by the riots, and "for such disturbances as did occur the people have been sufficiently punished by the payment of tax up to date." The government rejected the suggestion, declaring that the tax could be withdrawn only when it had "effected its objects, as a punitive or a preventive measure."⁹³ In 1910, the villagers of Nambuthalai cited their extreme poverty in petitioning the government for exemption from the punitive police tax that had followed disturbances between the Muslim Labbai and the Padayachi fishermen castes of the village the previous year. The Madras government's response was terse: "the petition may be rejected," it said.

“The Muhammadan inhabitants of Nambuthalai have only got what they deserved.”⁹⁴

Apart from being a financial burden on colonial subjects, additional police forces were also a starkly visible and aural reminder of coercive state authority. To that extent, they functioned as a warning against further protests. Arguing against the need for extra policing following the Tirunelveli shooting of 1908, one inhabitant of the town claimed that the additional police who had been brought in a few days earlier would be able to maintain the quiet that had been restored “merely by their presence.”⁹⁵ Writing in the 1970s, H. H. Carleston, a retired civil servant, recalled his years spent in Sivakasi, where punitive police forces had been stationed following the Nadar-Maravar riots of 1899. His memoir indicates how police authority blended into the sounds and sights of the town to become a part of everyday life. “From my house,” he wrote, “I could hear every day the bugles of the reserve police, and first thing on Easter day the hymns of the midnight mass at the little church.”⁹⁶

Additional police forces were intended to be stationed in disturbed areas for only a limited time period. But the Police Act of 1861 did not specify a time limit, allowing the government to extend the force’s stay in the disturbed area as it deemed fit. In practice, Section 15 was extended fairly often; typically, the additional police were initially stationed for one to three years, with at least a couple of annual extensions. Often the necessity of a special force for extended periods was used to justify the establishment of a permanent police outpost in the area. By stationing armed additional police forces for extended periods in areas that had witnessed protest, the colonial government used policing not merely as a response to violent protest but also as a precautionary measure that would forestall future attempts at public assembly—whether violent or nonviolent. In a sense, it brought the policing of public assembly back full circle to preemptive measures such as Section 144 of the CCP.

Colonial perceptions of caste as an unchangeable and primary identity among Indians ensured that special police forces were retained perpetually, especially in situations where the original conflict had pertained to caste. Police planners were convinced that conflicts between castes reflected essential antagonisms that could never die, and that needed to be kept in check by impartial colonial policing. And so many of the forces stationed in the wake of the 1899 Maravar-Nadar riots were retained for years, sometimes decades, after the riots. The special force of fifty stationed in Madurai

was retained for an entire decade, extended via numerous executive orders.⁹⁷ It was finally disbanded in 1909, only because the district police was being reorganized and the number of policemen at the Kamudi station was permanently increased. Likewise, the special police forces sanctioned in Nanguneri and Palayamcottai were absorbed into the regular force in 1910, "as there (was) no prospect of their abolition."⁹⁸ While the 1899 riot was a serious one involving several hundred people, similar police action followed smaller confrontations as well. When the Elayangudi special police force of ten constables, stationed following a 1901 riot between the Hindus and Labbai Muslims of the village, was abolished in 1904, the police added two permanent constables and extra carbines to the Elayangudi police station.⁹⁹ Emergency police forces had become a permanent presence in these villages, entailing an intrusive and coercive state presence that materially shifted the possibilities and forms of popular politics. By becoming an everyday presence, by deploying categories of caste in its everyday practices, police incursion into these spaces helped reproduce caste in rural politics.

Conclusion

The colonial state's intervention in popular politics in twentieth-century Madras was not exceptional or limited to the moment of riot and police fire that is the most visible to the historian. This chapter has demonstrated the extent to which the state, through its local magistracy and police, monitored popular politics. When filtered through an Orientalist and elitist lens, communities seeking equal access to roads, laborers looking for a raise, and Congress nationalists appeared before the state as "crowds," apolitical, prone to violence, and a peril to public order. Accordingly, the Madras government surveilled and regulated the politics of the street, even peaceful actions, through a spectrum of policing measures. In dealing with public assemblies, rather than attempting a legal resolution of the pertinent issue, the state tended to use provisional, executive and, occasionally violent policing. It passed temporary magisterial orders to prevent public gatherings; it stationed extra armed police forces in areas where the political climate was vibrant; it preventively detained popular leaders; and, at the extreme, it used police and military force on public assemblies. Shifting attention from the station to the streets, this chapter has also shown how the form and intensity of popular protest changed in response to policing. Magisterial orders restricting public gatherings often brought protest to a slow stop. Occasionally, though, subjects

challenged the restrictions on their right to public assembly and turned violent. This was the moment of riot that, contrary to its representation in colonial discourse, was not a momentary and impulsive reversion to premodern politics. Rather, the riot was shaped over a long interaction with the police and was a response to the close monitoring of protest.

The fact that public assembly in colonial Madras entailed prolonged dealings with the police had ramifications for caste politics. Specifically, it implied that competition between two communities over access to public spaces was not limited to these actors; it necessarily involved the state, in the form of its police. On the one hand, local policemen were aware of tensions between castes and quickly intervened to maintain public order. In effect, this often translated to support for the more powerful caste. On the other hand, castes competing for local visibility actively drew the police into their conflicts. Besides giving a caste the backing of state force in navigating a dispute, police participation also signaled the caste's ability to access state power as embodied in its most immediate agents, the local policeman and magistrate.

In most of the examples discussed in this chapter, members of a caste of *one* village or town mobilized to assert local dominance—Chettiars and Agamudaiyars in Villur, Konars and Nadars in Karisalkulam, Chettiars and Nadars in Aruppukkottai, and so on. After independence, castes would mobilize across the state, not just in one locality. They would mobilize to assert their stake in political office, not just local dominance. Finally, in colonial Madras, police violence put a temporary brake on conflicts, limiting the ability of castes to use public spaces in their politics. That changed in 1947.

Illegitimate Force in Postcolonial Politics

THE INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURE OF the Madras police as well as the legal codes that governed its management of popular politics continued largely unchanged after 1947. With the adoption of universal adult franchise, however, the political context in which the police operated shifted. This chapter examines how the policing of popular politics, whether legally sanctioned or not, was represented as illegitimate in an electoral arena, so that police fire on postcolonial citizens frequently sparked loud and at times violent protests. To that extent, the policing of political opposition by the state in the decades after independence not only strengthened the opposition, it also gave increased legitimacy to the politics of the street. This stood in stark contrast to the colonial era, when police shootings had routinely, if temporarily, silenced popular politics.

All the same, there were limits to the rights of public protest in independent India, for not all citizens could take to the streets in protest of state force. Specifically, it was not individuals but rather politically active groups with electoral muscle—groups that often coalesced around caste identity in postcolonial Madras—that could challenge the force of state law. The realities of electoral math meant that certain castes with numerical dominance could now confront state authority. Equally, confrontational politics in public spaces helped these communities in crafting newer, more sharply defined identities in the postcolonial political arena. The coming together of the spatially dispersed (and sometimes even antagonistic) Kallar, Maravar and Agamudaiyar castes into the composite, and electorally powerful, Thevar identity, exemplifies this. On the flip side, groups that lacked numbers—laborers, Dalits, Dalit laborers—could not participate in the politics of the street with equal confidence, resulting in their continued, and sometimes increased, vulnerability.

In Tamil Nadu, popular violence thus accompanied democratization through broad caste-based coalitions, albeit patchily.¹ Politics in 1950s and

'60s Madras province marked a shift in power from the Brahmin-led Congress Party to the “non-Brahmin” Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK). This oppositional identity (non-Brahmin), which had emerged in the early twentieth century, pitted fairly privileged, urban castes against Brahmins, who had dominated politics under colonial rule.² After independence, alongside the shift from Brahmin to urban non-Brahmin power, there were other changes. In particular, economically marginalized, rural caste groups like the Thevars of southern Tamil Nadu also participated in violent politics in pursuit of their share in state power. However, Thevar reach for power often came at the expense of Dalit democratization. This chapter examines these confrontations among Brahmins, elite non-Brahmins, Thevars, and Dalits during the 1950s and '60s, and their continued ramifications in twenty-first-century Tamil politics. Today, the DMK and its ideologically comparable rival, the ADMK (All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam) continue to occupy the seat of power in Tamil Nadu. Brahmins dominate positions of power in several domains *outside* government; Thevars have become significant players in Tamil politics; but Dalit battles for equality still continue, violently.

Procedural Continuities and Changes

The continuity of colonial forms of policing after independence is partly explained by the political uncertainty faced by the new nation and its anxiety about maintaining stability. The Partition of India in 1947 had resulted in mass migrations and deaths, leaving the central government suspicious of anything resembling separatism. In February 1950, the government of India passed the Preventive Detention Act in order to protect “internal security” in the nation.³ Although intended to be an emergency provision, the act was extended numerous times on grounds of necessity, and became part of normal law under various guises.⁴ The act, which remained in force for almost two decades, until 1969, allowed local magistracies to detain persons threatening national security for up to twelve months.⁵ In Madras province, the act was deployed against several hundred participants in the movement for a separate Andhra state and members of the Communist Party of India (CPI), among others.⁶ In addition to political exigency, the new state was invested in maintaining order, even when order implied adherence to a status quo premised on socioeconomic inequality. Scholarship on decolonization in India has emphasized the continuity between the

British Raj and the “Congress Raj,” so that Congress Party leadership, even in the decade before independence, was committed to maintaining existing class relations.⁷ Shalini Sharma examines the fruition of this attitude in the ruling Congress Party’s policy toward labor politics in the first year of independence, arguing that the Congress’s quick disavowal of the CPI shows “how rapidly the limits of Indian democracy were set in place.”⁸ Finally, in a new political order that guaranteed everyone participation through the vote, the Congress leadership sought to delegitimize the very forms of mass politics it had fostered and led in the decades before independence.⁹

Hence, when the Union Jack gave way to the Indian tricolor, the government of Madras State continued to use the same laws and strategies as its colonial predecessor in order to police popular politics. Independent India’s government adopted in practically unchanged form the legal provisions that had informed colonial policing: the Code of Criminal Procedure of 1898 (CCP), the Police Act of 1861, and the Indian Penal Code of 1860 (IPC). The new government continued to rely on these laws to preemptively ban gatherings that seemed a possible threat to public order, to redefine public assemblies as unlawful assemblies, to fire on such gatherings, and to press judicial charges against participants in protests.¹⁰ There were numerous instances of police firing on public gatherings in the first decade after independence; a report compiled by the Madras Government in early 1961 listed approximately fifty-five instances in the province since independence.¹¹ A score of these cases were not overtly political, involving routine police attempts to apprehend suspects (in cases of smuggling, dacoity, prohibition offenses and so forth) gone awry. The remainder, however, were explicit attempts to contain popular politics. A dozen cases involved police firing on communist “mobs” and “conspirators,” all within the first three to four years after independence, and over a half dozen focused on labor demonstrations, ostensibly incited by members of the Communist Party. Finally, a few cases, to be discussed in greater detail in the rest of this chapter, involved police shooting members of the political opposition, including the DMK and the Forward Bloc.

However, the continued use of police fire was difficult to justify in independent India, as evidenced not just by protests in legislative houses, newspapers, and public spaces but also by measures taken by the government to reduce its use. In September 1957, responding to questions about shootings in Delhi and Bombay in the parliament, Home Minister G. B. Pant announced that police rules would be amended “to cause the least loss of life

or least injury to persons” during shootings.¹² A police officers’ conference held in 1960 reiterated concern “over the frequency with which the police have had to resort to fire-arms for quelling riots,” and discussed ways to minimize firing on the public consistent with the goal of maintaining order.¹³ In line with these concerns, the executive orders regulating the use of police force were amended in the 1950s and 1960s, although the broad legislative guidelines regarding unlawful assemblies remained unchanged. The most important change was that police management of popular assemblies was made less lethal through a combination of measures. The first was the use of tear gas on protestors: although this had already been introduced in the final years of British rule, its use became standard only in the 1950s.¹⁴ Correcting the long-standing practice of first using *lathis* to disperse crowds, the 1960 police conference advised policemen to use tear gas as the first step before progressing to the *lathi* charge and the use of firearms.¹⁵ The change was incorporated into the Police Standing Orders, which cautioned policemen to always carry an adequate supply of tear gas during riot control. A second change made in the 1950s and 1960s in the interest of reducing fatalities was the phasing out of the more lethal .303 rifles in favor of .410 muskets to disperse unlawful assemblies.¹⁶ Even as these measures point to the state’s efforts to use less spectacular violence in postcolonial India, they did not imply reduced policing of politics.

Criminal prosecution of protesting crowds also continued after 1947, though not with the same frequency as in the colonial period. In 1960, Dalits of Pannankulam village protested against the execution of court orders to distraint their paddy crop “by pushing their women to the front and themselves remaining at the back; stones were pelted at the police from the crowd causing simple and minor injuries.”¹⁷ The police could not order a *lathi* charge since some of the women were pregnant and some had their children with them, but sixty-one Dalits were convicted of rioting and assault. In 1972, seventeen fishermen who threw country bombs at mechanized boats were arrested after the incident. Five of them were taken directly from the government hospital where they had been admitted with bullet injuries after the police fired on them to the police station to be charged.¹⁸

Strategies used during the Indian Emergency of 1975–77 to curb political opposition echoed policing techniques used earlier in independent India. This is not to downplay the brutality of the Emergency. Censorship of the press, suspension of writs guaranteeing fundamental rights, ruthless implementation of projects like slum clearance and mass contraception, even

the scale of the policing—all of these distinguished the Emergency months from the years preceding them. But in terms of procedure, the policing techniques used during the Emergency were not radically different from what may be considered “normal” policing. For example, the Shah Commission mentions the discriminatory use of Section 144 of the CCP in the days after the Allahabad Court convicted Prime Minister Indira Gandhi of election fraud, leading up to the Emergency.¹⁹ The state’s selective use of Section 144 to manage popular politics, and specifically opposition parties, was a continuation of usual policing in the postcolonial era. The Maintenance of Internal Security Act (MISA), enacted by the parliament in 1971, was an especially striking feature of the Emergency. The MISA gave the government draconian powers of preventive detention—by allowing detention for indefinite durations and eliminating the need for independent judicial review, among other things. But the fundamental feature of preventive arrest under (impossible to define) conditions of threats to state security was already present in the Preventive Detention Act of 1950. Soon after the Emergency, the Janata Dal government, which had replaced that of the Congress, repealed the MISA to fulfil its electoral promise to the people. Yet, in the same breath as it acknowledged the “gross abuse” of the MISA and called for its repeal, the government brought back the Preventive Detention Act, arguing that a government in power did not have the luxury of entirely abandoning the use of preventive detention.²⁰ There was no time, before or after the Emergency, that the postcolonial Indian government did not use police powers against its opposition.²¹

Politics as Confronting Police Force: the DMK case

Procedural continuities from the colonial era notwithstanding, universal franchise and a vibrant multiparty system posed a new challenge to policing in postcolonial Madras. As in many other provinces across India, the Congress Party came to power in Madras in the first three elections after independence—in 1952, 1957, and 1962. Yet, Congress authority did not go unchallenged. Its most significant opposition came from the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), founded by C. N. Annadurai in 1949. Annadurai (popularly known as Anna, or Elder Brother) was a follower of EVR Periyar, the preeminent leader of anti-caste politics in twentieth-century Madras, and the DMK was an offshoot of EVR Periyar’s Dravida Kazhagam (DK). Unlike Periyar’s DK, which advocated Dravidian

separatism, Annadurai's DMK, despite its demands for a separate Dravidian state, was also interested in contesting elections and participating in government. In 1967, the DMK won the state legislative assembly elections for the first time, with Anna coming to power as Chief Minister. The DMK derived its strength from the popular base cultivated by Periyar's Self-Respect movement and came into power on a number of related platforms, including anti-Brahmin protest, anti-Hindi protest, and socialist rhetoric.²² In the first fifteen years after independence, the DMK had raised these issues to challenge the legitimacy of a provincial government that was led by a Brahmin and had close ties with the national leadership, both of which were seen as unrepresentative of the majority of the Tamil people. The very form of the DMK's politics over the 1950s and 1960s, when the party increasingly relied on street demonstrations, reflected its substantive aspects. In protesting the imposition of Hindi as the national language, the DMK was explicitly questioning the ability of a physically and culturally distant central government to represent citizens of Madras Province. In taking to the streets, the DMK was implicitly questioning the legitimacy of the institutions of liberal democracy, including its laws and their enforcement by the police. Both the form and substance of the DMK's politics helped cement the party's popularity in the early decades after independence.

The DMK's steady move toward a politics of the street unfolded in conjunction with, and in opposition to, state policing during the 1950s. As early as 1950, the Congress-led state government was using somewhat unobtrusive policing measures to keep its eye on DMK politics. It sent policemen to DMK meetings to note their particulars—time and venue, audience count and response to the speeches, identity of speakers and so forth—in addition to having inspectors actually transcribe and translate the speeches in shorthand.²³ More objectionable to the DMK was the government's regular use of Section 144 to ban its meetings. Condemning the use of policing in a democracy, DMK leaders declared a policy of defiance of Section 144 bans. In a public address in October 1950 to an audience of around 6,000 people, S. V. Natarajan, a DMK leader, declared that "the indiscriminate use of Section 144 to ban meetings of Kazhagams was a feature of the present administration, which had no parallel even during the British regime."²⁴ Nothing, he added, would keep the Dravidians from defying these orders. Every speaker at this event condemned the Congress government's use of Section 144. Faced with DMK leaders' repeated exhortations in speeches and in publications to defy Section 144 orders, the ruling Congress government

looked for ways to prosecute them. Specifically, it considered whether Section 117 of the IPC, which penalized public abetment of an offense, could be used against Annadurai. Already in a hole for using colonial forms of control, the government was only digging itself in deeper. The Section 144 orders being defied by DMK members were not restricting specific actions but were restricting speech more generally, speech that was guaranteed under Article 19 of the new Constitution. The government feared that to prosecute Anna would invite trouble from the courts.²⁵ Consequently, after vacillating on the decision for over a year, the government dropped the matter, though it continued surveilling Anna's activities.

Anna's rhetoric contrasted the exploitative aims and violent methods of a colonial government, which understandably used Section 144, with the goals of a democratic one, which had no reason to do so. "The Europeans were persons who came to exploit this country. They came here only to take away the gold in this country and they were ruling us with a gun. So, there was meaning in their applying Sec. 144 to meetings," he said.²⁶ Painting a vivid picture of a violent Congress government curbing the right to nonviolent public assembly, he took the critique to its logical conclusion in politics of performance, by exhorting members of the DMK to defy all future Section 144 orders, starting with their very next meeting, scheduled to take place in ten days at Kunnathur. In his appeal to DMK followers to flood the jails, Anna also seems to flaunt the DMK's popular appeal, contrasting sovereignty derived from the people with that derived from the law.

What danger will be caused if we speak at Kunnathur? Are our mouths guns or cannon? . . . I ask the rulers whether there is any justice in their action. . . . If a prohibitory order under Section 144 is issued in respect of meetings of the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam in any place, including Kunnathur, we will certainly violate. . . . That meeting may be banned, the comrades coming to the meeting may be beaten with *lathis* and Natarajan and other friends may be arrested and sent to jail at the same time. . . . our struggle will begin at Kunnathur on the 26th instant, the prohibitory order under Sec. 144 will be violated in every place by our comrades. . . . If this government desires to put hundreds of persons in jail, let it boldly apply section 144 against our meetings.²⁷

In accordance with this appeal, the DMK planned its meeting in Kunnathur for the following week. Much as it had anticipated, the local magistrate promulgated a Section 144 order prohibiting the meeting based on a

local Congress member's claim that the meeting would result in a breach of the peace. The DMK responded by announcing that they would hold the meeting in defiance of the order. On the 26th, policemen arrived at the site prepared to enforce the order. According to government reporting, the DMK supporters threw stones at the police, who retaliated with a *lathi* charge, which, however, was ineffective in ending the violence. The police then fired on the crowd; three were injured, none killed. A magisterial inquiry justified the firing.

The progression of events in this case, i.e., state restriction on a public assembly leading within a few hours or days to a more violent confrontation between protestors and the police, and judicial exoneration of police violence, to some extent paralleled instances of protest in the colonial Madras Presidency. The difference in this case is that the DMK did not meet on the 26th to express grievances about the original issue (a demand for a separate Dravida state, say) but simply to oppose the Section 144 order. The politics here was expressly about the policing of public assembly in a democracy. A telling anecdote from Paula Richman's analysis of EVR indicates a similar dynamic, where the purpose of a political act was not so much to critique the *Ramayana*, as to do it publicly—to provoke a spectacle that made visible political differences among the populace.²⁸ In August 1956, disregarding the counsel of senior Congress politicians and actively courting arrest, Periyar led his followers to the Marina Beach in Chennai to ceremonially burn a copy of the *Ramayana*. His supporters threw stones at the police, who responded with a “half-hearted” *lathi* charge, and arrested 890 people. Richman writes that after being released in two and half hours, Periyar did not continue the protest, instead commenting that “the event had more than fulfilled its purpose.”²⁹

The fact that supporters at the beach threw stones at the police in the anecdote above points to the slippery slope from critiquing state violence to engaging in violence oneself.³⁰ Anna's call to strike in 1950 had explicitly voiced the right to nonviolent protest in a democracy but within a few years DMK politics had taken a turn toward the violent. This was especially in evidence in the early 1960s, when the central government in New Delhi was considering implementing Hindi as the national language. Building on and consolidating a long history of Tamil/Dravidian difference from the Hindi-speaking/Aryan north, the DMK vehemently protested this imposition. In its confrontations with the state police during the anti-Hindi agitations, DMK cadres engaged in violent politics. On 25 January 1965, for

example, about 5,000 students gathered at the Rajaji Park in Madurai; two of them burned copies of the Indian Constitution. The students then led a procession to the Congress office, damaged some property, threw stones, and attacked the local representative. The police used tear gas and *lathis*, injuring nine students, and registered cases against several others. Section 30 of the Police Act of 1861 was enforced for a week, prohibiting any more processions. But unlike in the colonial era, policing was unable to suppress what was seen as popular, legitimate protest—in this instance, the assertion by the DMK of a distinctly Dravidian identity. Flouting the Section 30 order, about 400 students gathered the next morning, hoisted black flags, and when asked to disperse threw stones at the policemen, who then used tear gas to disperse the gathering. It is significant that two years after these protests, the DMK came to power with an overwhelming majority and the Congress was erased from the Tamil political landscape.

One of the most dramatic confrontations between state police and the DMK took place in July 1953, when police fired on a large gathering of DMK protesters. This was a charged moment in Madras politics: Chief Minister C. Rajagopalachari (Rajaji) had announced the controversial *Kulakalvi* scheme, the DMK was campaigning for the renaming of (Hindi) Dalmiapuram Railway Station back to (Tamil) Kallakudi Railway Station, and the party was objecting to certain disparaging remarks that Prime Minister Nehru had made about it. Whereas the latter two issues spoke to the long running anti-Hindi/anti-center politics of the period, the first ruffled local anti-caste sentiments. The *Kulakalvi* scheme, announced by the Madras government, was intended to train children in their hereditary vocations. Unsurprisingly the DMK objected to the plan as a perpetuation of caste inequalities by a Brahmin and pilloried the Brahmin-led Congress Party's distance from the Tamil people.³¹

The DMK choreographed a mass protest on these issues, showcasing the gap dividing the state government from the people. Around 7 a.m. on 15 July, 2,000–3,000 DMK supporters blocked a railway line near Thoothukudi.³² According to government reports, the Deputy Superintendent of Police and the Sub-Collector requested Natarajan, the DMK secretary leading the protest, to tell his followers to disperse, multiple times, only to be met with refusals. The police then arrested a few of the protesters (retaining them in police vans stationed at the site), but had stones thrown at them in retaliation. The matter having escalated, the Collector now appeared on the scene, and negotiated the release of the arrested DMK members in return

for their ending the protest. The arrested were released but, disregarding the agreement, simply rejoined the protest, which, Natarajan now announced, would continue until 5:30 p.m. At this stage, the police carried out a *lathi* charge, only to be pelted with stones. They responded by firing twenty-four rounds: three people died on the spot, and another on his way to the hospital. The crowd dispersed. When the train finally managed to leave that spot, it was again obstructed a half mile away by a smaller group of around 400–600 persons. This gathering also showered stones on the train and refused to disperse when ordered to, injuring a constable and railway guard and damaging a few windows in the process. This triggered another shooting, with no casualties this time. Once again, a half mile away, the protestors attempted to remove railway keys from the track and to set fire to the railway bridge. Finally, protestors damaged property and threatened residents, even beating some of them, in a Brahmin locality in Thoothukudi town.

The Thoothukudi protest was not isolated, but was part of a statewide campaign planned by the DMK for that day. On 15 and 16 July, in Madras city alone, policemen took over a hundred DMK members into custody for stopping trains or conducting demonstrations without the appropriate police licence. In addition, over a hundred DMK members were arrested in other parts of the state, including Tirunelveli, Rajapalayam, and Tanjavur.³³ In addition to the punitive arrests, the postcolonial state continued the practices of its colonial predecessor in another way: it imposed Section 30 of the Police Act of 1861 and Section 144 of the CCP in Thoothukudi in the days following the shooting, to ensure that order was maintained. However, unlike colonial state practices, police violence was also immediately followed by a public inquiry open to the press in Madurai, with over seventy witnesses examined.³⁴ “The Court Hall and the verandah of the Sub Court were packed to capacity with lawyers, leading citizens, and the public generally, on most days of the enquiry.”³⁵ Though the inquiry held that the shooting was justifiable and exonerated the policemen, the postcolonial government had to deal with the political consequences of deploying police force. Even at the railway lines, protestors’ slogans had targeted the government’s use of the police as much as it had its substantive policies: “Down with Nehru’s government; down with Rajaji’s government; down with the new elementary education scheme; down with police *zulum*.”³⁶ A couple of weeks after the incident, cartoons appeared in *Viduthalai*, a DMK newspaper, not only mocking the Chief Minister’s use of police force against them but also asserting the impossibility of



FIGURE 4A. Political cartoons from the 1950s. *Viduthalai*, 29 July 1953, p. 1, GO 2821 ms confidential, Public (General B), 13 October 1953, TNA. “The master (Rajaji) turns the dogs on the beggar (Periyar), who is pleading for alms (education for his son).” The cartoon is an indictment of Rajaji’s proposed *Kulakkalvi* scheme.



FIGURE 4B. Political cartoons from the 1950s. *Viduthalai*, 31 July 1953, p. 1, GO 2821 ms confidential, Public (General B), 13 October 1953, TNA. The lion is the DK, the bespectacled figure is Rajaji, and the caption reads, “Is the prison cell (large) enough?”

containing political opposition through such methods. And over the long term, one of the participants in the confrontation with the police became a five-term Chief Minister of the state. In popular narratives, DMK stalwart M. Karunanidhi's lying down on the railway tracks at Kallakudi and courting police arrest on 15 July 1953, at the age of twenty-nine, marked a turning point in his stellar political career.³⁷

One of the *Viduthalai* cartoons that followed the July 1953 incident depicts an irate Rajaji holding open the doors of a tiny cage. Two armed policemen are trying to scare a magnificent lion into the cage, which Rajaji then hopes to bar shut.³⁸ The lion is the Dravida Kazhagam (DK), and the caption reads, "Is the prison cell (large) enough?" The cartoon mocks Congress attempts to contain the DK movement using police force, but not, I would argue, the use of state force itself. In the cartoons, Rajaji, with his angry expressions and caricatured body language, is clearly the villain. The policemen, in contrast, appear merely as servants of the state; there is nothing unsavory about them. The gap between the positive portrayal of the policemen in the cartoon and the animosity displayed toward them at the Thoothukudi rally points to a broader tension between the DMK's politics of words and its politics of deeds in these years. The DMK's effective use of language—in fiery speeches, radical plays, and blockbuster films—was central to its politics and has been discussed by several scholars.³⁹ It has also been pointed out that even as DMK speeches and films critiqued obvious social inequalities, these criticisms masked an acceptance of more fundamental inequalities between the literate and the illiterate, between the rich and the poor, between leaders and the led. Orators' use of pure, "classical" Tamil, for instance, signaled an implicit hierarchy between leaders, who had access to this high-flown language, and their listeners, who did not. But politics of the street were different: they were more democratic, allowing all to participate. This discordance within DMK politics suggests that in the 1950s and 1960s, the DMK's explicitly articulated critique of the models of liberal democracy—which privileged the "reading public" over the potentially violent "crowd"—was only tentative.⁴⁰

A look at a Tamil film of this period illustrates the DMK's acceptance of police and state force, and the limits to its critique of power structures. *Paava Mannippu* ("Forgiveness of Sin") was released in 1961 and starred Sivaji Ganesan—a giant of Tamil cinema and a DMK member.⁴¹ The film is a tale of two families, those of a villainous, high-caste, Hindu merchant and a poor, idealistic, Muslim reformer. The former, Aalavandar, an

overtly religious businessman-landowner, is a caricature of the greed of the wealthy and the irrationality of the religious. He displays no evidence of a conscience and commits various sins through his life. He is avaricious and exploits his tenants; he kills people and shifts the blame onto others; he defaces his enemy by pouring acid on his face; and so on. In marked contrast, the Muslim teacher lives in a slum and helps the poor by dispensing educational and medical assistance. The film, with its messages about religious harmony, class inequality, and the hypocrisy of religious belief stays true to DMK form. But the social critique in films of this period is limited, M. S. S. Pandian argues. Plots bring about a change in heart in evil landowners, merchants, and kings, giving way to benevolent landlords and loyal tenants, good kings and happy subjects—the films rarely question class or caste in their entirety. As Pandian writes, “It is a world of transformed exploiters with untransformed property and power relations.”⁴² The resolution of the plot thus occurs without a progressive element. Sara Dickey notes a similar absence of a progressive element in Tamil films of a slightly later period and characterizes them as melodrama, which “steadfastly refuses to understand social change in other than private contexts and emotional terms.”⁴³ *Paava Mannippu* fits these patterns. It is certainly melodramatic, and the final scene marks the moral redemption of the erstwhile villain through the ultimate act of paternal penance. He risks his life in a fire to save his alienated and impoverished son. He then bequeaths his wealth to the son, instructing him to use it to help the poor. His friend, a pastor, comforts him by saying that Christ will forgive him for his sins. Evil is defeated, then, by a moral, personal transformation, not a structural, societal change.

But the villain does not die in the fire. Instead, at the moment of redemption, three policemen enter to arrest him for his past actions. What were represented as his sins, to be forgiven by god until a minute ago, are now crimes to be punished by the state. Thus, alongside its melodramatic plot resolution that relies on personal, moral transformation, the film still calls for the legitimizing authority of the state in effecting change. In doing so, it expresses a more broadly held belief of the 1950s that the state would be a central instrument of social transformation. In line with this narrative, the film depicts the police as legitimate instruments of state authority, rather than as coercive or illegitimate.⁴⁴ In contrast, the actions of DMK protesters on the railway tracks near Thoothukudi, in definitively and violently rejecting police attempts to de-escalate the protest, suggests that the DMK included non-elite actors who challenged police power. By allowing for the

politics of crowds, the party was, in effect, expanding the critique of state power articulated by its more privileged leaders. Yet even as its politics of the streets invited state reprisal in the form of police force, party ideologues limited their criticism—as in the newspaper cartoons that followed the Thoothukudi shooting—to the actions of the party in power, rather than expressing fundamental distrust of the institutions of the liberal state. Further, although DMK politics had moved toward violent demonstrations, the party did not embrace violence as performative or purifying politics.⁴⁵ The story changes when we examine another political foe of the Madras Congress in the 1950s, the Forward Bloc, led by U. Muthuramalinga Thevar.

Democratization and Caste Violence

A charismatic political figure from the Ramanathapuram district, U. Muthuramalinga Thevar (UMT) had had a long political career by the 1950s. Born in 1908 into a landed family in Pasumpon village near Paramakudi town, he belonged to the Maravar caste. As a youth, he had joined the Congress Party, but later deflected to Subash Chandra Bose's faction, which in the 1940s separated into an independent party, the Forward Bloc. In the 1930s, he led a number of trade union strikes in the textile mills in Madurai. In these, he stood out for his style, which was more aggressive than that of the established Congress trade union leadership. Around this time, UMT also led agitation against the colonial government, protesting the inclusion of members of his caste within the scope of the Criminal Tribes Act of 1911. After India's independence, UMT became a powerful player in electoral politics; by the second national elections of 1957, he was embroiled in a major conflict with the state government and its police.

In the Ramanathapuram district, the battle lines during the 1957 elections were drawn between Maravars, Nadars, and Pallars—all numerically significant castes. As seen in earlier chapters, tensions between these castes had coursed through the first half of the century, with Maravars coming into violent conflict with Nadars and Pallars at different moments. Maravars resented the fact that the Nadars, once poor and considered impure, had improved their economic and caste standing since the late nineteenth century, even as they themselves were criminalized and economically marginalized under colonial rule. Pallars, who occupied the lowest rung in the caste hierarchy and often worked as landless agrarian laborers, had long been subject to exploitation by Maravars, despite acts and movements of

resistance (notably in the 1930s). These long-standing tensions between the caste groups were sharpened by changes that had occurred since independence. First, the rise of the Nadars over the preceding half century seemed to have attained a pinnacle when K. Kamaraj, a Nadar from the Ramana-thapuram district, became Chief Minister in 1954, provoking resentment from Maravars in general and UMT in particular. Second, Pallar activism and political participation in the region had increased through the preceding decade, inviting violent retaliation across its villages from Maravars. According to a petition submitted to the Madras government in 1957 by a Dalit journalist from Madurai, Maravars of the region had raped Pallar women, destroyed Pallar crops, and added kerosene and urine to wells used by Pallars, to name just a few acts of violence.⁴⁶

The 1957 election cycle, which saw caste groups broadly aligned with political parties, brought into relief the volatility of this political climate. Contemporary sources and later analysts concur that Nadars and Pallars largely supported the Congress, while Maravars predominantly supported the Forward Bloc. These affiliations were strengthened by the caste identity of the key players of both parties: UMT, a Maravar, headed the Forward Bloc and K. Kamaraj, a Nadar, was the face of the Congress in Madras State. Pallars did not have a separate party of their own, but a prominent local leader and the president of the Mudukulathur Depressed Classes League, Immanuel Sekaran, was allied with the Congress. It was not just that the elections provided a backdrop for caste violence. Rather, the very process of democratization—in which marginal groups claimed their political share—catalyzed violence. This is apparent when we consider the progression of events over the course of the summer, which witnessed an increasing spiral of political participation from Nadars and Pallars and violent retribution from the locally more powerful Maravars.⁴⁷ It was not just the strength of Maravar large numbers that came into play during the 1957 riots, it was also “the fear of (Pallar) small numbers.”⁴⁸ Immanuel Sekaran’s political ascendancy in the 1957 election cycle revealed the voice that Pallars could exercise in independent India, giving an extra edge to Maravar-Pallar conflict that had existed for several decades.

The run-up to the general elections, which were held in March, was relatively peaceful. UMT contested simultaneously for seats in the Madras Legislative Assembly and the national parliament. He won both elections, a measure of the political clout he wielded in the region. Since UMT had to resign one of his two seats, by-elections to the Mudukulathur Assembly

seat were scheduled for July. Freed from the burden of running a statewide campaign and determined to wrest back the seat, the provincial Congress Party invested its resources into the ensuing campaign. UMT too went on an aggressive campaign trail. He gave speeches at numerous small towns, drawing huge crowds. In these speeches, UMT deftly combined attacks on Nadars as an economically powerful trading caste, as the caste in power, and as a caste who were historically inferior to Maravars. For instance, in a speech at Peraiyur in June 1957 attended by around 7,000 people, he referred to the election as a contest between honest Maravar farmers and dishonest Nadar traders who were swindling them, abetted by the police, an institution they had infiltrated through their access to power (i.e., the Chief Minister was a Nadar).⁴⁹ Building on the claim that corrupt caste power was now allied with coercive state power, he exhorted his followers to commit acts of violence against the police and against Nadars. More broadly, unlike the DMK, whose politics embraced atheism and the exercise of reason, UMT advocated a brand of muscular Hinduism that valorized the use of force. UMT's call for violence did not go unheeded. Over the next few months, his adherents attacked many local volunteers and members of the Congress Party. Based on reports that the local Pallar population had voted for the Congress in the general elections, they also attacked local Pallars. On 1 July, the day of the by-election, there were multiple reports of voter intimidation of Pallars, Nadars, and Congress members by UMT's followers.⁵⁰ UMT's nominee, Sasivarna Thevar (also of the Maravar caste), won the by-election, but the result was challenged on grounds of misconduct in an independent petition to the Election Commission. The petition aggravated the already tense situation, and violence intensified over July and August.⁵¹

As it had with Annadurai earlier, the state administration had policed UMT's political activities through the year. Policemen shadowed him on his campaign, noting audience particulars and transcribing and translating his speeches, a fact that UMT did not fail to bring to public attention. As violence increased after the general elections, extra contingents of the Special Armed Police were stationed in Ramanathapuram and additional police jeeps from neighboring districts were sent to the local police to allow daily armed patrols of remote villages. According to DSP C.V. Narasimhan, "Quick movements of police parties of sufficient strength in these interior tracts had a very salutary effect on the rowdy elements of the locality and a large measure of confidence was restored among the non-Marava communities."⁵² In addition, the government considered

taking legal action against UMT for defamation under Section 500 of the IPC, since UMT was subjecting Chief Minister K. Kamaraj to ferocious professional and ad hominem attack in his campaign speeches.⁵³ The government also considered detaining UMT under the Preventive Detention Act of 1950 for fomenting communal unrest. But even as the government and its lawyers were mulling over the decision and its potential political fallout, the situation in Ramanathapuram plummeted.

Whether inflamed by or despite the extensive preventive policing, violence between the communities had been escalating in the district. To restore a measure of peace, the Ramanathapuram District Collector, C. V. R. Panikkar, called for a public meeting of local community leaders on 10 September 1957.⁵⁴ Ironically, the Peace Conference was to become the originary moment of antagonistic caste narratives that would survive for more than a half century in Tamil politics. The meeting was attended by UMT and Immanuel Sekaran, among others. At the meeting, it is said that Immanuel Sekaran failed to accord UMT the respect he was accustomed to receiving from Pallars. Upon leaving, UMT is reported to have told a few of his adherents, “What kind of Maravars are you that a Palla lad dares speak to me like this!”⁵⁵ The following night, in Paramakudi town, a group of men fatally stabbed Immanuel Sekaran when he was returning home from a meeting. A flurry of violent clashes between Maravars, Pallars, and the state police occurred across the villages of eastern Ramanathapuram over the following fortnight. One prominent strand in contemporary and later accounts of this period fits its events into the narrative of historic Pallar oppression by the higher-caste Maravars.⁵⁶ On the whole, eighteen Pallars were killed and several injured in open clashes between them and Maravars; almost 3,000 Pallar houses were burned. On 20 September, when Pallars took refuge within a church in Veerambal village, a group of around 200 Maravars broke in and fired into the gathering.⁵⁷ Pallars of some villages escaped to the town nearby; the post office refused to carry mail; some schools stayed shut; and doctors stopped visiting certain villages. But in a clear sign of the changed times, where Pallars were ready to fight for their political, social, and economic rights, Pallars were not helpless victims in these confrontations. They too were the aggressors in villages where they enjoyed numerical dominance. In all, eight Maravars were killed and over a hundred houses destroyed in the clashes.

In addition to framing the violence as a conflict *between* two unequal castes, another interpretation also emerged in contemporary accounts and

historical memory to describe the events of September 1957. According to this narrative, triggered by the political threat UMT posed to the Chief Minister and the rivalry between the two, the state's measures to restore order had been biased against Maravars, rendering them the primary victims of police violence. During the course of the events of 1957, the government of Madras had, in fact, deployed a number of policing mechanisms to control Maravars: it put over 400 people, including UMT, in preventive custody; it authorized police forces to fire on public gatherings on at least seven occasions—inevitably on Maravar gatherings; it stationed special armed police forces targeting Maravar villages for several months in Ramanathapuram; and, allegedly, it caused a false charge of abetting murder to be filed against UMT. All these measures had a colonial genealogy—they were justified by judicial procedure or by the doctrine of necessity, and there was no legal provision for the affected Maravars to challenge any of them individually. Collectively, however, they were represented in contemporary newspapers as well as in later accounts as a violation of the rights of a community. Policing was perceived as an act of conscious state power that targeted a specific caste, rather than as a necessary means of maintaining order. Equally, the resistance to policing occupied the domain of politics rather than law.

Especially important in this endeavor was the *memory* of 1957, which was actively deployed by Thevars in the postcolonial political arena. One instance of policing especially stood out from the others in this regard. When Immanuel Sekaran was murdered, the police reportedly received information that certain Maravars belonging to Keezhathooval, a neighboring village, were responsible for the crime. A couple of days after the murder, on the morning of 14 September, a party of armed policemen went into the village to apprehend the suspects. Government accounts of the day's events depict a stereotypically violent mob that threatened public order and police safety: "The police party was attacked by a crowd of Maravars, a thousand strong, who were armed with deadly weapons, as a result of which a few Police officials were injured."⁵⁸ In response, the police asserted, they fired at the crowd. "To begin with, two rounds were fired. But, as the crowd still pressed forward, four more rounds were fired and the mob dispersed."⁵⁹ Five people died in the shooting. Although the English-language press parroted the police narrative of a "mob attack," the Madras government instituted a magisterial commission to investigate the Keezhathooval shootings, under political pressure from UMT.⁶⁰ The

one-man magisterial inquiry was conducted by a member of the Revenue Board, S. Venkateshwaran, in a heavily guarded government bungalow in Paramakudi, the closest town to the site of the incident and began within five days of the event. It was a public inquiry, covered daily and in detail by local and national newspapers. Policemen, villagers of Keezhathooval, and forensic experts testified. On the very first day, a very different narrative of events from the police version emerged from local testimony. According to this account, presented by Maravar (and some Pallar) residents of the village, the police had not been greeted by a violent mob in Keezhathooval village on 14 September.⁶¹ Instead, upon entering the village, they had first forced all the Maravars into the school building. Then they had summoned the five concerned Maravars, tied their hands, marched them out to the tank near the village, strapped them to trees, blindfolded them, and then shot them point-blank at close range.⁶²

Despite the magisterial inquiry into the shooting exonerating the policemen, the deliberate and carefully targeted nature of the killing described in the alternative version of events was not lost to history. Instead, it made its way into community narratives and public monuments and contributed to the politics of public spaces from the 1990s on, as will be discussed in the final section of this chapter. Judicially verifiable facts were not the determining components of history and memory in postcolonial politics. More immediately, the ability of Maravars to retaliate against police violence over several weeks, and the ability of UMT to gain political mileage through the Keezhathooval incident speaks to the value of numbers in a democratic political arena.⁶³ All the same, policing made its power felt. Within a few days of UMT's arrest under the Preventive Detection Act of 1950, violence in the area had come to an end. UMT stayed in jail for a little over a year; his political activities declined after his release, and he died soon after, in 1963. The Forward Bloc collapsed, but the value of the Thevar (the umbrella caste to which Maravars belonged) vote remained high, with the community being courted by the DMK from as early as the 1960s and by the ADMK in later decades.

Redefining Publics: Expansions and Limits

After 1947, the language of politics in Madras state was no longer limited to a small civil society or a literate public sphere. Instead, electoral politics included those belonging to lower social classes and castes, especially

when they could organize under the banner of powerful political parties. Although the DMK and the Forward Bloc followed fairly different political trajectories and espoused very different political messages in the 1950s, both parties took to the streets in their campaigns. And both parties shaped the form of their politics in step with the policing mechanisms deployed against them. The extent of violence displayed by the two parties in moments of public protest increased over the course of the 1950s and 1960s, informing and informed by the state's increased use of police force. This dynamic was not unique to Tamil politics of the 1950s: Thomas Blom Hansen argues that the violent policing of the Samyukta Maharashtra movement in 1956 spurred the movement on, so that "the cohesion of the movement vitally depended on the determined resistance it faced from the political establishment."⁶⁴

Not all voices of protest enjoyed the political clout of the DMK or UMT, and the use of police force against labor or the Communist Party of India (CPI) did not provoke similar political challenges to the state government. In fact, the Madras government enacted laws expressly to tackle Communists in the early years of independence; these included the Madras Maintenance of Public Order Ordinance and, later, the Madras Maintenance of Public Order Act in 1947.⁶⁵ The government's use of policing against the CPI, starting as early as 1947 and continuing into the 1950s, encompassed the range of tools available to them—from preventive policing to use of firearms to the punitive stationing of armed forces. In 1948, police complained about agricultural workers in several villages in the Ramanathapuram district who had struck for higher wages "at the instigation of Communists," and stationed the armed police reserve in these areas during the harvest to curb the protest.⁶⁶ The definition of the Communists as a threat to national security in the late 1940s legally justified multiple instances of police violence not only against members of the party, but on labor more broadly, as for instance in 1947, when police fired on industrial strikers in the Vikramasingapuram textile mills whom, they said, were acting "under the Communist direction."⁶⁷

But even in the late 1950s, when the CPI was no longer actively resisting the Congress government and had transitioned in its strategy to contesting elections, it was still being policed. In 1959, the Rameshwaram Sub-Inspector reported that there were "strained feelings" between the Congress and the CPI over the results of the local *Panchayat* elections, and that the Communists were holding processions that could result in a breach

of the peace. Accordingly the magistrate passed an order under Section 144 prohibiting political processions and gatherings within the limits of the *Panchayat* Board for a month.⁶⁸ In addition to policing the party, the state continued to use police force to put down labor demonstrations even though the instability of the initial years of independence had passed. Such incidents garnered little media attention. When police fired on a procession of around 10,000 plantation workers in Valparai in 1957, killing five and injuring six, the *Indian Express* coverage was limited to a tiny article on page 7, problematically headlined “Fire opened on unruly plantation workers, 5 killed.”⁶⁹ In contrast, the police firing on DMK protestors in 1953 and on Maravars in 1957 had received widespread, front-page press coverage in the days that followed. Police attacks on laboring classes continued into the 1970s. In 1971, there was a conflict in coastal Tirunelveli between fishermen and owners of newly mechanized boats which had begun to erode the fishermen’s earnings. Talks held between the disputing parties were unfruitful. The next year, in anticipation of trouble, the government posted two sections of the armed reserve police in the area at the beginning of the fishing season. This only pushed the conflict seaward. In the early hours of 12 October 1972, the fishermen threw country-bombs at the mechanized boats, destroying property worth about 3 lakh rupees.⁷⁰ Police fired on the protestors, injuring some of them. As expected, they were exonerated in the inquiry that followed. In the absence of judicial redress, labor groups required political muscle to protest police force. But in light of the weakness of the CPI in postcolonial Tamil politics, the ability of labor—whether organized or unorganized—to rally against police violence was constrained, especially outside urban centers.

Admittedly, the CPI was politically weak in most parts of India by the 1960s; but its explicit disavowal of caste as an explanatory factor in addressing inequality was particularly injurious to its position in Madras. Besides boasting of a long history of anti-caste movements dating from the late nineteenth century, the very success of caste-based political parties like the DMK kept the politics of caste alive in this province. Continued police violence in the era of democratic politics also vitalized caste politics, since the electoral arena gave citizens a platform that was more effective in negotiating coercive state authority than were judicial courts. As seen throughout this book, courts routinely justified police violence, which could be interpreted as necessary to maintain order. Furthermore, the law’s equal treatment of all citizens ignored their varied exposure to police violence based

on caste and class. Resistance on the streets and political legitimacy were a different matter. Here, political parties organized around caste identity could voice their experience of state violence. The focus on identity not only helped democratize politics by facilitating the participation of lower-caste actors, it also made possible the articulation of a fundamental critique of liberal politics and the state violence upon which it rested, by calling attention to its inequalities.

Even as caste politics helped communities talk about police violence, talking about police violence strengthened caste identities. Castes whose everyday experience of the state was mediated through the police used their experience of exclusion and violence as a foundation to strengthen caste identities and stake political claims. For both subordinate castes like Pallars and relatively dominant ones like Maravars, violence was “a form of political currency in the postcolonial milieu of commensuration.”⁷¹ In turn, claiming historic experience of violence brought into play the politics of memory. Here I discuss the memorialization of the 1957 Keezhathooval police shooting, which has played a considerable role in the consolidation of Thevar caste identity in recent decades. The day of the shooting has been named *Aivar Thinam* (Day of the Five), in tribute to the five victims of police fire. On 26 January 1990, the Indian Republic Day, the Tamil Nadu Thevar Peravai (Tamil Nadu Thevar Assembly) erected a memorial pillar to the five victims of the shooting in Keezhathooval village. The choice of India’s Republic Day to hold the event points to the integration of the memory into the arena of state politics. The name of the group—Tamil Nadu Thevar Assembly—suggests that between 1957, when the shooting occurred, and 1990, when the pillar was erected, the significance of the shooting had expanded from one village to the entire state of Tamil Nadu, from the Maravar caste to the Thevar umbrella caste. Thevar community blogs too memorialized the shooting, with far more vivid descriptions than the dry police reports of a half century earlier. For instance, one Tamil blog recounted the events of the day as follows:

The ruthless murderer, the blood-thirsty inspector Ray, and a police battalion were sent to Keezhathooval village by the Chief Minister Kamaraj and senior police officers. . . . On 14 September 1957, the policemen entered Keezhathooval village, near Mudukulathur. Inspector Ray beat and tortured the peaceful residents of Keezhathooval village. He imprisoned the elderly in the village school. Mudukulathur

Sub-Inspector Nataraja Iyer dragged out the five youth Thavasiyandi Thevar, Chittiravelu Thevar, Jeganathan Thevar, Muthumani Thevar, and Sivamani Thevar. The blood-thirsty Inspector Ray took them to the banks of the tank that adjoined the village. There, the five brave youth who had been taken to the banks of the tank were blindfolded, their hands and feet were tied. They were tied to the *karuvela* trees, and as they stood there in fear, (the policemen) shot them. Hearing the sound of gunshot, those imprisoned in the village school wailed in anguish. . . .”⁷²

As opposed to official narratives of the firing, where the victims were enumerated but not named, the five deceased were memorialized with their names and with vivid images that were used to embellish the tragic tale. The entire story was made more emotive, the inspector was named, other actors—helpless witnesses to the crime—were brought in, their cries of anguish recorded for posterity. When I went to Keezhathooval village in July 2015, I met Govindan, who shared with me his memories of the day. One of two small boys who had presented eyewitness testimony supporting the brutal shooting to the government commission a half century ago, Govindan was now an aged man. His narrative, similar to that of the blog, highlighted the emotive aspect of the encounter. He recounted the names of some of the victims, the name of Sub-Inspector Nataraja Iyer, the slaps the five men had received from the police, the blazing heat they had endured, the torture (*cittiravatai*) the rest of the villagers had faced, the pots of gruel (*kañci*) the policemen had gratuitously broken, and the fatal shots fired—by five policemen on five men.⁷³

It is noteworthy that of the various episodes of violence from 1957, it was this story that was memorialized in Thevar narratives. Discussing the controversial police firing on Algerian-French protestors in Paris in 1961, Joshua Cole argues that acts of commemoration pull the history of an event in different directions.⁷⁴ The memory of the Keezhathooval episode highlights, first, state violence at the expense of other instances of inter-communal clashes that occurred during that fortnight in 1957. Second, it highlights the identity of a supra-local community, Thevars, at the expense of locality.⁷⁵ The events of 1957 pertained only to the Maravar sub-caste, so much so that in investigations of the police shooting, Agamudaiyars (another Thevar sub-caste) were considered impartial witnesses, as opposed to Maravars or Pallars. In contrast, the memory of the shooting



FIGURE 5. Statues of Dalit leaders. B. R. Ambedkar and Immanuel Sekaran, Kizhakkancheri village. Note the calendar, which also carries an image of Immanuel Sekaran, hanging outside the locked structure. Author's collection.

is appropriated by Maravars, Kallars, and Agamudaiyars across Tamil Nadu—the Thevar voting bloc, in short. Third, the memory of the episode, especially in the form of the images, highlights the masculinity of the victims—all depicted as mustachioed, bare-chested men, pushing to the margins questions of gender violence pertaining to the events of 1957. The image also strengthens the Thevar self-representation as a masculine and valiant caste community, a far cry from the Villur protests of 1902 when Agamudaiyar women sat on the ground, defying police orders, to protest Chettiar construction.⁷⁶ On the whole, among Thevars, the memory of state violence upon a caste community overshadows other public memories of 1957, indicating the use of caste politics to negotiate coercive state authority as well as to consolidate electoral strength.

Dalits too have summoned historical memory to forge community and stake political claims. The battle between Thevars and Dalits for historical memory manifests in present-day Tamil Nadu as a battle for the landscape, fought on public streets.⁷⁷ Statues of UMT and Immanuel Sekaran, the two protagonists of the 1957 conflict, dot the southern Tamil landscape. Some of UMT's statues are larger, more gilded, and occupy key spots in



FIGURE 6. Statue of U. Muthuramalinga Thevar, Kamuthi. Author's collection.

large cities, reflecting the greater wealth and political capital held by the Thevar community. Immanuel Sekaran's statues are often paired with B. R. Ambedkar's, announcing the arrival of a Dalit community politicized at the national level. Numerous simple brick-and-paint statues of both leaders occupy strategically significant sites across villages in Ramanathapuram—near the village water tank or temple. In recent years, Thevars, Dalits, and the parties representing them have confronted each other several times over the question of paying obeisance to these statues, which are frequently enclosed in locked structures, their keys held at the respective local police station. These conflicts have been especially pitched on certain days that have become meaningful in Thevar and Dalit community narratives: 30

October (UMT's birth and death anniversary), 11 September (Immanuel Sekaran's death anniversary), and 14 September (the day of the Keezhathooval shooting). The intensity of the conflict has provoked a considerable police presence on these dates, at these sites. For instance, in September 2013, the Tamil Nadu police used Section 144 of the CCP to place restrictions on public gatherings honoring Immanuel Sekaran on the anniversary of his death, as well as on gatherings paying homage to the victims of the Keezhathooval shooting, three days later.⁷⁸ More recently, in 2015, police protection for UMT's anniversary celebrations included 6,000 personnel and a drone.⁷⁹

These violent encounters are not timeless expressions of antagonism between two eternally hostile castes, but instead need to be contextualized in contemporary history. In southern Tamil Nadu, Thevar violence against Dalits since the 1980s has been a backlash to Dalit political activism and economic betterment.⁸⁰ Importantly, caste violence has not existed autonomous of state violence; rather, the state has been fully implicated in Thevar violence against Dalits. An infamous incident from 2011, when the Paramakudi town police fired at a Dalit procession commemorating the death of Immanuel Sekaran, killing seven, drew considerable attention to the imbrication of the police in caste politics. According to state authorities, the crowd had grown violent, necessitating police fire. However, scholars and Dalit activists have challenged this narrative, claiming that the shooting was unprovoked.⁸¹ Some have explained the intervention of the police in Thevar-Dalit conflict by noting the preponderance of Thevars in the Tamil Nadu police force. Thus, according to one report on Dalit violence, Thevar policemen "*have been unable to overcome their caste affiliations.*"⁸² This framing, where a putatively fair police force is corrupted by caste ideology, ignores the structural violence of policing and isolates its working from broader ideologies of power. As commentators on the 2011 police attack on Dalits have noted, Thevar violence has been backed by state authority for two reasons. First, Thevars, because of their concentrated numerical strength, are a more valuable voting bloc in a first-past-the-post electoral system than are Dalits, who are more dispersed geographically. Accordingly, state governments and prominent political parties have allowed Thevars privileged access to police functioning. Second, caste ideology is interlaced with broader structures of power, so that Dalits are marginalized systemically through state and police functioning, not just by Thevar actors in power. In other words, police brutality is reflective of broader currents of power.

Dalit struggles for equality and a fair political stake have persisted into the twenty-first century in the face of yoked police and upper-caste violence. This has occasionally led to a confrontational politics of the street that, Hugo Gorringe argues, complements the process of democratization. Far from being harmful to democracy, radical Dalit movements have deepened the democratic process in Tamil Nadu by extending the agenda and constituency of its politics.⁸³ Importantly, such confrontational politics are waged not solely against members of one caste but rather against a casted social structure that is undergirded by state violence. The seeming normalization of violence in Tamil politics today has not come out of nowhere. It reflects the possibilities of a democracy, where the most marginalized groups can at least struggle to resist the violence they face every day. Violence has never been separated from the rule of law in liberal states. In colonial India, popular violence was curbed by the normal use of exceptional power, but in postcolonial India, violence has been absorbed into the language of mainstream politics.

Conclusion

THE POLITICS OF CIVIL SOCIETY in twentieth-century India—participating in debates about policy, writing newspaper columns, and so forth—included only a small segment of the body politic, as has been widely recognized.¹ Although access to the liberal public sphere was limited to those privileged by race, gender, class, religion, and caste, its actors represented themselves as unmarked by any of these identities, and therefore as representing universal interests. This bourgeois public sphere was rooted in private property, for its activities occurred indoors, conducted by unseen bodies. But outside these closed spaces was a vast world where visible bodies daily performed other kinds of politics. On village and urban streets, in open fields, at factory gates, along rivers, near temples, and outside tea shops, some people claimed their rights and some people put down others' rights. In these politics that were very much embodied, identities of community, far from being abstracted away, were central.²

Alongside subject-citizens negotiating unequal status, there was another necessary participant in the communal politics of public spaces. This was the police officer, who was invested with the task of maintaining public order. In fact, public arenas stand “conceptually *between* the state and society . . . a zone of interaction.”³ Neither colonial nor postcolonial policemen treated all subjects equally, from a distance. Contrary to the colonial myth of the neutral state that stood above partisan disputes, policemen acting in public arenas were guided by colonial knowledge that objectified native communities. Bernard Cohn wrote that the British in India “conquered not only a territory but an epistemological space as well.”⁴ Indeed, policemen drew on colonial knowledge to provide some communities greater state protection while subjecting others to more coercive surveillance. Not only were the objects of policing determined by caste; its agents were too. In colonial Madras, police recruitment drew explicitly on objectified notions of caste, so that certain castes were represented far more than others in the force. Although the postcolonial government disavowed this policy except for affirmative action for the lowest castes, some castes remained better represented than others. The influx of certain castes into the force

at certain moments in the post-independence period suggests that the presence of sympathetic caste members in the police was valued in those communities.⁵ Thus, in addition to being agents of state authority, policemen were also social actors with caste identities. Conversely, despite the ideal of an equal law, legal subjects had varying levels of access to state authority in the form of policing. Far from existing in two distinct realms, the everyday enactment of state and caste authority informed each other. Upper-caste actors drew on police authority to enforce caste hierarchy, even as police intervention in caste conflict helped reproduce state authority. Certainly, policing also helped those of the lower castes resist caste authority on occasion. My point here is not that the police always reaffirmed caste hierarchies (although they often did), but that caste politics and policing were not independent of each other.

In the course of their routine tasks—surveillance on the beat, registering a crime, interrogating a suspect, or monitoring a public gathering—policemen brought legally sanctioned state violence, or the threat of it, to bear on societal disputes. Well-versed in the priorities and methods of policemen, subject-citizens maneuvered criminal procedure to their advantage where possible, channeling the force of law into the embodied politics of public spaces. Together, policemen and the objects of their coercive gaze built a world where criminal law was a real and continuous presence, a world where state authority was routinely performed and experienced instead of being an abstraction. Policing practices simultaneously constituted the everyday authority of the state and popular, sometimes violent politics, especially among lower castes and classes that were frequent objects of police authority. Hence, “communal” violence did not take place independent of modern state authority. This was neither a domain of criminal violence that was clearly distinct from legal violence nor a domain of subaltern politics that was autonomous from modern state power. Rather, popular violent politics were constituted in relation to the law and its criminal procedure.

Contrary to the notion that the colonial police’s purview was largely limited to urban centers, this book has argued that the institution extended its reach, albeit unevenly, into the countryside. In order to use its scarce resources optimally, the Madras police differentiated communities, spaces, and times, deploying more men and arms into communities deemed criminal, to dense or tense villages, and on festival and market days. Even if policing in provinces across British India differed in some ways—including the strength of the force and its literacy—it shared some common features.⁶

First, policing across the country allowed for escalation from unarmed civil to armed military action, enabling the normal exercise of exceptional, violent state authority. Second, colonial policing employed the language of community in designating its objects, deeming certain communities more criminal than others. Race, of course, was the primary line dividing colonized subject from colonizer, and rendered all Indians vulnerable to state violence under colonial rule. But there were other divisions too. Religious identity proved important in categorizing colonial subjects in some parts of the country. In the Tamil regions of the Madras Presidency, however, caste was central, for historical reasons. Here, caste identity mattered even in cases of ostensibly religious conflict, as for instance in disputes between Christian Nadars and Hindu Nadars or Muslim Labbais and Hindu Padayachis. The vitality of the anti-caste movement, which had started by the late nineteenth century in this region, added to the importance of caste in influencing conflict and, concomitantly, in informing police knowledge of social dynamics. While the salience of race as a political identity and police category disappeared with independence, that of caste increased as Dravidian parties that built on Periyar's Self-Respect movement came to power in Tamil Nadu.

The application of caste as a category guiding policing was not limited to occasional encounters, to instances when caste groups were politicized enough to confront more powerful castes and the police. Instead, identity seeped into everyday life, in how individuals encountered social and state authority combined. I focus on the politics of public spaces not to neglect the politics of writing and the intellectualism of caste radicalism or to recycle stereotypes of caste politics as violent politics, but to highlight the vulnerability of the casted body in resisting power and the imbrication of the state in enacting routine violence.⁷ Indeed, this everyday exposure of the body occurred in tandem with other forms of caste politics that included the creation of origin narratives, conversion to other religions, migration to plantations across the Empire, and the politics of associations. This is illustrated vividly when we consider police interaction with the Nadars, a caste whose status changed dramatically over the period studied. During these years, Nadars appear prominently in the archival record at moments when they were engaged in fierce riots with Maravars, in 1899, 1918, and 1957. But that was not their only encounter with violence or with the police. In the years immediately after 1899, the colonial police extended extra protection to the community, whom they saw as important traders, in the

form of stations and beats. Individual instances of police violence, as for instance against a Dalit male suspected to have played a role in the death of a Nadar woman, also indicate that police tactics were shifting in tune with increasing Nadar status. It is well documented that Nadars altered their social position through forming associations and writing caste histories, which, in fact, located the 1899 riot as a key moment of community formation.⁸ But in addition I suggest that they also fashioned their community identity through mundane acts like filing “false complaints” to buttress their status against that of the Naickers of one village, or petitioning the police to relocate the station in another. Interestingly, the Nadars begin to disappear from police records in the 1960s, by which time their new caste status had been consolidated and their politics had migrated more fully to the bourgeois public sphere.

If some castes like the Nadars had achieved their desired status after a prolonged struggle, for others like the Dalits, the struggle was only beginning. From the 1960s on, Dalits faced violent retaliation for their activism and for the legislative protection extended to them by the new Republic. Although police force typically accompanied and supported upper-caste violence in these incidents, judicial redress was rarely effective, since police violence was usually deemed legal. Instead, protest on the streets framed in the language of community had a better chance of being heard—by political leaders and by the media. Thus, even as the judicial institutions of the liberal state allowed for the reproduction of caste violence, democracy provided the conditions to challenge caste inequality. The renewed vigor of the politics of the street in democratic India, its gendered nature and tilt toward majoritarianism notwithstanding, has allowed marginalized caste groups like Dalits to protest the violence of the law. All the same, violent interactions between police and legal subjects have endured, illuminating the role of a superior state force in reproducing social violence. In understanding recent caste wars, it is important to see community relations not as distinct from the state but as part of the longer history of the policing of public spaces, which helped normalize violence along community lines in colonial and postcolonial Madras.

Introduction

1. S. Viswanathan, "Caste-based mobilisation and violence," *Frontline* 15, no. 22 (1998), <https://frontline.thehindu.com/static/html/fl1522/15220360.htm>.

2. The Thevar sub-caste referred to here were Kallars and the Dalits were Pal-lars. Government Order (GO) 62, Public (Police), 7 February 1933, Tamil Nadu Archives (TNA).

3. For scholarly discussions that emphasize the colonial state's inability to penetrate the southern countryside, see C. J. Baker and D. A. Washbrook, eds., *South India: Political Institutions and Political Change 1880–1940* (Delhi: Macmillan, 1975). For media reports and historical accounts of violent caste politics in southern Tamil Nadu, see S. Viswanathan, *Dalits in Dravidian Land: Frontline Reports on Anti-Dalit Violence in Tamil Nadu, 1995–2004* (Pondicherry: Navayana, 2005); K. A. Manikumar, *Murder in Mudukulathur: Caste and Electoral Politics in Tamil Nadu* (New Delhi: LeftWord, 2017). For films, see *Thevar Magan*, directed by Bharathan (Raaj Kamal Films International, 1992); *Vedam Puthithu*, directed by Bharathiraja (Janani Art Creations, 1987). For film commentary, see Baradwaj Rangan, "Review: *Paruthi Veeran*," 2 March 2007, <https://baradwajrangan.wordpress.com/2007/03/02/review-paruthi-veeran/>. For critiques of cinematic representation of caste in Madurai, see Dickens Leonard, "Spectacle Spaces: Production of Caste in recent Tamil films," *South Asian Popular Culture* 13, 2 (2015). For the consequences of framing caste as a religious rather than socioeconomic issue, see Rupa Viswanath, *The Pariah Problem: Caste, Religion, and the Social in Modern India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).

4. For a comprehensive account of the historiography on caste in the modern era, see Susan Bayly, *Caste, Society and Politics in India from the Eighteenth Century to the Modern Age* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999). For a handbook, see Diane Mines, *Caste in India* (Ann Arbor, MI: Association for Asian Studies, 2009). For scholarship on Dalits, see Ramnarayan Rawat and K. Satyanarayana, eds., *Dalit Studies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016).

5. Police personnel in the period and site of study were all men. The Tamil Nadu police significantly corrected its gender balance around the end of the twentieth century.

6. Rajnarayan Chandavarkar, "Customs of Governance: Colonialism and Democracy in Twentieth Century India," *Modern Asian Studies* 41, no. 3 (2007): 450–51.

7. David Arnold, *Police Power and Colonial Rule, Madras, 1859–1947* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1986), 99.

8. See also Basudev Chatterji, "The Darogah and the Countryside: The Imposition of Police Control in Bengal and its Impact (1793–1837)," *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 18 no. 1 (1981). For the broader colonial world, see David Anderson and David Killingray, eds., *Policing the Empire: Government, Authority and Control, 1830–1940* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991); Martin Thomas, *Violence and Colonial Order: Police, Workers and Protest in the European Colonial Empires, 1918–1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

9. John McLane, "Bengali Bandits, Police and Landlords after the Permanent Settlement," in *Crime and Criminality in British India*, ed. Anand Yang (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1985); Anand Yang, *The Limited Raj: Agrarian Relations in Colonial India, Saran District, 1793–1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989); and to a lesser extent Sandria Freitag, "Collective Crime and Authority in North India," in *Crime and Criminality*, ed. Yang. For exceptions to this literature of absence, see Erin Giuliani, "Strangers in the village? Colonial Policing in Rural Bengal, 1861 to 1892," *Modern Asian Studies* 49, no. 5 (2015); and, for an earlier period, Radhika Singha, *A Despotism of Law: Crime and Justice in Early Colonial India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998). More tangentially, Shahid Amin's work firmly locates the police in the everyday lives of the rural inhabitants of colonial north India. Shahid Amin, *Event, Metaphor, Memory: Chauri Chaura, 1922–1992* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995). For exceptions outside South Asia, see Michelle Moyd, *Violent Intermediaries: African Soldiers, Conquest, and Everyday Colonialism in German East Africa* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2014). But even works that explicitly deny routine police presence contain evidence that suggests otherwise. Thomas, *Violence and Colonial Order*, 333–34; David Killingray, "Securing the British Empire: Policing and Colonial Order, 1920–1960," in *The Policing of Politics in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Mark Mazower (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1997), 171.

10. Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the College de France, 1977–78*, ed. Michel Senellart, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2007); Mark Neocleous, *The Fabrication of Social Order: A Critical Theory of Police Power* (Sterling, VA: Pluto Press, 2000).

11. For literature on police as agents of both governmentality and sovereignty, arguing for convergence between the goals of economic welfare and state power, see Mariana Valverde, "Police, Sovereignty, and Law: Foucaultian Reflections," in *Police and the Liberal State*, ed. Markus Dubber and Mariana Valverde (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008); Clive Emsley, "Introduction: Political Police and the European Nation-State in the Nineteenth Century," in *Policing of Politics*, ed. Mazower; Mark Mazower, "Conclusion: The Policing of Politics in Historical

Perspective,” in *Policing of Politics*. For the well-established scholarship on the intimacy between private property and definitions of criminality, see E. P. Thompson, *Whigs and Hunters: The Origin of the Black Act* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1975); Douglas Hay et al., eds., *Albion’s Fatal Tree: Crime and Society in Eighteenth-Century England* (London: Allen Lane, 1975); Yang, ed., *Crime and Criminality*.

12. Sidney L. Harring, *Policing a Class Society: The Experience of American Cities, 1865–1915* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1983); Phillip Thurmond Smith, *Policing Victorian London: Political Policing, Public Order, and the London Metropolitan Police* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1985); David Taylor, *Policing the Victorian Town: The Development of the Police in Middlesbrough, c. 1840–1914* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002); Stefan Petrow, *Policing Morals: The Metropolitan Police and the Home Office, 1870–1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994); Thomas Holloway, *Policing Rio de Janeiro: Repression and Resistance in a 19th Century City* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993).

13. Tirthankar Roy, *The Economic History of India, 1857–1947* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000).

14. Bernard Cohn, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996); Nicholas Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001).

15. Valverde, “Police, Sovereignty, and Law,” 25. For a discussion of the instability of the categories used to define the objects of colonial violence, see James Leaning, “Categories of Conquest and Colonial Control: The French in Tonkin, 1884–1914,” in *Violence, Colonialism and Empire in the Modern World*, ed. Philip Dwyer and Amanda Nettelbeck (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

16. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978); Gyan Prakash, “The Colonial Genealogy of Society: Community and Political Modernity in India,” in *The Social in Question: New Bearings in History and the Social Sciences*, ed. Patrick Joyce (London: Routledge, 2002). Colonial forensics (famously, fingerprinting) was certainly invested in capturing the individual identity of legal subjects too, but my interest here is in the policing of communities.

17. Refracted through a shifting Orientalist lens, the discursive construction of criminal groups’ identities changed across the span of colonial rule: from blood-thirsty “thugs” in the early nineteenth century to relatively prosaic “dacoits” by midcentury and caste-based “criminal tribes” by the 1870s. The Criminal Tribes Act of 1870 attributed criminality to the members of a community, simply for belonging to it, rather than to an individual for a particular crime. For the literature on community and criminality, see Yang, *Crime and Criminality*; Singha, *Despotism of Law*; Meena Radhakrishna, *Dishonoured by History: “Criminal Tribes” and British Colonial Policy* (Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 2001); Anand Pandian, *Crooked Stalks: Cultivating Virtue in South India* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009); Sandria Freitag, “Crime in the Social Order of Colonial North India,” *Modern Asian Studies* 25, no. 2 (1991).

18. There was also a direct genealogical link between the policing of criminalized communities in the nineteenth century and regular policing in the twentieth. The Thuggee and Dacoity Department, which was phased out in the 1860s with the reorganization of the national police, bequeathed to the latter some of its targets as well as techniques. Freitag, "Collective Crime and Authority," 150.

19. David Arnold, "Bureaucratic Recruitment and Subordination in Colonial India: The Madras Constabulary, 1859–1947," in *Subaltern Studies 4: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, ed. Ranajit Guha (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1985).

20. Ramanathapuram was constituted only in 1910, from parts of the Madurai, Tirunelveli, and Tanjavur districts. The three districts studied here were alternatively known as Madura, Tinnevely, and Ramnad in colonial writing. This book adheres to the current spellings, except in direct quotations. The districts were bifurcated in the 1980s and correspond to the present districts of Madurai, Theni, Dindigul, Tirunelveli, Thoothukudi, Ramanathapuram, Sivagangai, and Virudhunagar.

21. The shift from private local policing to centralized state policing occurred around the same period (1750–1850) in Great Britain as well, where also it met with popular resistance. Victor Bailey, ed., *Policing and Punishment in Nineteenth Century Britain* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1981); Clive Emsley, *Crime and Society in England, 1750–1900*, 5th ed. (New York: Routledge, 2018).

22. Gyanesh Kudaisya, *A Republic in the Making: India in the 1950s* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2017); Gyan Prakash, Michael Laffan, and Nikhil Menon, eds., *The Postcolonial Moment in South and Southeast Asia* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018); Taylor Sherman, William Gould, and Sarah Ansari, "From Subjects to Citizens: Society and the Everyday State in India and Pakistan, 1947–1970," *Modern Asian Studies* 45, no. 1 (2011). A large Partition historiography also emphasizes this point.

23. Christophe Jaffrelot, "Interpreting the Divergence of Two Political Trajectories," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 15, no. 2 (2002).

24. Discussing political policing across countries in the twentieth century, Mazower notes the striking smoothness which with police agencies "made the transition from democracy to dictatorship and back again." Mazower, "Conclusion," 253. See also Arnold, *Police Power and Colonial Rule*, 2.

25. Jacques Derrida, "Force of Law: The 'Mystical Foundation of Authority,'" in *Acts of Religion*, ed. Gil Anidjar (New York: Routledge, 2002), 233.

26. Hence the continued use of colonial provisions like Section 144 of the CCP (preventing public gatherings) and Section 124 of the IPC (penalizing sedition), well into the twenty-first century. For a conception of entire colonial realms as spaces of exception that permitted suspension of normal law, see Nasser Hussain, *The Jurisprudence of Emergency: Colonialism and the Rule of Law* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003); Partha Chatterjee, *Lineages of Political Society: Studies in Postcolonial Democracy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).

27. Walter Benjamin, "Critique of Violence," in *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, trans. Edmund Jephcott, ed. Peter Demetz (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978); Derrida, "Force of Law."

28. Hussain, *Jurisprudence of Emergency*; Veena Das and Deborah Poole, eds., *Anthropology in the Margins of the State* (Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press, 2004); Thomas Blom Hansen and Finn Stepputat, *Sovereign Bodies: Citizens, Migrants, and States in the Postcolonial World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005); Jinee Lokaneeta, *Transnational Torture: Law, Violence, and State Power in the United States and India* (New York: NYU Press, 2011). Das and Poole draw explicit attention to the figure of the policeman as embodying exception, p. 11.

29. Elsewhere Benjamin points out that the "tradition of the oppressed" teaches us that emergency is not the exception but the rule. Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 257.

30. The legal tolerance for police violence is addressed only by fundamental shifts in criminal procedure, e.g., with the presumption of guilt and consequent changes in evidentiary protocol. Jinee Lokaneeta, "Law Commission Report on Torture is a Step in the Right Direction, but a Just Bill is Still Some Way Off," *The Wire*, 15 November 2017, <https://thewire.in/external-affairs/prevention-of-torture-bill-india-law-commission>.

31. Ornit Shani, *How India Became Democratic: Citizenship and the Making of the Universal Franchise* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018); Rohit De, *A People's Constitution: The Everyday Life of Law in the Indian Republic* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018).

32. Dirks, *Castes of Mind*; Ashutosh Varshney, "Is India Becoming more Democratic?," *Journal of Asian Studies* 59, no. 1 (2000); Christopher Jaffrelot, *India's Silent Revolution: The Rise of the Lower Castes in North India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003); Hugo Gorrings, *Untouchable Citizens: Dalit Movements and Democratisation in Tamil Nadu* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2005); Anupama Rao, *The Caste Question: Dalits and the Politics of Modern India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009); Jeffrey Witsoe, *Democracy against Development: Lower-caste Politics and Political Modernity in Postcolonial India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013).

33. There were attempts to change this theoretical equality as early as the 1950s, but especially in the 1970s and '80s, when special procedures began to be introduced in the courts to address caste-based crime.

34. Gorrings, *Untouchable Citizens*; Diane Mines, *Fierce Gods: Inequality, Ritual, and the Politics of Dignity in a South Indian Village* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005).

35. Mines, *Fierce Gods*; Pandian, *Crooked Stalks*; Das and Poole, *Anthropology in the Margins*.

36. Bama, *Karukku*, trans. Lakshmi Holmström, ed. Mini Krishnan (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012); Omprakash Valmiki, trans. Arun Prabha Mukherjee, *Joothan: An Untouchable's Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008); Human Rights Watch, *Broken People: Caste Violence against India's Untouchables* (1999).

37. Rao, *The Caste Question*.

38. GO 243 ms, Public Police, 17 April 1930, TNA. By this time, the Fraser Commission's recommendations had been implemented in this region.

39. Government of Madras, *Report on the Administration of the Police of the Madras State 1960 (MPAR)* (Madras, 1962), "Statement D."

40. Beatrice Jauregui, *Provisional Authority: Police, Order, and Security in India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016).

41. Rajnarayan Chandavarkar, *Imperial Power and Popular Politics: Class, Resistance and the State in India, c.1850–1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Ashwini Tambe, *Codes of Misconduct: Regulating Prostitution in Late Colonial Bombay* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009); Prashant Kidambi, "The Ultimate Masters of the City': Police, Public Order and the Poor in Colonial Bombay, c. 1893–1914," *Crime, History & Societies* 8, no. 1 (2004); Philippa Levine, *Prostitution, Race and Politics: Policing Venereal Disease in the British Empire* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

42. Although most judicial records that make their way to government archives contain only the court's final judgment, a few include detailed police records tucked behind the judgment. This is especially true of Privy Council appeals housed in the British Library.

43. In colonial India, Part IV records were required to be maintained in English. They switch to a combination of Tamil and English after independence.

44. Manur Station, Sethurayanpudur Village, n.d. (probably December 1932). The inspector's signature on the record does not clearly reveal his name.

45. Anupama Rao, ed., *Gender and Caste* (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 2003).

46. IOR: L/P&J/6/1151, British Library (BL). The numbers pertain to 1909–10.

47. In the smaller region studied here, Vellalas, Muslims, Nayars, and Balijas contributed in the largest numbers to the force. Appendix A, Statement F: "Return showing the religion or caste of officers and men employed in the Police for 1915," *MPAR 1915*.

48. C. D. Maclean, ed., *Manual of the Administration of the Madras Presidency Vol.1* (1885; reprint, New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1987). Dalits, in particular, were conspicuously absent from the force. As of 1930, only 382 out of the 34,200 constables of the Madras police were Dalits, provoking demands for correction in the Madras legislative houses. "27 February 1930," *Proceedings of the Madras Legislative Council, India* (Madras: Government Press, 1930).

49. Dalit *talayaris* were weeded out of the policing system on the grounds that as untouchables they would not be able to conduct searches or mingle with the

larger population. There was also a belief that lower-caste communities tended to be criminal. Arnold, “Bureaucratic Recruitment,” 6.

50. The position of Sub-Inspector (SI) was introduced by the Fraser Commission. The SI’s predecessor, the Station House Officer, had risen up the ranks from the position of constable.

51. East India (Police), *Report of the Indian Police Commission* (London, 1905), paragraph 200.

52. *Report of the Indian Police Commission*, paragraph 200. On the whole, the Madras police was considered a more literate force than those of the other provinces in British India. GO 102 ms, Public Police, 10 February 1930, TNA.

53. *Report of the Indian Police Commission*, paragraph 200. The village police were not trained but were to be given a book in Tamil explaining their duties. M Krishnaswamy Iyer, *Village Police Catechism* (1901), Tam B 748, BL.

54. Elizabeth Kolsky, *Colonial Justice in British India: White Violence and the Rule of Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 12.

55. This tendency is marked in activist, media, and governmental writing. Michel Foucault, trans. Alan Sheridan, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (Pantheon Books, 1977). For a discussion of the network of state and non-state actors implicated in torture, see Jinee Lokaneeta, *The Truth Machines: Policing, Violence, and Scientific Interrogations in India* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2020).

56. Thazhiyoothu Station, Chatram Kudiyiruppu Village, “Law and Order,” 6 March 1939.

57. Das and Poole, eds., *Anthropology in the Margins*; Akhil Gupta, *Red Tape: Bureaucracy, Structural Violence, and Poverty in India* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012); John Harriss and Craig Jeffrey, “Depoliticizing Injustice,” *Economy and Society* 42, no. 3 (2013); C. J. Fuller and Veronique Benei, eds., *The Everyday State and Society in Modern India* (New Delhi: Social Science Press, 2000); Paul Brass, *Theft of an Idol: Text and Context in the Representation of Collective Violence* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997).

58. William Gould, *Bureaucracy, Community and Influence in India: Society and the State, 1930s–1960s* (London: Routledge, 2011); Jonathan Saha, *Law, Disorder and the Colonial State: Corruption in Burma c. 1900* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

59. Jinee Lokaneeta, *Transnational Torture: Law, Violence, and State Power in the United States and India* (New York: NYU Press, 2011).

Chapter 1

1. GO 588, Revenue, 25 June 1906, TNA.

2. Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983).

3. David Arnold, *Police Power and Colonial Rule, Madras, 1859–1947* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1986).

4. Ranajit Guha, “Prose of Counter-Insurgency,” in *Subaltern Studies 2*, ed. Guha (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983).

5. GO 243, Public Police, 17 April 1930, TNA.

6. The Commission’s recommendations were implemented as the Indian Police Act of 1861, which would function as the blueprint for police organization across the country. The Madras Presidency had already passed a District Police Act in 1859, whose features were largely incorporated in the Indian Police Act of 1861. “Memorandum accompanying the resolution appointing the Indian Police Commission of 1861,” in P. Hari Rao, ed., *The Indian Police Act* (Madras: T. A. Venkatasawmy Rao, 1933).

7. In England, by contrast, local police resisted centralized control through much of the nineteenth century. Victor Bailey, “Introduction,” in *Policing and Punishment in Nineteenth Century Britain*, ed. Bailey (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1981).

8. James Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), 11.

9. These numbers pertain to 1928, midway through the colonial period studied here. They do not include the armed and Special Forces, whose numbers were high in these districts. GO 243 ms, Public Police, 17 April 1930, TNA.

10. Manu Goswami, *Producing India: From Colonial Economy to National Space* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 45.

11. East India (Police), *Report of the Indian Police Commission*, 1905, Appendix 13.

12. James Ferguson and Akhil Gupta, “Beyond ‘Culture’: Space, Identity, and the Politics of Difference,” *Cultural Anthropology* 7, no. 1 (1992).

13. Rajnarayan Chandavarkar, “Customs of Governance: Colonialism and Democracy in Twentieth Century India,” *Modern Asian Studies* 41, no. 3 (2007): 451.

14. GO 753 Press, Judicial, 28 December 1925, p. 15. TNA. *Kusba*: a small town centered on a market.

15. GO 753 Press, Judicial, 28 December 1925, TNA, p. 22. A force of thirteen constables was enlisted to guard the Madura Mills (but was paid for by the mill owners), and the Tallakulam outpost of Madurai Town station served “the respectable residential quarters of the town and various government offices.” GO 750 Press, Judicial, 28 December 1925, TNA.

16. GO 753 Press, Judicial, 28 December 1925, TNA, p. 8

17. For example, following riots against Nadar traders in 1899, extensive provisions were made to increase the security of the ten-mile road between Aruppukottai and Virudupatti, including erecting a station midway between the two trading centers and constant patrolling of this road. GO 704, Judicial, 18 May 1900, TNA.

18. Iral, a center of trade and pilgrimage, was allocated a station, and an extra constable was stationed at Kalugumalai because its biennial temple festival

included large cattle fairs. GO 750, Judicial, 28 December 1925; GO 753, Judicial, 28 December 1925, TNA.

19. GO 2508, Judicial, 5 December 1888, TNA.

20. GO 1162, Judicial, 21 May 1888, TNA.

21. *Serai*: an inn. East India (Police). *Report of the Indian Police Commission* (London, 1905), paragraph 140.

22. For example, a new station and outpost were opened in Kadaladi in 1930 to monitor 132 criminal caste members through triweekly beats to nearby villages; officials budgeted two constables for Tirupattur station, to patrol nine and seven *kavalgars* residing in two villages within its limits. GO 243, Public Police, 17 April 1930, TNA.

23. Gyanendra Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990).

24. Thazhiyoothu Station, Rajavallipuram Village, 9 May 1931.

25. Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency*; Diane Mines, *Fierce Gods: Inequality, Ritual, and the Politics of Dignity in a South Indian Village* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005).

26. Violence during festivals is a recurring theme in Tamil cinema since the 1990s. See *Thevar Magan*, *Paruthiveeran*, *Virumandi*, *Subramaniapuram*.

27. The villages had earlier been attached to a station that far away in order to align their police and magisterial jurisdictions. GO 928 mis, Judicial, 5 August 1922, TNA.

28. They were transferred because the villages lay on the extreme west of Thataparai station limits. GO 3496 ms, Home, 15 July 1938, TNA.

29. GO 3496 ms, Home, 15 July 1938, TNA. In a similar story, Puliyaugulam village was shuttled from Narikkudi station to Manamadurai station to Tiruppuvanam station in a matter of just five years in the 1930s. GO 467 ms, Public Police, 31 August 1935, TNA.

30. East India (Police), *Report of the Indian Police Commission*, paragraph 139.

31. For a discussion on the constitution of criminality in colonial India, see Anand Yang, ed., *Crime and Criminality in British India* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1985).

32. W. S. Meyer, "Report on the Constitution of Additional Districts, Divisions and Taluks in the Madras Presidency, and other Connected Matters," IOR: L/P&J/6/948, BL.

33. Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977–78*, ed. Michel Senellart, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2007).

34. GO 243 Public Police, 17 April 1930, TNA.

35. Unlike the other forms mentioned above, which extended to police stations across the province, this printed form was very likely limited to the Tirunelveli and Ramanathapuram districts, where Maravars were a numerically dominant caste.

36. *Kaval* skirted the line between pillage and protection. In some cases, *kavalgars* (policemen) were regularly paid by villagers for their security; in cases of

theft, they retrieved the goods or reimbursed the victim. In others, villagers paid the policemen fees to be exempted from theft. In most colonial writing, *kaval* was depicted as a form of extortion that had flourished in the political chaos of the eighteenth century, a claim that bolstered the legitimacy of colonial rule. The colonial government attempted to eradicate *kaval* for over a century, with no success.

37. Manur Station, Melapillayarkulam Village, 1943.
38. Manur Station, Mavadi Village, 10 May 1943.
39. GO 243 ms, Public Police, 17 April 1930, TNA.
40. Scott, *Seeing Like a State*, 3.
41. Part I of the Station Crime History listed each crime that had been registered in the station for that year and the village where it had occurred; Part II was a cartographic representation of the same information; Part III was a “Register of Active Known Professional Criminals” residing within the station’s jurisdiction; Part IV contained notes on the villages within the station’s jurisdiction; and Part V was a “History Sheet” for criminals. GO 1364, Judicial 5 December 1922, TNA. Madras, *Orders of the Madras Police*, vol. 4, 1926, pp. 58–66, V7470, BL.
42. GO 1364, Judicial, 5 December 1922, TNA.
43. Some stations used printed forms with specific questions, but most did not.
44. See David Ludden, “Orientalist Empiricism: Transformations of Colonial Knowledge,” in *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament: Perspectives on South Asia*, eds. Carol Appadurai Breckenridge and Peter van der Veer (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993).
45. Thazhiyoothu Station, Naranammalpuram Village, December 1936.
46. Manur Station, Kanarpatti Village, n.d., probably early 1935.
47. VM: Village Munsif; Karnam: village accountant; *Bundobust*: preparatory security arrangements. Manur Station, Manur Village, c.1932.
48. I found no mention of gender-related conflict in colonial era station records, except in cases where these overlapped with inheritance disputes. In contrast, this is a prominent theme in Dalit feminist writing. Bama, tr. Lakshmi Holmström, *Sangati: Events* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2009). Domestic violence became an important area of intervention for the Tamil Nadu police toward the end of the twentieth century.
49. Madras, *Orders of the Madras Police*, vol. 1, 1926, p. 114, paragraph 515, V7470, BL.
50. Thazhiyoothu Station, Naranammalpuram Village, “Law and Order,” 22 December 1937; Sattur Station, Vellur Village, 2 September 1945.
51. Madras, *Orders of the Madras Police*, vol. 1, part 3, Order 447, 1926, V7470, BL.
52. East India (Police). *Report of the Indian Police Commission*, paragraph 139.
53. Great Britain, *First Report of the Commissioners Appointed to Inquire as to the Best Means of Establishing an Efficient Constabulary Force in the Counties of England and Wales* (London: 1839), p. 25.
54. Stefan Petrow, *Policing Morals: The Metropolitan Police and the Home Office, 1870–1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994); Deborah Talbot,

Regulating the Night: Race, Culture and Exclusion in the Making of the Night-time Economy (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007); Ashwini Tambe, *Codes of Misconduct: Regulating Prostitution in Late Colonial Bombay* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009); Philippa Levine, *Prostitution, Race and Politics: Policing Venereal Disease in the British Empire* (New York: Routledge, 2003). However, when it came to policing anti-colonial political activity, there were important differences in legal usage and surveillance practices between the metropole and the colony: I examine this in Chapter 4.

55. Vachakarapatti Station, Thammanaickenpatti Village, date illegible, possibly 27 July 1938.

56. Madras, *Orders of the Madras Police*, vol. 3, 1926, V7470, BL. These registers were intended to maintain station-level statistics on convicted and suspected criminals, their movements across various station jurisdictions, and their movements in or out of jail.

57. *MPAR 1908*, p. 22, “Return of Known Depredators, Receivers of Stolen Goods and Suspected Persons for the Year 1908.”

58. Madras, *Orders of the Madras Police*, vol. 1, V7470, BL. Singha argues that “habitual offender” had a looser definition in Punjab than in the UK, suggesting greater police discretion in the colonies. Radhika Singha, “Punished by Surveillance: Policing ‘Dangerousness’ in Colonial India, 1872–1918,” *Modern Asian Studies* 49, 2 (2015).

59. *First Report of the Commissioners*, p. 13.

60. Cross examination of PW10, 12 September 1944, in Ramnad Sessions Case. IOR: L/P&J/7/7306, BL.

61. <https://oombs.wordpress.com/2011/12/05/k-d-expansion-more/>, <http://slangmela.pbworks.com/w/page/9837645/Chennai%20Slang>, <https://gokkamakka.wordpress.com/madras-tamil/>, http://www.samosapedia.com/search?utf8=%E2%9C%93&search_term=kd&search=Submit. *Kedi Billa Killadi Ranga*, a Tamil film released in 2013, also references the term in its title. KD was also absorbed into the vernacular in colonial Punjab. Singha, “Punished by Surveillance.”

62. *Kedi*, directed by Jothi Krishna (Sri Surya Movies, 2006).

63. For a discussion on the subversive potential of the “rowdy,” see Shreyas Sreenath, “Rowdy,” *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 40, 2 (2017).

64. “Notified member” referred to someone notified under the CTA.

65. Bernard S. Cohn, “The Census, Social Structure and Objectification in South Asia,” in *An Anthropologist Among the Historians and Other Essays* (Oxford University Press, 1987).

66. Scott, *Seeing Like a State*, 340.

67. Madras, *Orders of the Madras Police*, vol. 1, part 3, Order 440, 1926, V7470, BL.

68. GO 1364, Judicial, 5 December 1922, TNA.

69. GO 2113, PWD (B&R), 6 August 1900, TNA.

70. GO 243 ms, Public Police, 17 April 1930, TNA.

71. GO 750, Judicial, 28 December 1925; GO 753, Judicial, 28 December 1925, TNA.

72. Vachakarapatti Station, Avudaiyapuram Village, July 1938 or slightly earlier.

73. Vachakarapatti Station, Ettoorvattam Village.

74. Vachakarapatti Station, Kalpothu Village, December 1938.

75. Ajantha Subramanian, *Shorelines: Space and Rights in South India* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 100–101.

76. GO 1385W, PWD, 20 May 1901, TNA.

77. Madras, *Orders of the Madras Police*, vol. 4, 1926, pp. 71–72, V7470, BL.

78. Madras, *Orders of the Madras Police*, vol. 1, 1926, p. 96, V7470, BL. For a discussion of government buildings and their nameboards as symbolizing a boundary between state and society, see C. J. Fuller and John Harriss, “For an Anthropology of the Modern Indian State,” in *The Everyday State and Society in Modern India*, ed. C. J. Fuller and Veronique Benei (New Delhi: Social Science Press, 2000).

79. Anthony King, *The Bungalow: The Production of a Global Culture* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984). For the medieval period, see Catherine Asher and Cynthia Talbot, *India before Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

80. GO 375W, PWD (B&R), 3 February 1904, TNA. Compared to the estimated cost of 24,670 rupees for district headquarters, I, II, and III class stations (which had only the ground floor and a verandah only along the entrance) cost ~ 2,000 rupees in the 1900s. GO 375W, PWD (B&R), 3 February 1904; GO 1385W, PWD (B&R), 20 May 1901, TNA.

81. GO 753, Judicial, 28 December 1925, TNA.

82. For instance, in 1923 it was seen as a relaxation of policing when about 50 percent of the notified Vaduvarpatti Koravars in the Ramanathapuram district were directed to report to police stations only once on dark nights instead of twice every night. *MPAR 1923*.

83. GO 1462 Press, Judicial, 30 August 1906, TNA.

84. Madras, *Orders of the Madras Police*, vol. 4, 1926, V7470, BL; GO 323 mis, Home Judicial, 8 February 1919, TNA.

85. GO 398, Judicial, 7 March 1902, TNA; Madras, *Drill Manual for the Use of the Madras Police* (Government Press, 1897), T4315, BL. However, in a nod to racial hierarchy, “East Indian” constables of all districts were allotted boots. Madras, *Orders of the Madras Police*, vol. 4, 1926, V7470, BL.

86. The average beat distance was around six miles, and in cases where the distance was between ten and sixteen miles, the department attempted to rearrange police jurisdictions. In 1920, the government sanctioned a bus allowance for constables of the Ramanathapuram district, which had poor road connectivity (but refused to extend the scheme to other districts, citing financial constraints). GO 37 mis, Judicial, 10 January 1922, TNA.

87. Sub-Inspectors were given the choice of keeping horses until around 1924, when their conveyance allowance of 25 rupees, intended for the upkeep of the horse, was replaced by a 5 rupee bicycle allowance. *MPAR 1923*, p. 7.

88. *MPAR 1928*, p. 6.

89. The increase in strength was not matched by an increase in the number of female recruits. Even the provincial capital, Madras City, opened its Women's Wing only in 1964. *MPAR 1964*, paragraph 4.

90. The housing issue is a running theme in government orders and *MPARs* of the period. See, in particular, *MPAR 1964*, paragraph 41. Budget allocations reflect this: the department requested 50 lakh rupees for housing compared to just 2 lakh rupees for station construction in 1955. *MPAR 1955*, paragraph 49.

91. GO 243 Public Police 1930, TNA

92. *Madras State Administration Report 1951–52*, Madras, 1952.

93. *MPAR 1964*, paragraph 42.

94. Vivek Dhareshwar and R. Srivatsan, "Rowdy-sheeters: An essay on Subalternity and Politics," in *Subaltern Studies 9*, eds. Shahid Amin and Dipesh Chakrabarty (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996); Sreenath, "Rowdy."

95. See GO 2311 ms, Home, 2 September 1957; GO 1209 ms, Home, 24 April 1968; GO 1424 ms, Home, 22 June 1970, TNA; and *MPARs*. For over a decade after the police took over enforcement, they recorded around 100,000 offenses per year across the province. By 1967, it was almost 200,000 offenses per year.

96. GO 935 ms, Home, 6 April 1957, TNA.

97. "Note on Administration of the Prohibition Act," GO 1209 ms, Home, 24 April 1968, TNA.

98. *Neera*: Also tapped from palm trees, like toddy, but used unfermented to make jaggery.

99. Tirunelveli SP to IGP, 25 May 1968, GO 2120 ms, Public, 28 October 1968, TNA.

100. Manur Station, Melapillayarkulam Village, February 1952.

101. GO 388 ms, Public, 2 February 1956, TNA.

102. GO 917, Public, 19 March 1958, TNA.

103. GO 112-113, Home, 11 January 1957, TNA.

104. Thazhiyoothu Station, Rajavallipuram Village. R. S. Arumugham was agitating on behalf of evicted Dalit peasants at the Madras legislature. GO 2664, Revenue, 1954, TNA.

105. *MPAR 1923*. Italics mine. These numbers are fairly representative of reports through the early twentieth century.

Chapter 2

1. *Virumandi*, directed by Kamal Hassan (Raaj Kamal Films International, 2004).

2. David Dery, "'Papereality' and Learning in Bureaucratic Organizations," *Administration and Society* 29, no. 6 (1998): 678.
3. Veena Das, "The Signature of the State: The Paradox of Illegibility," in *Anthropology in the Margins of the State*, ed. Veena Das and Deborah Poole (Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press, 2004), 245.
4. Radhika Singha, *A Despotism of Law: Crime and Justice in Early Colonial India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998).
5. Bhavani Raman, *Document Raj: Writing and Scribes in Early Colonial South India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).
6. Nicholas Dirks, "From Little King to Landlord: Property, Law, and the Gift under the Madras Permanent Settlement," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 28, no. 2 (1986): 332.
7. R. E. Frykenberg, *Guntur District, 1788–1848: A History of Local Influence and Central Authority in South India* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965).
8. D. A. Washbrook, *The Emergence of Provincial Politics: The Madras Presidency, 1870–1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976); D. A. Washbrook, "Law, State and Agrarian Society in Colonial India," *Modern Asian Studies* 15, no. 3 (1981).
9. Bama, *Karukku*, trans. Lakshmi Holmström, ed. Mini Krishnan (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012), 32.
10. Kalpana Kannabiran and Vasanth Kannabiran, "Caste and Gender: Understanding Dynamics of Power and Violence," in *Gender and Caste*, ed. Anupama Rao (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 2003), 250. The incident appears to have occurred around 2001.
11. Anand Teltumbde, *The Persistence of Caste: The Khairlanji Murders and India's Hidden Apartheid* (New Delhi: Navayana, 2010), 98; P. Sainath, "A Dalit Goes to Court," *The Hindu*, (Chennai), 13 June 1999. Ironically, Teltumbde himself was arrested in 2020 for his activism, on what is widely recognized as a false charge.
12. Susan Bayly, *Caste, Society and Politics in India from the Eighteenth Century to the Modern Age* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999).
13. Within the village police, VMs came from the higher castes (Brahmin, Pillai, Thevar, Naicker) while by the early twentieth century *talayaris* were inevitably Thevar and Naicker.
14. W. F. Agnew and Gilbert Henderson, *The Code of Criminal Procedure, being Act V of 1898, together with Rulings, Circular Orders, Notifications and Orders of the Government of India and the Local Governments, with Copious Notes* (Calcutta: Weekly Notes Printing Works, 1901), Section 157 1(b); Madras, *Orders of the Madras Police*, vol. 1, 1926, p. 67, V7470, BL.
15. Madras, *Orders of the Madras Police*, 1926, vol. 1, p. 83; vol. 3, pp. 54–55. V7470, BL.
16. *MPAR 1899*, 20.
17. *MPAR 1900*, 14. In 1904 there were a total of 61,197 cases, of which 43,843 were true cases. *MPAR, 1904*, p. 6.

18. *MPAR 1901*, 14. Likewise, the number of true cases and maliciously and willfully false cases were, respectively, 48,086 and 5,086 in 1906; 48,726 and 5,254 in 1910; and 54,474 and 4,828 in 1915. *MPAR 1906*; *MPAR 1910*; *MPAR 1915*. In cases declared “maliciously or wilfully false,” policemen could prosecute the complainant, but this was not usually undertaken in large numbers or with much success. Incidentally, Madurai and Tirunelveli were usually among the districts that most often contributed to the willfully false cases.

19. Statement of the fifth accused in the court of the Sattur sub-magistrate, 18 October 1940, in Sessions Case No. 120 of 1940, IOR: L/P&J/7/4508, BL. See also Vencataramana Aiyar, *The Muthukrishna Naidu Case*, T8171, BL, where the word “false” is arguably used more than any other.

20. Emphasis mine. Statement of the second accused in the court of the Sattur sub-magistrate, 18 October 1940, in Sessions Case No. 120 of 1940, IOR: L/P&J/7/4508, BL.

21. Madras, *Orders of the Madras Police*, 1897, p. 311. V3462, BL.

22. East India (Police), *Report of the Indian Police Commission*, 1905, paragraph 25.

23. East India (Police), *Report of the Indian Police Commission*, 1905, paragraph 26.

24. In fact, there was more coherence to the liberal project in India, where authoritarian rule precluded voices of opposition, than in Britain, where the liberal project was more fractured. K. J. M. Smith, *James Fitzjames Stephen: Portrait of a Victorian Rationalist* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); David Skuy, “Macaulay and the Indian Penal Code of 1862: The Myth of the Inherent Superiority and Modernity of the English Legal System Compared to India’s Legal System in the Nineteenth Century,” *Modern Asian Studies* 32, no. 3 (1998); Uday Singh Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire: A Study in Nineteenth-Century British Liberal Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

25. Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993); Thomas Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

26. Elizabeth Kolsky, *Colonial Justice in British India: White Violence and the Rule of Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

27. Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 134. See also Raman, *Document Raj*, 10–11.

28. Bhabha, *Location of Culture*.

29. W. F. Agnew and Gilbert Stuart Henderson, *Code of Criminal Procedure*, 1898, Section 157.

30. Agnew and Henderson, *Code of Criminal Procedure*, 1898, Section 160.

31. Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, 133.

32. H. T. Prinsep, *Code of Criminal Procedure (Act XXV of 1861)*, Section 139, p. 76; Prinsep, *Code of Criminal Procedure (Act X of 1872)*, Section 112, p. 91. For the remaking of signature practice under Company rule, see Raman, *Document Raj*.

33. Agnew and Henderson, *Code of Criminal Procedure (Act X of 1882)*, Section 154, p. 105.

34. Agnew and Henderson, *Code of Criminal Procedure (Act V of 1898)*, Section 154, p. 148.

35. East India (Police), *Report of the Indian Police Commission*, 1905, paragraph 150. The Commission also censured policemen who delayed recording crime reports they received, insisting that policemen record this information and send it to magistrates instantly.

36. East India (Police), paragraph 34.

37. Madura Collectorate file 62/1914, 23 July 1914, District Record Centre, Madurai (hereafter DRCM); GO 15 Press, Judicial, 4 January 1913, TNA; *MPAR 1904*.

38. *MPAR 1902*, 3; *MPAR 1903*, 4.

39. *MPAR 1904*; *MPAR 1905*; *MPAR 1921*, 7. Intervening reports, including in 1906, 1907, 1908, 1909 and 1919, also mentioned improved performance of the village police.

40. The term had, however, already been associated with the CCP. Prinsep, *Code of Criminal Procedure, 1872*, comments that “the complaint or information reduced to writing forms part of the first information report,” p. 92. Similarly, Agnew and Henderson, *Code of Criminal Procedure, 1898*: “The complaint or information reduced into writing under this section forms part of the First Information Report,” p. 149.

41. Form No. 44 in Madras, *Orders of the Madras Police*, vol. 1, p.77, vol. 2, p. 50, 1897, V3462, BL. In Madras city alone, the FIR replaced the Crime and Occurrence Register only in 1908. As of 1908, the FIR was being used in Bombay but not in Calcutta. GO 1317, Judicial, 22 September 1908, TNA.

42. GO 2508 Judicial, 5 December 1888, TNA. See also GO 1307, Judicial, 7 August 1890, TNA.

43. *MPAR 1903*, 4.

44. Madura Collectorate file 62/1914, 23 July 1914, DRCM.

45. Madura Collectorate file 62/1914, 23 July 1914, DRCM.

46. Madura Collectorate file 62/1914, 23 July 1914, DRCM.

47. Cox, too, emphasizes the mechanical aspects of the FIR when he writes that “the report to the magistrate consists of a printed form, which is a counterfoil from the book in which the information is registered.” Edmund Cox, *Police and Crime in India* (London: S. Paul & Co., 1911), 111–12.

48. Ratanlal Ranchhoddas and Dhirajlal Keshavlal Thakore, *The Criminal Procedure Code (Act No. V of 1898)* (Bombay, 1937), 106–7; Palamaneri Narayanaswami Ramaswami, *Magisterial and Police Guide* (Madras: Madras Law Journal, 1931), 515–18; East India (Police), *Report of the Indian Police Commission*, 1905, paragraph 150.

49. It could be used “to corroborate or impeach the testimony” of the informant under sections 145, 157, and 158 of the Indian Evidence Act of 1872. See also Ramaswami, *Magisterial and Police Guide*, 516–18; Ranchhoddas and Thakore, *The Criminal Procedure Code*, 106.

50. Akhil Gupta, *Red Tape: Bureaucracy, Structural Violence, and Poverty in India* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), 144–45.

51. Washbrook mentions that Sessions courts set considerable value on these reports as of 1896. D. A. Washbrook, “Country Politics: Madras 1880 to 1930,” *Modern Asian Studies* 7, no. 3 (1973): 492–93.

52. GO 3855, Home, 28 September 1937, TNA.

53. Appeal petition to the High Court, GO 3855, Home, 28 September 1937, TNA. Naidu was somewhat successful in his appeal—his death sentence was commuted to transportation for life.

54. The lecture was later published as a pamphlet. P. S. Naidu, *Crime: Its Investigation and Detection* (Madras, 1907), 6–7. Tr 1030, BL.

55. In a murder case from 1945, the *talayari* claimed that he had been delayed in submitting the first report because he had been bitten by a scorpion on the way. IOR: L/P&J/7/10164, BL. The FIR for a murder case from 1959 declared that the crime had occurred at around 5 p.m. on 21 October, but was registered at the Usilampatti police station only at 2:45 a.m. on the 22nd, raising the possibility that the plaintiff had committed the murder late at night on the 21st. Detailed interrogation convinced the judge that the person carrying the message had not had enough cash to take a bus, had therefore walked the distance, and that it had rained that evening—a combination of factors sufficient to explain the delay and, concomitantly, justify the use of the FIR. GO 1740, Home, 23 May 1961, TNA. For other examples, see GO 2058, Law (General), 30 November 1921, TNA; IOR: L/P&J/7/7306, BL.

56. Ramaswami, *Magisterial and Police Guide*, p. 518. The author, in turn, was quoting from Cecil Walsh, *Indian Village Crimes*, 1929.

57. Examination of second accused in the Court of Session, Ramnad Division at Madura, 30 November 1940, Sessions Case 127 of 1940, IOR: L/P&J/7/4517, BL.

58. Statement by first accused in the Court of the sub-magistrate, Tirumangalam, 5 April 1941, in Sessions Case 33 of 1941, IOR: L/P&J/7/4828, BL.

59. Examination of the first accused in Sessions Case 7 of 1940, Ramnad Division at Madura, 2 March 1940. Translations by court translator, V. Subramanian. IOR: L/P&J/7/3973, BL.

60. Washbrook, “Country Politics.”

61. Washbrook, “Country Politics,” p. 494.

62. Washbrook also notes the increasing use of false reports by headmen against their enemies in the early twentieth century. “Country Politics,” pp. 492–93.

63. Douglas E. Haynes and Gyan Prakash, “Introduction: The Entanglement of Power and Resistance,” in *Contesting Power: Resistance and Everyday Social Relations in South Asia*, ed. Douglas Haynes and Gyan Prakash (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 3.

64. Testimony of PW9, 23 September 1929, in Sessions Cases 42 and 49 of 1929, Ramnad Division at Madura, GO 3277, Law, 4 August 1930, TNA.

65. Tenth Accused Angamuthu Servai’s statement in the court of the Sivaganga Taluk magistrate, 18 January 1940, IOR: L/P&J/7/3973, BL.

66. The archive of witness testimony is richer for the late 1930s and early '40s, when the Privy Council in London relaxed its criteria to hear criminal appeals from across the empire, than for the earlier years. Stacey Hynd, "Criminal Law," *Privy Council Papers*, <http://privycouncilpapers.exeter.ac.uk/contexts/law-and-the-british-empire/the-laws/criminal-law/>.

67. Testimony of PW9, 23 September 1929, in Sessions Cases 42 and 49 of 1929, Ramnad Division at Madura, GO 3277, Law, 4 August 1930, TNA.

68. Testimony of Samuel Servai, PW4, in Madura Sessions Case 7 of 1941, IOR: L/P&J/7/4763, BL.

69. Testimony of Abdul Khadir, PW5, in Madura Sessions Case 7 of 1941, IOR: L/P&J/7/4763, BL.

70. Testimony of Karuppanan Ambalam, PW6, in Madura Sessions Case 7 of 1941, IOR: L/P&J/7/4763, BL.

71. David Hardiman, "The Indian 'Faction': A Political Theory Examined," in *Subaltern Studies 1*, ed. Ranajit Guha (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1982), pp. 225–26.

72. Nicholas Dirks, *The Hollow Crown: Ethnohistory of an Indian Kingdom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

73. Srinivas defines a caste as dominant "when it preponderates numerically over the other castes, and when it also wields preponderant economic and political power." Mysore Narasimhachar Srinivas, "The Social System of a Mysore Village," in *The Dominant Caste and Other Essays* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987), 77.

74. Testimony of PW1, Pacha Naicker, in Tinnevely Sessions Court, 26 November 1945, IOR L/P&J/7/10164, BL.

75. GO 3893 ms, Home, 9 August 1938, TNA.

76. Petition to Minister of Law, Courts and Prisons, Madras, 1 July 1938, GO 3893 ms, Home, 9 August 1938, TNA.

77. GO 3564 ms, Law (General), 26 August 1930; GO 469 ms, Public (Police), 26 September 1934; GO 118 ms, Public (Police), 27 February 1935, TNA. Across the Presidency, Dalits went up from 1.3 percent of the constabulary in 1928 to 2.6 percent in 1933.

78. Statement of fifth accused in the court of the sub-magistrate of Sattur, 18 October 1940, in Sessions Case No. 120 of 1940, Ramnad Division at Madura, IOR: L/P&J/7/4508, BL.

79. Thazhiyoothu Station, Rajavallipuram Village, Marava Form, n.d., possibly 1931.

80. Thazhiyoothu Station, Rajavallipuram Village, 9 May 1931.

81. IOR: L/P&J/7/4763, BL.

82. IOR: L/P&J/7/4763, BL.

83. Deposition of PW13 at the preliminary enquiry, 23 November 1940, in Madura Sessions Case 7 of 1941, IOR: L/P&J/7/4763, BL.

84. Petition by Irulappan Servai, 5 September 1938, in Madura Sessions Case 7 of 1941, IOR: L/P&J/7/4763, BL.

85. Bayly, *Caste, Society and Politics*; Dirks, *Castes of Mind*; M. S. S. Pandian, *Brahmin and Non-Brahmin: Genealogies of the Tamil Political Present* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2007).

86. Pamela Price, "Ideology and Ethnicity under British Imperial Rule: 'Brahmans,' Lawyers and Kin-Caste Rules in Madras Presidency," *Modern Asian Studies* 23, no. 1 (1989); Niels Brimnes, "Beyond Colonial Law: Indigenous Litigation and the Contestation of Property in the Mayor's Court in Late Eighteenth-Century Madras," *Modern Asian Studies* 37, no. 3 (2003).

87. The defense lawyers who represented the accused in the murder cases I looked at were named Achalu Aiyangar, H. T. Narayanaswami Ayyar, Krishnaswami Ayyangar, Ganapatirama Ayyar, Ramasesha Ayyar, and Rangaswami Aiyar. The fact that most of these lawyers appeared in multiple cases suggests direct relationships between castes that actively participated in politics of violence and castes that maintained rhetoric distance from it. Incidentally, the Brahmin Tamil actor, Kamal Hassan, who has acted in many films on Thevar violence, is from Paramakudi town, a Thevar stronghold, where his father was a criminal lawyer.

88. Note dated 15 January 1952, Manur Station, Manur Village.

89. Sattur Station records, n.d., probably c. 1925. The language suggests that this note was written by a European policeman. The inspector went on to mention the names of suspected professional assassins employed in cases like this: Velu Thevan, Muthia Tevar, Subba Naidu, Karuppana Kudumban—a diverse caste mix including Thevars and Dalits.

90. Thazhiyoothu Station, Thazhiyoothu Village, 10 December 1936.

91. Manur Station, Manur Village, n.d., probably c. 1932; Sankarankoil Taluka Station, Town records, date illegible (13 July 1937 or 13 July 1931).

92. GO 3564 ms, Law (General), 26 August 1930, TNA.

93. Manur Station, Melapillayarkulam Village, 5 July 1937.

94. Jonathan Saha, "A Mockery of Justice? Colonial Law, the Everyday State and Village Politics in the Burma Delta, c. 1890–1910," *Past & Present* 217 (2012).

95. For a framing of bureaucratic violence as occurring not randomly but in conjunction with social inequalities, see John Harriss and Craig Jeffrey, "Depoliticizing Injustice," *Economy and Society* 42, no. 3 (2013).

96. GO 2664 ms, Revenue, 15 September 1954, TNA.

97. Landowners Association to Tirunelveli District Collector, 15 July 1954, GO 2664 ms, Revenue, 15 September 1954, TNA.

98. District Kisan Sabha Tirunelveli to Minister for Labour and Agriculture, Government of Madras, 27 June 1954, GO 2664 ms, Revenue, 15 September 1954, TNA.

99. Diane Mines, *Fierce Gods: Inequality, Ritual, and the Politics of Dignity in a South Indian Village* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005).

100. GO 2439 ms, Home, 17 September 1957, TNA. For other examples, see GO 1740 ms, Home, 23 May 1961; GO 1175 ms, Home, 28 June 1975, TNA.

101. Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, “Law and Disorder in the Postcolony: An Introduction,” in *Law and Disorder in the Postcolony*, eds. Comaroff and Comaroff (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 20.

102. Sessions Judgment, GO 3050 ms, Public, 10 December 1959, TNA.

103. Government of India, *The Shah Commission Report: Circumstances Leading to Declaration of Emergency* (New Delhi: Government of India Press, 1978).

104. GO 2216 Public (Law and Order), 13 October 1977; GO 1258, Public (Law and Order), 23 May 1977, TNA.

105. J. James, MLA to Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, 29 August 1977, GO 2216 Public (Law and Order), 13 October 1977, TNA.

106. Theni District today.

107. “Kamal’s Rustic Rashomon—Virumaandi!” 6 February 2014, <https://csrags.wordpress.com/2014/02/06/review-of-tamil-classic-movie-virumaandi/>.

108. She goes on, “Swayed by avarice or anger these are people who never think twice before they take away a life,” fully reproducing the myth of the premodern southern districts. Malathi Rangarajan, “Virumaandi,” *The Hindu*, 23 January 2004, <https://www.thehindu.com/thehindu/fr/2004/01/23/stories/2004012301530300.htm>.

109. A brief but powerful comment on Keezhvenmani village, where upper-caste landholders had brought about the death of forty-four Dalit laborers in 1968, also points to the movie’s awareness of the imbrication of higher castes in violent politics.

110. This is seen in the lyrics for “Karpakirakam,” “Anta Kantamani,” and “Karumāttūr Kāṭṭukkuḷḷē.”

Chapter 3

1. Approximately 75 paise in the decimal system that was introduced in 1957. https://www.rbi.org.in/Scripts/mc_public.asp.

2. R. Kunchitapadam, Madurai Collector, to GOM, 23 September 1956, GO 917, Public, 19 March 1958, TNA.

3. Veena Das and Deborah Poole, eds., *Anthropology in the Margins of the State* (Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press, 2004), 14.

4. R. Kunchitapadam, Madurai Collector, to GOM, 23 September 1956, GO 917, Public, 1958, TNA.

5. Sanford Levinson, ed., *Torture: A Collection* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Thomas Hilde, ed., *On Torture* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008); Darius Rejali, *Torture and Democracy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007); Faisal Devji, “Torture at the Limit of Politics,” in *Screening Torture: Media Representations of State Terror and Political Domination*, ed. Michael Flynn and Fabiola Salek (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012);

John Parry, *Understanding Torture: Law, Violence, and Political Identity* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010).

6. Jinee Lokaneeta, *Transnational Torture: Law, Violence, and State Power in the United States and India* (New York: NYU Press, 2011), 206.

7. W. F. Agnew and Gilbert Henderson, *The Code of Criminal Procedure, being Act V of 1898, together with Rulings, Circular Orders, Notifications and Orders of the Government of India and the Local Governments, with Copious Notes* (Calcutta: Weekly Notes Printing Works, 1901), Section 107.

8. Ratanlal Ranchhoddas and Dhirajlal Keshavlal Thakore, *The Criminal Procedure Code (Act No. V of 1898)* (Bombay, 1937), 55. The comment pertains to Chapter VIII of the CCP in general. In fact, the preventive provisions of the CCP capture the subsumption of executive authority within legal authority. Radhika Singha, “Punished by Surveillance: Policing ‘Dangerousness’ in Colonial India, 1872–1918,” *Modern Asian Studies* 49, 2 (2015).

9. Ramnad Collectorate File 66/1908, 28/1/1908, DRCM.

10. Madura Collectorate File 22/mgl/1912, 6/8/1912, DRCM.

11. DSP Madura to IGP Madras, 18 October 1911, File 22/mgl/1912, 6/8/1912, DRCM.

12. Thazhiyoothu Station, Chatram Kudiyiruppu Village.

13. Thazhiyoothu Station, Chatram Kudiyiruppu Village, “Law and Order,” 26 March 1938.

14. Thazhiyoothu Station, Chatram Kudiyiruppu Village, “Law and Order,” 6 March 1939.

15. Thazhiyoothu Station, Chatram Kudiyiruppu Village, “Law and Order,” 24 September 1932. *Agraharam*: the Brahmin street of a village.

16. Bayly notes that conversion to Christianity or Islam did not imply opting out of the Hindu caste order or concern with rank. Susan Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings: Muslims and Christians in South Indian Society, 1700–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990). See also David Mosse, *The Saint in the Banyan Tree: Christianity and Caste Society in India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).

17. Thazhiyoothu Station, Thazhiyoothu Village, April 1937. CPC: Code of Criminal Procedure, 1898.

18. Thazhiyoothu Station, Thazhiyoothu Village, 22 December 1937.

19. Sankarankoil Taluka Station, Town; Manur Station, Mavadi Village; Manur Station, Therkukulam Village.

20. Madras, *Orders of the Madras Police*, vol. 1, 1897, p. 22. V3462, BL.

21. Thazhiyoothu Station, Thazhiyoothu Village, April 1937.

22. Sankarankoil Taluka Station, Vaadikkottai Village, 30 June 1937.

23. Manur Station, Melapillayarkulam Village, 1938.

24. Manur Station, Manur Village, 28 June 1945.

25. Thazhiyoothu Station, Chatram Kudiyiruppu Village, Chittanpacheri hamlet, 22 December 1937.

26. Manur Station, Mavadi Village, September 1937.

27. Emphasis mine. Thazhiyoothu Station, Chatram Kudiyiruppu Village, Chittanpacheri hamlet, 1939.
28. Sattur Station, Sivakasi Town, 1924 or earlier.
29. Manur Station, Melapillayarkulam Village, 1938.
30. Vachakarapatti Station, Kalpothu Village, 27 July 1939.
31. For the classic text on interpreting official writing, see Ranajit Guha, "Prose of Counter-Insurgency," in *Subaltern Studies 2*, ed. Guha (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983).
32. *Fortnightly Report for Madras Presidency (FNR)*, December 1930, TNA.
33. A closer reading of the prehistory of such conflicts sometimes reveals scattered references in the governmental archive itself to the disciplining attempts made by the police to contain the dispute. See GO 62 ms Public Police, 7 February 1933; GO 649 ms, Public (Police), 3 December 1935, TNA.
34. James Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985).
35. GO 1 ms, Public Police, 3 January 1929, TNA.
36. IGP to Chief Secretary to GOM, Judicial, 30 January 1929, GO 1 ms, Public Police, TNA.
37. GO 671 (mis confidential), Public Police, 10 December 1930, TNA.
38. "Alleged Murder of Police Constable," *The Hindu*, 28 July 1930, and IGP's letter to GOM, 13 November 1930, respectively. GO 671 mis confidential, Public Police, 1930.
39. Tinnevely Sessions Court Judgment, GO 671 mis confidential, Public Police, 1930, TNA.
40. IGP's report to GOM, GO 671 mis confidential, Public Police, 1930, TNA.
41. Tinnevely Sessions Court Judgment, GO 671 mis confidential, Public Police, 1930, TNA.
42. DSP to IGP, 15 October 1930, GO 671 mis confidential, Public Police, 1930, TNA.
43. "I cannot for one moment believe that the constables were indulging in empty fun or harmless teasing for its own sake. But it is rather difficult to say what they were after—the woman or her jewels." Sessions Judgment, GO 671 mis confidential, Public Police, 1930, TNA.
44. Author unclear—possibly the Chief Secretary to the government. Everyone in the senior bureaucracy signs off on the note. GO 671 mis confidential, Public Police, 1930, TNA.
45. Shalini Sharma, "Yeh Azaadi Jhooti Hai! The Shaping of the Opposition in the First Year of the Congress Raj," *Modern Asian Studies* 48, no. 5 (2014).
46. Sharma, "Yeh Azaadi Jhooti Jai!"
47. Vachakarapatti Station, Avudaiyapuram Village, 1959.
48. Thazhiyoothu Station, Chatram Kudiyiruppu Village, "Law and Order," 1954. RDO is the Revenue Divisional Officer.
49. Anupama Rao, ed., *Gender and Caste* (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 2003).
50. Manur Station, Kanarpatti Village.

51. Thazhiyoothu Station, Chatram Kudiyiruppu Village, “Law and Order,” 14 April 1967.

52. GO 1543 ms, Public, 4 October 1960, TNA. Sivaganga was a small town, with a population of 15,642 at this time. *Census of India 1961*, vol. 9, Madras (1966).

53. Report from RDO Devakottai to Ramanathapuram Collector, 15 April 1960, paragraph 27, GO 1543 ms, Public, 4 October 1960, TNA.

54. Nasser Hussain, *The Jurisprudence of Emergency: Colonialism and the Rule of Law* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003).

55. Testimonies of Defence Witnesses 9 and 12 respectively, GO 1543 ms, Public, 4 October 1960, TNA.

56. Beatrice Jauregui, *Provisional Authority: Police, Order, and Security in India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016).

57. Jauregui, *Provisional Authority*, 51.

58. For a discussion on the dismissal of subaltern politics as economically motivated, see Shahid Amin, *Event, Metaphor, Memory: Chauri Chaura, 1922–1992* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

59. For a discussion of gendered ways of witnessing and talking/being silent about pain, see Veena Das, *Life and Words: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

60. Sivaganga All-Party Committee to Governor of Madras, 14 November 1959, GO 1543 ms, Public, 4 October 1960, TNA. Translation mine.

61. There was an SI Nataraja Iyer who played a central role in the Mudukulathur shooting, but it is unclear if this was the same person.

62. “Statement of M. Suyambulingam,” 29 February 1960, GO 1543 ms, Public, 4 October 1960, TNA.

63. For works on the nineteenth century, see Douglas Peers, “Torture, the Police, and the Colonial State in the Madras Presidency, 1816–55,” in *Criminal Justice History – An International Annual*, ed. Louis A. Knafla (Westport, CT: 1993); Anupama Rao, “Problems of Violence, States of Terror: Torture in Colonial India,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 36, no. 43 (2001). For scholarship on the post-Emergency period, see Lokaneeta, *Transnational Torture*; A. G. Noorani, “Custodial Torture,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 32, no. 38 (1997).

64. A notable exception to this regulatory continuity was the addition of custodial rape to PSO 145 —the executive provision outlining the procedure for investigation into cases of custodial violence. This happened in July 1970, at the end of the period under study. GO 1763 ms, Public, 29 July 1970, TNA.

65. East India (Police), *Report of the Indian Police Commission*, paragraph 26.

66. John T. Parry, *Understanding Torture: Law, Violence, and Political Identity* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010).

67. See Madras Legislative Assembly debates on police budget, 22 December 1956, 15 July 1957.

68. Palamaneri Narayanaswami Ramaswami, *Magisterial and Police Guide*. (Madras: Madras Law Journal, 1931).

69. East India (Police), *Report of the Indian Police Commission*, paragraph 26.
70. Tarapada Banerji, *The Indian Evidence Act, No. I of 1872, as Amended by Act No. XVIII of 1872, together with an Introduction and Explanatory Notes, Rulings of Courts, and Index* (Calcutta: Mukhurji & Co., 1896), Section 24.
71. Section 25–26, Banerji, *Indian Evidence Act of 1872*.
72. Agnew and Henderson, *Code of Criminal Procedure*, Section 164.
73. Though the policeman was directed not to procure a confession of guilt from the suspect, he could interrogate the suspect in order to glean any other information about the case from him.
74. David Dixon, *Law in Policing: Legal Regulation and Police Practices* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).
75. Anupama Rao, “Torture, the Public Secret,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 39, no. 23 (2004); Rao, “Problems of Violence.”
76. Lokaneeta, *Transnational Torture*, 137.
77. Debates on torture provoked by the war on terror tend to slip into this position, i.e., what is the minimum violence required to maintain global security. See Levinson, *Torture: A Collection*.
78. The Madras IGP used this reasoning in 1967 to argue against including custodial rape in the custodial violence redressal guidelines. According to him, the police committed torture only “in their anxiety to bring home the guilt” of a suspect, whereas rape was committed for “sexual gratification.” Of course, both were expressions of power. GO 1763, Public, 29 July 1970, TNA.
79. Peers, “Torture, the Police, and the Colonial State,” 47. Peers’s otherwise excellent analysis echoes the narrative that torture was practiced for the purpose of extorting confessions.
80. GO 523, Judicial, 1912, TNA.
81. Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 27.
82. Thomas Blom Hansen and Finn Stepputat. *Sovereign Bodies: Citizens, Migrants, and States in the Postcolonial World*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 171.
83. Tinnevely Collector to Chief Secretary to Government of Madras, 6 June 1918, GO 1191 (mis), Home Judicial, 27 May 1919, TNA.
84. Assistant Sessions Court Judgment, paragraph 12, 4, GO 1191 (mis), Home Judicial, 1919, TNA.
85. Madras, *Orders of the Madras Police*, vol. 1, 1926, Order 320, V7470, BL.
86. Thomas Blom Hansen, “Sovereigns Beyond the State: On Legality and Authority in Urban India,” in *Sovereign Bodies*, ed. Hansen and Stepputat, 171.
87. The “crimes” I examined that provoked torture included insubordination to a white man, gambling for a few rupees, theft of a sack of grain, theft of some cotton from the fields, burglary, and public drunkenness.
88. GO 85 ms, Home, 17 January 1970, TNA.

89. GO 159 mis, Judicial (Police), 21 March 1924; GO 278 ms, Judicial (Police), 27 May 1924, TNA.
90. Sattur Sub-magistrate's report, July 1923; GO 278 ms, Judicial (Police), 1924, TNA.
91. Ramnad Public Prosecutor's report to Ramnad Magistrate, September 1923, GO 278 ms, Judicial (Police), 1924, TNA.
92. GO 300 ms, Public Police, 28 May 1930, TNA.
93. RDO's report, 22 September 1955, GO 388 ms, Public, 2 February 1956, TNA.
94. Minutes of Enquiry, GO 85 ms, Home, 17 January 1970, TNA.
95. Emphases mine. Translation mine. *Theekadir*, 8 March 1973. The phrase appears as "boots kālkaḷāḷ."
96. For a discussion of medical jurisprudence and its privileged role in rape cases, see Elizabeth Kolsky, "'The Body Evidencing the Crime': Rape on Trial in Colonial India, 1860–1947," *Gender and History*, 22, no. 1 (2010).
97. GO 1246 ms, Judicial, 14 August 1901; GO 602 ms, Judicial, 28 March 1913; GO 278 ms, Judicial (Police), 27 May 1924; GO 1191 mis, Home (Judicial), 27 May 1919; GO 917 ms, Public, 19 Mar. 1958; GO 1519 ms, Public, Sep. 24, 1960, TNA.
98. Lokaneeta, *Transnational Torture*, 144.
99. Amnesty International reports (from the 1980s on) that the Indian police also secretly dump the bodies of victims of custodial violence in rivers or wastelands far away from the station.
100. GO 327 mis, Judicial Police, 23 June 1924, TNA.
101. Madura DM to GOM, 27 April 1924, GO 327 mis, Judicial Police, 23 June 1924, TNA.
102. Madura DM to GOM, 27 April 1924, GO 327 mis, Judicial Police, 23 June 1924, TNA.
103. GO 1191 Home Judicial, 1919, TNA.
104. Michael Taussig, "Culture of Terror—Space of Death. Roger Casement's Putumayo Report and the Explanation of Torture," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 26, no. 3 (1984), 494.
105. GO 1246 Judicial, 14 August 1901, TNA.
106. IGP to Chief Secretary to GOM, Judicial, 3 August 1901, GO 1246 Judicial, 14 August 1901, TNA.
107. See issues of 13 July 1969; 21 September 1969; 20 July 1969; 22 February 1970; 8 March 1973, *Theekadir*.
108. GO 1519 ms, Public, September 24, 1960, TNA.
109. GO 85 ms, Home, 17 January 1970, TNA.
110. RDO's report, GO 917 ms, Public, 19 March 1958, TNA.
111. "kāṭṭuttī pōḷ paraviyatu," *Theekadir*, 26 June 1969, p.8.
112. *MPAR 1972*.
113. Lokaneeta, *Transnational Torture*, 157.
114. GO 1519 ms, Public, September 24, 1960, TNA.

115. GO 51 ms, Public, 9 January 1978, TNA.

Chapter 4

1. "Governor's response to Tirunelveli Deputation," 1 April 1908, GO 133B Judicial Disposal, 9 July 1908, TNA.

2. *MPAR 1908*, 11–12.

3. Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993).

4. Ranajit Guha, *Dominance without Hegemony: History and Power in Colonial India* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 55–56.

5. There is a large body of literature on the politics of crowds, including George Rudé, *The Crowd in History: A Study of Popular Disturbances in France and England, 1730–1848* (1964; Reprint London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1981); Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983).

6. Police Act, Section 15.

7. Nasser Hussain, *The Jurisprudence of Emergency: Colonialism and the Rule of Law* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003), 106–9.

8. Among others, see Gyanendra Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990); Shahid Amin, *Event, Metaphor, Memory: Chauri Chaura, 1922–1992*. (Berkeley: University of California Press), 1995.

9. P. A. J. Waddington, *Controlling Protest in Contemporary, Historical and Comparative Perspective: The Policing of Mass Demonstration in Contemporary Democracies* (Florence: European University Institute, 1997), 24.

10. *MPAR 1908*, 11.

11. "Statement by Guruswamy Iyer," GO 133B, Judicial Disposal, 9 July 1908, TNA.

12. "Statement by Guruswamy Aiyer," GO 133B, Judicial Disposal, 9 July 1908, TNA.

13. Ashe was later the victim of a famous terrorist attack by nationalists for his role in acting against V.O.C. Pillai.

14. "Guruswami Aiyar's statement," GO 133B, Judicial Disposal, 9 July 1908, TNA.

15. *MPAR 1908*, 11.

16. This was the reduced sentence confirmed by the High Court. The lower court had sentenced Siva and V. O. C. Pillai to ten years and life, respectively. *MPAR 1908*, 11.

17. Amin points to a policeman's beating of a nationalist volunteer, Bhagwan Ahir, a few days before the burning of the Chauri Chaura police station,

as a significant moment in the events leading up to the riot. Amin, *Event, Metaphor, Memory*.

18. Section 144, CCP.

19. This specificity distinguished Section 144 from martial law, whose imposition prohibited *all* public gatherings in a much larger area.

20. R. E. Frykenberg, "On Roads and Riots in Tinnevely: Radical Change and Ideology in Madras Presidency during the 19th century," *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 4, no. 2 (1981); Sandria Freitag, *Collective Action and Community: Public Arenas and the Emergence of Communalism in North India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).

21. Robert Hardgrave Jr., *The Nadars of Tamilnad: The Political Culture of a Community in Change* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969).

22. M. N. Srinivas, *Religion and Society among the Coorgs of South India* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952).

23. Ramnad Collectorate file R Dis. 27/1905, 20 March 1905, DRCM.

24. A couple of months later, the Konars protested the Nadars' use of the village pond. This time, the magistrate did pass an order under Section 147 of the CCP, prohibiting the Nadars from using the pond until they established their right to do so in a judicial court.

25. Head Assistant Magistrate, Sattur, to Sub-Magistrate, Watrap, 3 December 1904, Ramnad Collectorate file R Dis. 27/1905, 20 March 1905, DRCM.

26. Alagar Nadan's petition, Ramnad Collectorate file R Dis. 27/1905, 20 March 1905, DRCM.

27. Head Assistant Magistrate, Sattur, to Sub-Magistrate, Watrap, 3 December 1904, Ramnad Collectorate file R Dis. 27/1905, 20 March 1905, DRCM.

28. GO 599 ms, Public Police, 25 October 1930, TNA.

29. DSP Ramnad to IGP, 5 October 1930, GO 599 ms, Public Police, 25 October 1930, TNA.

30. GO 301 mis, Home Judicial, 6 February 1918, TNA.

31. GO 301 mis, Home Judicial, 6 February 1918, TNA.

32. Freitag, *Collective Action and Community*.

33. GO 4614 ms, Home, 15 November 1937, TNA. The GO mentions payment at standard rates; however, the Police Act of 1861 specifies that no fee be charged for granting these licenses.

34. GO 5677 ms, Home, 30 October 1938, TNA; *MPAR 1939*; *MPAR 1945*.

35. DSP Ramanathapuram to IGP, 14 September, GO 5677 ms, Home, 30 October 1938, TNA.

36. Textile manufacture was the principal industry experiencing such disputes, but there were also smaller strikes in the Dindukkul cigar factory, the Thoothukudi port, the General Metal Trading Company in Koilpatti, and the Sri Rama Vilas Motor Works in Madurai.

37. *MPAR 1939*, 14.

38. *FNR*, July 1939.
39. *FNR*, 1936, Mss Eur D 596: Erskine Papers, 596/16, "General Political Correspondence with Viceroy," BL.
40. For other instances of this, see David Arnold, "Labour Relations in a South Indian Sugar Factory 1937–39," *Social Scientist* 6, no. 5 (1977); Rajnarayan Chandavarkar, *Imperial Power and Popular Politics: Class, Resistance and the State in India, c.1850–1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
41. January is the harvest season and several workers had left for their villages—hence the quiet situation. *FNR*, 1937, 1938.
42. The decision to pass a Section 144 order against the mill owners was not unanimous: Congress ministers implemented it against the advice of the Madras Governor, who warned them against "taking sides in a trade dispute." The Governor fully expected the mill owners to appeal at the High Court against the order and have it quashed. IOR/L/P&J/7/1846, BL.
43. GO 56–57 mis, Judicial, 9 January 1904; GO 183 ms, Judicial, 28 January 1904, TNA.
44. Madura Additional District Magistrate's Court Judgment, GO 56, Judicial, 9 January 1904, TNA.
45. Arnold, *Police Power and Colonial Rule*, 111.
46. *MPAR* 1903, 7.
47. *MPAR* 1903, 7.
48. Section 141, Indian Penal Code, Act XLV of 1860.
49. Section 146, IPC.
50. Section 127, CCP.
51. *FNR*, June and September 1919, 523/15: Letters between Mr. Montagu and Lord Pentland, July 1917–March 1919, Mss Eur D523: Correspondence and Papers of Edwin Samuel Montagu (1879–1924) as Secretary of State for India, 1917–22, BL.
52. Lord Pentland to Mr. Montagu, 1 October 1918, Mss Eur D523/15, BL.
53. G. F. Paddison, Madura DM, to Secretary of Home, GOM, 20 October 1918, GO 2549 Press NP, Home Judicial, 15 November 1918, TNA.
54. G. F. Paddison, Madura DM, to Secretary of Home, GOM, 20 October 1918, GO 2549 Press NP, Home Judicial, 15 November 1918, TNA.
55. GO 2549 Press NP, Home Judicial, 15 November 1918, TNA.
56. *MPAR* 1918, 14–15.
57. E.g., *The Hindu*, 8 October 1918, GO 2548 mis, Home Judicial, 15 November 1918, TNA. The infamous Jallianwala Bagh massacre was to happen a mere six months later.
58. Complaint Petition of Neelamega Venkatachalapathy Ayyar in the court of the DM Madura, GO 2549 Press NP, Home Judicial, 15 November 1918, TNA.
59. R. Rao, Madras Legislative Council Debate, GO 238 mis, Home Judicial, 31 January 1919, TNA.
60. R. Rao, Madras Legislative Council Debate, GO 238 mis, Home Judicial, 31 January 1919, TNA.

61. Hussain points to the impossible demand for precision that governs the use of “necessary” force in both colonial martial law and domestic unrest in Britain. Hussain, *Jurisprudence of Emergency*, 106.

62. Section 127, CCP.

63. Section 128, CCP.

64. Section 129, 130 CCP.

65. Section 132, CCP.

66. GO 1472, Public, 17 September 1960, TNA; Madras, *Drill Manual for the Use of the Madras Police* (Government Press, 1897), T4315, BL.

67. Appendix I-A, Government Resolution Appointing the Police Commission: Memorandum, p. 117, in P. Hari Rao, ed., *The Indian Police Act (Act V of 1861) and the Indian Police Act (III of 1888) and the Police (Incitement to Disaffection) Act (XXII of 1922): with commentaries and notes of case-law thereon* (Madras: T. A. Venkatasawmy Rao, 1933).

68. Rao, *The Indian Police Act*, p. 123.

69. “Propositions Unanimously Recorded by the Commission,” Sections 54, 56, in Rao, *The Indian Police Act*.

70. Appendix I-A, Government Resolution Appointing the Police Commission: Memorandum, p. 117 in *The Indian Police Act*, ed. Rao.

71. East India (Police), *Report of the Indian Police Commission*, paragraph 72. On this topic, the Fraser Commission largely followed the principles set down by the First Police Commission of 1861.

72. Speech of Mr. Peile in introducing the bill, *The Indian Police Act*, ed. Rao. This change was enabled by an 1888 amendment to the Police Act of 1861. The length of railway lines open to public traffic had increased from 1,588 miles in 1861 to 13,867 miles in 1887, making the amendment possible.

73. GO 462 ms, Public Police, 18 August 1930, TNA.

74. DM Madura to GOM, 9 August 1930, GO 462 ms, Public Police, 18 August 1930, TNA.

75. GO 2550, Home Judicial, 15 November 1918, TNA.

76. “Statement by Guruswamy Iyer,” GO 133B, Judicial Disposal, 9 July 1908, TNA.

77. “Statement by Ramakrishna Aiyar,” GO 133B, Judicial Disposal, 9 July 1908, TNA.

78. GO 462 ms, Public Police, 18 August 1930, TNA.

79. Madura DM to GOM, 28 September, GO 2549 Press NP, Home Judicial, 15 November 1918, TNA. *Tamasha*: fun.

80. For a discussion of the geographic dimensions of protest, see Javier Auyero, “The Geography of Popular Contention: An Urban Protest in Argentina,” *Canadian Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Studies* 28, no. 55/56 (2003).

81. Sandria Freitag, “Postscript: Exploring Aspects of ‘the Public’ from 1991 to 2014,” *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 38, no. 3 (2015), fn9.

82. *MPAR* 1909, 15–16.

83. *MPAR* 1910, 16.

84. *MPAR 1931*, 20.
85. Pandey, *Construction of Communalism*.
86. David Arnold, "Looting, Grain Riots and Government Policy in South India 1918," *Past & Present* 84 (1979).
87. GO 2550 Press, Judicial, 15 November 1918, TNA.
88. GO 2550, Home Judicial, 15 November 1918, TNA. Emphasis mine.
89. Sessions Judgment, GO 56-7 mis, Judicial, 9 January 1904, TNA.
90. This provision was the result of an 1895 amendment to the 1861 Act.
91. GO 2113, PWD, 6 August 1900; GO 1185 Press, Judicial, 5 August 1901, TNA.
92. GO 256-7 W, PWD (B&R), 24 January 1902; GO 2705-06 W, PWD (B&R), 6 October 1902, TNA.
93. GO 389 P, Judicial, 17 March 1903, TNA.
94. GO 830 ms, Judicial, 1 June 1910, TNA.
95. GO 133B, Judicial Disposal, 9 July 1908, TNA.
96. H. H. Carleston, "Recollections of South India 1927-1947," Mss Eur F180/49: Indian Civil Service Collection, BL.
97. GO 2550, Home Judicial, 15 November 1918, TNA.
98. 1257W, PWD (B&R), 14 November 1910, TNA.
99. GO 492 ms, Judicial, 19 March 1904, TNA; *MPAR 1901*, 7.

Chapter 5

1. Hugo Gorringer, *Untouchable Citizens: Dalit Movements and Democratisation in Tamil Nadu* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2005).
2. M. S. S. Pandian, *Brahmin and Non-Brahmin: Genealogies of the Tamil Political Present* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2007).
3. A. G. Noorani, "Preventive Detention in India," *Economic and Political Weekly* 26, no. 46 (1991): 2608.
4. GO 407 ms, Public (General B), 27 February 1967, TNA. See also Charles Henry Alexandrowicz, "Personal Liberty and Preventive Detention," *Journal of the Indian Law Institute* 3, no. 4 (1961); Noorani, "Preventive Detention in India."
5. When it lapsed, it gave way for a few years to the more draconian Maintenance of Internal Security Act of 1971.
6. GO 185 ms, Public (General D), 28 January 1952, TNA.
7. D. A. Low, ed., *Congress and the Raj: Facets of the Indian Struggle, 1917-47* (London: Heinemann, 1977).
8. Shalini Sharma, "Yeh Azaadi Jhooti Hai! The Shaping of the Opposition in the First Year of the Congress Raj," *Modern Asian Studies* 48, no. 5 (2014): 1358-88.
9. Dipesh Chakrabarty, "In the Name of Politics: Democracy and the Power of the Multitude in India," in *From the Colonial to the Postcolonial: India and Pakistan in Transition*, ed. Dipesh Chakrabarty, Rochona Mazumdar, and Andrew Sartori (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2007).

10. In 1951 the Madras provincial government recorded 1,745 cases of unlawful assembly, and in 1952 a whopping 1,907. GO 3220 ms, Home, 21 October 1953, TNA.

11. GO 824 ms confidential, Public, 9 May 1961, TNA. The list included only shootings that had occurred in the province as defined in 1961, i.e., Madras State or present-day Tamil Nadu.

12. "Police firing on crowds: Rules likely to be amended," *Indian Express*, 10 September 1957, p. 4.

13. GO 1472, Public, 17 September 1960, TNA.

14. Chandavarkar mentions the colonial government's reluctance to use tear gas during the policing of labor strikes in the 1920s and 1930s in Mumbai. Rajnarayan Chandavarkar, *Imperial Power and Popular Politics: Class, Resistance and the State in India, c.1850–1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). The first use of tear gas in the Madras Presidency was in 1945. It was first used to put down a protest without any casualties in 1947. *MPAR 1947*, 5. Likewise, tear gas was successfully used to disperse strikes in Madurai and Tirunelveli in 1948. *MPAR 1948*, 5.

15. An additional provision to allow the use of water at high pressure in Madras City and municipal towns was also incorporated. GO 1472, Public, 17 September 1960, TNA.

16. GO 1472, Public, 17 September 1960, TNA.

17. *MPAR 1960*, 5.

18. GO 1434 ms, Public (CRB), 27 April 1974, TNA.

19. Government of India, *The Shah Commission Report: Circumstances Leading to Declaration of Emergency* (New Delhi: Government of India Press, 1978).

The noteworthy point for the Commission was not that the police used Section 144, but that they did not use it when large, orchestrated meetings were held outside Indira Gandhi's house in a show of popular support for her rule.

20. "Statement made by Shri Charan Singh, Minister of Home Affairs in the Lok Sabha on 23rd March 1978 Regarding Preventive Detention," GO 485, Public (Law & Order), 11 March 1978, TNA. However, the PD allowed for checks to executive authority that the MISA did not, including a narrower definition of prejudicial activity, judicial review, and a twelve-month limit to the term of detention.

21. The end of the century saw the enactment of even more severe legislation, including the Terrorists and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act of 1985 and the Prevention of Terrorism Act of 2002.

22. Pandian, *Brahmin and Non-Brahmin*; Sumathi Ramaswamy, *Passions of the Tongue: Language Devotion in Tamil India, 1891–1970* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); V. Geetha and S.V. Rajadurai, *Towards a Non-Brahmin Millennium: From Iyothee Thass to Periyar* (Mumbai: Samya, 1998).

23. GO 360 ms, Public (General B), 12 February 1952, TNA. Anna had already been imprisoned once for the publication of his book, *Āriya Māyai*, but was released within ten days by a government that had realized that "repression was futile."

24. GO 360 ms, Public (General B), 12 February 1952, TNA.

25. Public Prosecutor, Madras to GOM, 29 November 1950, GO 360, Public (General B), 12 February 1952, TNA. The fact that the government had already lost a case in the Supreme Court on Article 19 increased its fears.

26. GO 360, Public (General B), 12 February 1952, TNA. Translations by the government translator.

27. GO 360, Public (General B), 12 February 1952, TNA.

28. Paula Richman, "E.V. Ramasami's Reading of the Ramayana," in *Many Ramayanas: The Diversity of a Narrative Tradition in South Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

29. Richman, "E.V. Ramasami's Reading of the Ramayana," 176.

30. A slip that Gandhi sought to avert through discipline. See Ranajit Guha, "Discipline and Mobilize," in *Subaltern Studies 7*, ed. Partha Chatterjee and Gyanendra Pandey (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993).

31. The political backlash to the scheme led, among other things, to K. Kamaraj, a Nadar leader of the Congress, replacing Rajaji as Chief Minister, effectively ending Rajaji's political career.

32. GO 2976 ms confidential vol. 1, Public (General A), 2 November 1953, TNA.

33. "Police Fire on Mobs," *The Indian Express*, 16 July 1953, p. 8, <https://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=P9oYG7HA76QC&dat=19530716&printsec=front-page&hl=en>.

34. The shooting happened on 15 July. The Inquiry Committee arrived in Thoothukudi late on the 16th, visited the scenes of the occurrences on the 17th, distributed 1,500 handbills publicizing the inquiry, and began hearing witness testimonies on the 18th.

35. "Report of the Committee of Enquiry into the Police Firing at Tuticorin," Section I, part 5, GO 2976 ms confidential, Public (General A), 2 November 1953, TNA.

36. "Report of the Committee of Enquiry into the Police Firing at Tuticorin," Section II, part 5, GO 2976 ms confidential, Public (General A), 2 November 1953, TNA.

37. Karunanidhi participated in the protest not at Thoothukudi but at Kallakudi, further north. See <https://www.thenewsminute.com/article/kallakudi-agitation-when-karunanidhi-became-household-name-tamil-nadu-86149>; <https://m.dailyhunt.in/news/india/english/hwnews+in-epaper-hwnws/how+karunanidhi+rose+to+political+relevance+with+kallakudi+protest-newsid-93382968>; <http://cms.newindianexpress.com/states/tamil-nadu/2018/aug/08/political-career-of-karunanidhi-gained-momentum-after-the-agitation-on-july-15-1953-at-kallakudi-1854854.html>.

38. The cartoon follows some of the traditions of early-twentieth-century cartooning, including the use of animals (the lion as heroic) and caricatures of Rajaji "with his hanging lip, sharp nose, black glasses and cunning demeanour." A. R. Venkatachalapathy, "Caricaturing the Political: The Cartoon in Pre-Independence Tamil Journalism," in *In Those Days There Was No Coffee* (New Delhi: Yoda Press, 2006), p. 52.

39. Bernard Bate, *Tamil Oratory and the Dravidian Aesthetic: Democratic Practice in South India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009); Robert Hardgrave Jr. and Anthony Neidhart, "Films and Political Consciousness in Tamil Nadu," *Economic and Political Weekly* 10 (1975); Sara Dickey, *Cinema and the Urban Poor in South India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); and M. S. S. Pandian, "Culture and Subaltern Consciousness: An Aspect of MGR Phenomenon," *Economic and Political Weekly* 24, no. 30 (1989).

40. Francis Cody, "Populist Publics: Print Capitalism and Crowd Violence beyond Liberal Frameworks," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 35, no. 1 (2015).

41. *Paava Mannippu*, directed by Bhimsingh (AVM Productions, 1961). For other films that also portray policemen positively, see *Bale Pandiya!* directed by B. R. Panthulu (Padmini Pictures, 1962) and *Neethikkuppin Paasam*, directed by M. A. Thirumugam (M.M.A. Chinnaya Thevar, 1963).

42. Pandian, "Culture and Subaltern Consciousness," p. PE65.

43. Sara Dickey, "Consuming Utopia: Film Watching in Tamil Nadu," in *Consuming Modernity: Public Culture in a South Asian World*, ed. Carol Breckenridge (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 138.

44. In an earlier scene in the movie, a rich young man announces his intention to serve the nation by enrolling in the police force and becoming an officer. *Paava Mannippu* (1961). The entry of policemen at crucial moments of narrative shift and plot resolution also occurs in other films of the time. In *Kavalkaran*, the heroine, played by Jayalalithaa, leaves her father's house to marry the man she loves, played by MGR. MGR, however, cannot accept her behavior, which, he says, is against the law. So he takes her to the police station, where he contrives to bring her father and manufactures a dispute between them that results in a parting of the ways. Now he accepts her, since her act of leaving her father has been legitimized in and by the space of the police station. *Kavalkaran*, directed by R. M. Veerappan (Sathya Movies, 1967).

45. Thomas Blom Hansen, *Wages of Violence: Naming and Identity in Postcolonial Bombay* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 62–65.

46. P. Maruthaiyya, "Rāmaṇātapuram Jillāvil Naṭakkum Kalavaraṅka! Cātic-caṅṭaiyā? Allatu Araciyal Kuḷappamā? Uṇmai Vivaraṅka!," (Madurai: Pattali Pathirikkai, 1957), Roja Muthiah Research Library (RMRL). See also K. A. Manikumar, *Murder in Mudukulathur: Caste and Electoral Politics in Tamil Nadu* (New Delhi: LeftWord Books, 2017).

47. Gorringe, *Untouchable Citizens*. For the most comprehensive account of the events of 1957 in English, see Manikumar, *Murder in Mudukulathur*.

48. Arjun Appadurai, *Fear of Small Numbers: An Essay on the Geography of Anger* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006).

49. GO 3358 ms confidential, Public, 30 November 1957, TNA. UMT also alleged that although the ex-IGP J. Devasahayam had once molested women, he had been appointed to his powerful position because he was "a Nadar, a Shanan, by

another Shanar (i.e., the Chief Minister).” Speech at Peraiyur, 29 June 1957, translations mine. In repeating the Nadar caste name as Shanar, UMT was reinforcing their historically subordinate caste position.

50. Manikumar, *Murder in Mudukulathur*.

51. Manikumar, *Murder in Mudukulathur*.

52. C. V. Narasimhan to Ramanathapuram Collector, 9 June 1957, GO 1277 ms confidential, Public, 24 April 1958, TNA.

53. GO 1277, Public, 24 April 1958, TNA.

54. In an explicit recognition of the conflict as caste-based, the collector did not include the CPI among his invitees.

55. The story is widely circulated. Among other sources, see Ramanathapuram Sessions Court Judgment, paragraph 5, which gives the original Tamil quote, “Oru paḷḷappayala eṅkūṭa etirttuppēca ivvaḷavu vaḷarttuviṭṭīrkalē! Ccacca! Nīṅkalum maravarkaḷā?” GO 3050 Public, 10 December 1959, TNA.

56. P. Maruthaiyya, “Rāmaṅātapuram Jillāvil Naṭakkum Kalavaraṅkaḷ Cātic-caṅṅaiyā?”; Tamiḷavel, *Camūka Urimaippōrāḷi Immāṅuvēl Tēvēntirar*; S. Viswanathan, *Dalits in Dravidian Land: Frontline Reports on Anti-Dalit Violence in Tamil Nadu, 1995–2004* (Pondicherry: Navayana, 2005); V. Geetha, “Desecrating Memory—The Paramakudi Police Shootings,” <https://kafila.online/2011/09/24/desecrating-memory-the-paramakudi-police-shootings/>.

57. GO 16, Public, 3 January 1959, TNA.

58. *FNR*, September 1957.

59. *FNR*, September 1957.

60. This was specifically *The Hindu*. “Police Fire on Hostile Mob: 5 Persons Dead in Village in Ramnad,” *The Hindu*, 15 September 1957. The *Indian Express* was more sensitive to the possibility of other narratives of the violence. “Trouble Spreads in Ramnad,” 19 September 1957, p. 8.

61. On the day Pallars presented their testimony, the *Express* noted ominously that UMT “was in his car in the compound” (i.e., intimidating any competing testimony). This is also common hearsay. “Keezathooval Enquiry: Harijan corroborates evidence of Thevar witnesses,” *Indian Express*, 21 September 1957, p. 8.

62. Manikumar mentions that the police shooting in Ulithimadai village on 20 September is also marked by the identical two narratives in police and popular accounts. Manikumar, *Murder in Mudukulathur*, 48.

63. Chakrabarty, “In the Name of Politics”; Dilip Gaonkar, “The Primacy of the Political and the Trope of the ‘People’ in Ernesto Laclau’s *On Populist Reason*,” *Cultural Studies* 26, nos. 2–3 (2012).

64. Hansen, *Wages of Violence*, 42–43.

65. B. S. Baliga, *Madras District Gazetteers: Madurai* (Madras: Government of Madras, 1960).

66. *MPAR* 1948, 5.

67. *MPAR* 1947, 9.

68. GO 1202 ms, Public General A, 17 April 1959, TNA.

69. *Indian Express*, 27 January 1957, p.7, <https://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=P9oYG7HA76QC&dat=19570127&printsec=frontpage&hl=en>. Even with regard to labor, the extent of organization and the location of protest made a difference; specifically, protests in the capital city attracted greater political attention. When police fired on a labor protest in the dockyards in Madras City in June 1958, the press and labor unions in the city expressed outrage, censuring the government and demanding a public inquiry into the incident. *Indian Express*, 17 June 1958, p.1, <https://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=P9oYG7HA76QC&dat=19580617&printsec=frontpage&hl=en>.

70. GO 1434 ms, Public, 27 April 1974, TNA.

71. Anupama Rao, *The Caste Question: Dalits and the Politics of Modern India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 181.

72. *Thevar Peravai* blog, October 2010, <http://www.thevar.info/2010/10/1957.html>, translation mine. The blog has since been taken down.

73. Interview with Govindan, 24 July 2015, Keezhathooval village.

74. Joshua Cole, "Entering History: The Memory of Police Violence in Paris, October 1961," in *Algeria and France, 1800–2000: Identity, Memory, Nostalgia*, ed. Patricia Lorcin (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2006).

75. For a discussion on the forging of translocal communal identities, see Sandria Freitag, *Collective Action and Community: Public Arenas and the Emergence of Communalism in North India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).

76. For other instances of this image of the masculine Thevar, see Tamil films *Thevar Magan*, directed by Bharathan (Raaj Kamal Films International, 1992); *Virumandi* (2004); *Vedam Pudithu*, directed by Bharatiraja (Janani Art Creations, 1987). See also Anand Pandian, *Crooked Stalks: Cultivating Virtue in South India* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009).

77. There have been similar conflicts in other parts of the country, with reference to statues of B. R. Ambedkar. See also D. Karthikeyan, "Contentious Spaces: Guru Pujas as Public Performances and the Production of Political Community," in *From the Margins to the Mainstream: Institutionalising Minorities in South Asia*, ed. Hugo Gorringer et al. (New Delhi: SAGE Publications, 2016); Amita Sinha and Rajat Kant, "Mayawati and Memorial Parks in Lucknow, India: landscapes of empowerment," *Studies in the History of Gardens and Designed Landscapes: An International Quarterly* 35, no. 1 (2015).

78. "Outsiders banned from entering Keezhathooval on Aivar Thinam," *The Hindu*, 14 September 2013, <http://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/Madurai/outside-banned-from-entering-keezhathooval-on-aivar-dhinam/article5127743.ece>.

79. "Massive Security Cordon in place at Pasumpon for Thevar Jayanthi," *The Hindu*, 30 October 2015, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/tamil-nadu/massive-security-cordon-in-place-at-pasumpon-for-thevar-jayanthi/article7820787.ece>.

80. In northern Tamil Nadu, there have been similar episodes of violence between Gounders and Dalits. For a framing of caste wars of the 1970s–'90s across

the nation as retaliatory violence against lower-caste activism, exacerbated by economic precarity, see Susan Bayly, *Caste, Society and Politics in India from the Eighteenth Century to the Modern Age* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

81. V. Geetha, “Desecrating Memory;” Anand Teltumbde, “Killing Pallars to Propitiate Thevars: A Fact-Finding Report on Police Firing at Paramakudi,” *CounterCurrents*, 30 October 2011, <https://www.countercurrents.org/teltumbde301011.htm>; Tamizhar Padukaappu Iyakkam, “Mutukulaṭṭūr kalavaram (1957) mutal Paramakkuṭi paṭukolai (2011) varai . . .,” *Keetru*, 20 October 2011, <http://www.keetru.com/index.php/2014-03-08-04-35-27/2014-03-08-12-20-14/17089-1957-2011>.

82. Emphasis mine. Human Rights Watch, “Broken People: Caste Violence against India’s Untouchables” (1999), <https://www.hrw.org/reports/1999/india/>.

83. Gorringer, *Untouchable Citizens*.

Conclusion

1. See especially Partha Chatterjee, *Lineages of Political Society: Studies in Postcolonial Democracy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).

2. Francis Cody cautions against overstating the binary between the literate and an “excessively embodied” crowd politics, and to acknowledge the linkages between the two. Francis Cody, “Populist Publics: Print Capitalism and Crowd Violence beyond Liberal Frameworks,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 35, no. 1 (2015): 50–65.

3. David Gilmartin, “Rethinking the Public through the Lens of Sovereignty,” *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 38, no. 3 (2015): 371.

4. Bernard Cohn, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 4.

5. For a moving fictional portrayal of the mixed results of this phenomenon, when members of a community joined a force that was always seen as an enemy, see Vela Ramamoorthy’s short story, “Irulappasami and the Twenty One He-Goats” in *Ambai*, ed. Gita Krishnankutty (New Delhi: Katha, 1999).

6. Despite the 1902 Police Commission’s efforts to standardize police functioning throughout the country, there were variations across provinces in how the force was organized, its staffing, training, and so forth. The Madras Presidency, for instance, had a considerably higher rate of literacy than most other provinces. In terms of the strength of the force in proportion to the population, it ranked higher than Bengal, but lower than Bombay or Punjab.

7. For important advice about not seeing all caste politics as violent politics, see Diane Mines, *Caste in India* (Ann Arbor, MI: Association for Asian Studies, 2009).

8. Robert Hardgrave Jr., *The Nadars of Tamilnad: The Political Culture of a Community in Change* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969).

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Sattur Station: Sivakasi town records.

Thazhiyoothu Station: Chatram Kudiyiruppu, Naranammalpuram, Rajavallipuram, and Thazhiyoothu village records.

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