

The Tamil Life of Purūravas: A Vernacular Adaptation of a Sanskrit Myth

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The *Purūravac-cakkiravartti-katai* (*PCK*), “The Story of Emperor Purūravas,” is a pre-modern Tamil folk telling of the ancient Urvaśī-Purūravas legend. The classical narrative of King Purūravas of the Lunar Dynasty tells about his love affair with the celestial nymph Urvaśī, their tragic separation, and final reunion. The *PCK* follows the classical narrative closely, but interposes a long account of other exploits of Purūravas, which do not appear in any of the Sanskrit tellings of the story. In this supplement, which I call “The Tamil Life of Purūravas,” Purūravas faces a tragic chain of unavoidable events, but eventually restores his former status through meditation and devotion. A comparative examination of the two parts of the text, that is, the classical narrative and the *Tamil Life*, shows that the latter generates an inverted mirror image of the fundamental notions implied in the classical narrative. The outcome of this structure is a shift in the ideological tendencies of the narrative toward a local ethos and popular religious notions. The *PCK* is thus shown to be a field of cultural negotiations, in which opposing ideologies contend for superiority, and its structure can be regarded as a transformative mechanism applied by local and popular cultural forms to enable appropriation of classical narrative traditions.

INTRODUCTION: THE *PURŪRAVAC-CAKKIRAVARTTI-KATAI* AND ITS MILIEU

Around the beginning of the nineteenth century, alongside the growing use of the recently introduced technology of print in Tamil-Nadu, a large body of Tamil folk narratives, originally oral, was transformed into written form.¹ Among these texts, which came to be the most popular form of Tamil prose in the nineteenth century, one distinguishable sub-group is what Kamil Zvelebil defined as “folk-versions of pan-Indian Hindu epic cycles.”² These texts expand episodes from the Rāmāyaṇa and Mahābhārata into long, elaborate tellings characterized by a relatively high register and an ornate style. Next to titles such as *Pañcapāñṭavar Vaṇavācam* (“The Forest Sojourn of the Five Pāṇḍavas”) and *Mayilirāvaṇaṇ-katai* (“The Story of Peacock Rāvaṇa”), this group also includes the *Purūravac-cakkiravartti-katai* (hereafter *PCK*), namely, “The Story of Emperor Purūravas.”³

The *PCK*, an elaborate prose telling of the ancient love story between the human King Purūravas and the celestial nymph (*apsaras*) Urvaśī, was first printed in Madras in 1819.⁴

I am grateful to my teacher, Prof. David Shulman, who introduced me to this text. The paper was born as a presentation at the 2014 Conference on South Asia in Madison, and an early (and much thinner) version of it was presented in 2016 in the STIMW seminar of the University of Manchester. I am grateful for audience comments on both occasions.

1. Zvelebil, *Two Tamil Folktales*, x. Blackburn shows that this process was driven by the growing need for simple Tamil fiction for civil-servants’ textbooks. See Blackburn, “The Burden of Authenticity,” 121–22.

2. Zvelebil, *Two Tamil Folktales*, xi.

3. The story of Purūravas is never actually narrated in the Sanskrit epics, but only very briefly referred to. However, as we shall see later, this Tamil tradition presents itself as an episode narrated in the Mahābhārata (MBh).

4. Blackburn, “The Burden of Authenticity,” 122. In this paper I used two editions of the text, a 1971 edition, referred to simply as “*PCK*,” and a 1912 edition, referred to as “*PCK* 1912.” Further information on these editions

The time of its composition is unknown, and so is the identity of its traditional audience and context of performance.⁵ It is composed in the typical style of pre-modern Tamil *kathā* literature⁶ and bears some features common to works of this genre, such as the use of proverbs and repetitive formulaic phrases. Like most Tamil folk-narratives, its authorship is traditionally ascribed to the medieval Tamil poet Pukaḷenti Pulavar.⁷ In terms of content, the *PCK* is a fusion of “folk/popular” and “classical” themes: the ancient Purūravas myth, as known from the Vedas and Purāṇas, occupies only one-fifth of the *PCK*. The remaining four-fifths are a unique supplement to the story, which does not appear in any of the Sanskrit tellings. This supplement, in addition to extending the story, is, as I intend to show, also designed to echo the classical narrative in a manner that situates the latter in a new ideological context and undermines its ethical and theological stands.

The *PCK*'s specific mix of narrative elements is shared by two other Tamil works: a nineteenth-century drama by the name of *Purūrava-nāṭakam* (*PN*, “The Drama about Purūrava”) and a sixteenth-century Tamil *mahākāvya*⁸ called *Purūrava-caritai* (*PC*, “The Adventures of Purūrava”). Like the *PCK*, both works place the Sanskrit “original” account next to a larger narrative with a plot similar to the *PCK*'s supplement. Further examination of these texts and a discussion of their relation to the *PCK* are made towards the end of this paper. However, we shall begin our exploration of the *PCK* with a consideration of its connection to the early, Sanskrit examples of the Purūravas narrative.

THE MYTHOLOGICAL CYCLE OF PURŪRAVAS

Among the ancient narratives of the Sanskrit tradition, the famous legend of Purūravas and Urvaśī stands out as one of the very few that have been retold and reworked from Vedic times to this day. It appears in a variety of texts in the Vedic canon from as early as the Ṛgveda,⁹ is narrated fully in many of the major Purāṇic texts, and is referred to in both epics.¹⁰ In the Sanskrit belletristic field, it serves as the theme for Kālidāsa's *Vikramorvaśīya* and is retold in the Kathāsaritsāgara.¹¹

Although spread over a wide swath of time and space, the vast majority of the Sanskrit tellings of the Purūravas story share a similar basic plot line, of which the central themes are the conjugal relationship of Urvaśī and Purūravas and their dramatic separation. The epics

can be found in the bibliography of this paper. To refer to specific episodes and quotations from the *PCK*, I used the page numbers of these editions.

5. According to Dr. T. Sellamuthu, to whom I am indebted for his help in reading the *PCK*, this text is similar in its didactic tone to the stories that are narrated during the eighteen-day-long Draupadī festival of Tamil Nadu (*tirauṇṇipattī*) and therefore may have been originally performed in a similar socio-religious context.

6. In a nutshell, this means pages-long sentences comprised of chains of subordinate clauses with nonfinite verbs, and a vocabulary abounding with words of Sanskrit origin.

7. This is a fictional ascription that points de facto to the anonymity of these texts. Zvelebil, *Two Tamil Folk-tales*, xiii–xiv.

8. *Mahākāvya* is a suitable designation of the genre only in respect to its general characteristics, being a long lyrical poem in meter. In fact, it may be considered a new form of poetic expression, which belongs to the Tenkasi “renaissance” of Tamil literature suggested by David Shulman. See Shulman, *More Than Real: A History of the Imagination in South India*, 155–56; idem, *Tamil: A Biography*, 249–50.

9. RV 10.95. This hymn contains only a dialogue scene between the two protagonists. Other Vedic versions of the story appear in Kāthaka-Saṃhitā 8.10, Mairāyaṇī-Saṃhitā 1.6.12, Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa 11.5.1, and Baudhāyana-Srauta-Sūtra 18.44–45.

10. MBh 1.75.20–23; Rām 3.48. Most of the major Purāṇas narrate this story, e.g., Bhāgavata Purāṇa 9.14; Viṣṇu Purāṇa 4.6; Padma Purāṇa 5.12; Matsya Purāṇa 24.10–32.

11. Kathāsaritsāgara 3.4–30

identify Purūravas as the first king of the Lunar Dynasty, and the Purāṇic accounts add a few fixed background sub-episodes, such as Urvaśī's curse of descent to the human world and the unusual birth-story of Purūravas, whose mother, Iḷā, is, in fact, a man under the influence of a sex-changing spell.¹² From the Purāṇas onwards, however, there is a clear split in the traditional telling of this narrative into two major branches, two "tale types," each of which has its own, mostly distinct, sub-episodes. One major type is the "Vedic" branch (hereafter "V-branch"), to which belong all tellings that are in agreement with the basic elements of the ŚB 11.5.1 narrative. The second type I call the "Kālidāsa" branch (hereafter "K-branch"), which includes the Purāṇic tellings that share the major narrative elements developed in Kālidāsa's *Vikramorvaśīya*.¹³

The first fifth of the *PCK* is a V-branch account, closely resembling the Bhāgavata Purāṇa (BhP) telling.¹⁴ A brief summary of the BhP telling will provide the necessary foundations for the following structural analysis of the *PCK* and enable us to identify its deviations from this conventional, "classic" template.

*The Classical Story of Purūravas in BhP 9.14*¹⁵

The celestial nymph Urvaśī, cursed by Mitra-Varuṇa to reside temporarily as a human in the human world, overhears the sage Nārada describing the good looks and other fine qualities of the human king Purūravas and makes up her mind to spend her time on earth with him. Immediately enchanted by Urvaśī's beauty, Purūravas asks her to become his wife and enjoy sexual pleasures with him. Urvaśī, herself enamored of Purūravas, agrees but sets three conditions: he must protect her two pet rams, her food must be only clarified butter, and she must never see him naked, except during sexual intercourse. Purūravas accepts her conditions, and the two lovers enjoy many days together. But like most curses in Indian literature, Urvaśī's too has an expiry date. In due time, Indra, the lord of the gods, starts missing Urvaśī's presence in his assembly. He then sends the Gandharvas to bring her back, and they accomplish this mission by virtue of a ruse. The Gandharvas enter Purūravas' palace in the dead of the night and steal the two rams from under his nose, a failure to which Urvaśī reacts with an acrid assault on Purūravas' manhood. Goaded by her cries, Purūravas pursues the thieves without taking the time to put on his garment. The Gandharvas then produce a flash of lightning so that Urvaśī sees him naked, and she disappears.

Mad with grief, Purūravas wanders through the world in search of her. He eventually arrives at the banks of the Sarasvatī River in Kurukṣetra, where he finds Urvaśī playing with

12. There are a few other sub-episodes, with some variation among them, but they all appear to be directly related to the love affair with Urvaśī. It should be noted that among the Mahāpurāṇas we find very few Purūravas-narratives that diverge from the love-story template. The Vāmana Purāṇa and Brāhmānda Purāṇa are two examples, but since they stand as exceptional cases I will not elaborate upon them.

13. Whether Kālidāsa's play is the source for this branch's characteristic narrative elements (which can be found in the MatsyaP, PadmaP, and ViṣṇudharmottaraP tellings) remains undetermined and is beyond the scope of the present paper. The Kathāsaritsāgara version also belongs to this branch.

14. This is deduced from an examination of the minor details that vary greatly among the V-branch Purāṇic tellings, such as the chronology of the Iḷā/Sudyumna sub-episode, the number and names of children born to Purūravas from Urvaśī, etc. For the present purpose, however, the choice of the BhP is only a matter of convenience, since other than these minor details the Purāṇic V-branch tellings show little variance.

15. Both BhP and *PCK* narrate the same typical sub-episodes (i.e., Purūravas' genealogy, beginning with the creation of the world and Brahma's emergence from Viṣṇu's navel, and Urvaśī's descent to the human world due to her curse) with little variance. Since these are beyond the scope of the current paper's topic, I begin my narration with the central theme, which appears in BhP 9.14.17–49.

her celestial companions, and begs her to return to him.¹⁶ At first, Urvaśī rejects him coldly, but when he insists and even threatens to kill himself, she agrees to meet him for one night every year and give birth to his sons. Six years and six sons later, she realizes he will not be satisfied in this manner and advises him to worship the Gandharvas and ask for a boon that would allow them to reunite forever. Purūravas does as she suggested and receives from the Gandharvas an *agnisthālī*, that is, a ritual vessel that contains fire. For some reason Purūravas believes the *agnisthālī* to be Urvaśī herself, and when he realizes it is just an earthen pot, he leaves it in the forest and goes back to his palace.

That night Purūravas is lost in thought. According to the BhP, this is a moment of cosmic importance: the turn of the cosmic ages, from the *Satya-yuga* (the first age) to the *Treta-yuga*. This change has some serious theological and ritualistic implications: what formerly was the one-syllable “Om̐” became at that moment the threefold Veda; the ritual structure of the *Satya-Yuga*, which included only one sacrificial fire, was replaced at that point with the standard ritual structure of three sacrificial fires, as ordained in the Vedas. According to the BhP, the manifestation of the three Vedas occurs in the mind of Purūravas on that very night in his palace. He then returns to the place where he left the *agnisthālī* but discovers that the fire and the earthen vessel have turned into two trees, one a *śamī* and the other an *aśvattha*. Purūravas uses their branches to kindle fire, performs the threefold fire sacrifice that he has envisioned, and eventually reaches Urvaśī’s world.

With regard to its outline and major motifs, the BhP telling can be considered a typical example of the “classic” V-branch narrative of Purūravas. As previously mentioned, the first fifth of the *PCK* highly resembles this version. At this point, however, we ought to take a look at the general plot of the *PCK in toto*.

*The PCK – A Brief Sketch*¹⁷

Typical of its genre, the *PCK* begins with a frame-narrative, which in this case is a well-known episode from the Mahābhārata’s Forest Book (*āranya-parva*). At a certain point during the Pāṇḍava brothers’ long exile, Arjuna leaves to perform a harsh penance (*tapas*) in order to obtain the *pāśupatiāstra*—the ultimate weapon for their coming war against their cousins and rivals, the sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra. In his absence Yudhiṣṭhira and the others are visited by Vyāsa, who, upon seeing Yudhiṣṭhira’s grief, tells him that his troubles will soon be over, in a manner similar to those of their ancestor, Purūravas. Yudhiṣṭhira asks him to tell the story and Vyāsa does so willingly, beginning with a description of the Lunar Dynasty from creation to the birth of Purūravas and up to his coronation as king of Pratiṣṭhānapuram. Hence the stage is set for the story of Purūravas himself, who thus far was described through conventional superlatives only. The account of his love affair with Urvaśī recalls the BhP narrative presented above, but instead of the familiar formula of the three nuptial conditions, Urvaśī says (*PCK* 1912, 12):

*varīr cakkiravarttiyē! eṅakk’ ōr virata-niyatiy uṅṅu. at’ eṅṅav eṅil: enta kālattil nīr vastiravīṅarāy
nīrvāṅiyākat tōṅṅrukiṅṅīrō akkālattil ummai viṅṅup pīrintu nīṅki viṅṅumpaṅiyāy[āka] irukkum
appōtu nīr maṅa-varuttam uṅṅamal eṅakkuc celavu kuṅukka vākkuttattaṅ ceyvīr āṅṅāl nām iru-
varum kāntaruvamākak kūṅṅikkalantu cukapōkaṅkaṅaiy aṅṅupavikkat takutiṅyāka irukkum.*

16. At this point in the BhP version, as in other major Purāṇic versions as well as the ŚB, the Ṛgvedic dialogue (RV 10.95) is partly (and not very accurately) quoted.

17. In order to facilitate the reading and the following discussion, I have included a schematic diagram of the plot outline of the *PCK* at the end of the current section.

Listen, O King! I have one condition: at some point, you would appear [before me] naked, and then I will have to leave you forever. If you promise to let me go without grieving when that time comes, it will be appropriate for us to enjoy now the bodily pleasures of *gandharva* [marriage].¹⁸

Purūravas agrees, and the story continues in accordance with the BhP telling:¹⁹ the Gandharvas steal the rams and Urvaśī vanishes; Purūravas encounters her again on the banks of Sarasvatī River and they have annual, nocturnal meetings that yield six sons; eventually he worships the Gandharvas, receives the *agnisthālī*, leaves it in the forest, and returns to his palace. But here the story takes a different turn: instead of having a sleepless night and heading back to the forest, Purūravas, discouraged by his failure to obtain Urvaśī with the *agnisthālī*, makes up his mind to stay at the palace and live happily with his young children. A while later, a wish starts growing in his heart—to find a wife and get married according to the householder’s dharma.

Here begins what I call “the Tamil Life of Purūravas,” or simply the *Tamil Life*—the PCK’s unique addition to the Purūravas myth. The *Tamil Life* starts with the fulfillment of Purūravas’ above-mentioned wish: a princess named Jeyapiratai from Viśala country learns about his beauty from her maids and falls in love with him. A proper *svayaṃvaram* is arranged and they get married, live happily, and have two sons. But this harmony does not last long, because at this point Śani-bhagavān, the personification of the inauspicious planet Saturn, whose gaze (i.e., astrological influence) is feared by men and gods alike, enters the story. Śani comes to Purūravas in person to announce the onset of his influence, and soon the troubles begin. First, the surrounding states’ kings conspire to take over his kingdom, and he is forced to go into exile. Along with his wife and children, he is led by Śani (in the guise of a Brahmin) to a far away country, where he pretends to be a simple clerk and joins a group of day-laborers who work for a rich merchant (*ceṭṭiyār*) named Nine-Crore-Nārāyaṇa (*navakōṭi nārāyaṇaṇ*). Just as the royal family is starting to get used to their new life, Śani causes Nine-Crore-Nārāyaṇa to lust after Jeyapiratai. Nine-Crore-Nārāyaṇa decides to take her by force, but she hides in a chest and “locks” it with a vow to keep her chastity. Unable to open, break, or burn the chest, the merchant loads it on a boat and sails to the Andaman Islands. Meanwhile, Purūravas takes his children on a search for his missing wife. He is told by the merchant’s servants that she has gone, and, while Purūravas is still absorbing the shock of her loss, Śani causes a river to flood and separate him from his children. He is carried away in the stream to a herdmen’s village, where he pretends to be a herdman as well. The erstwhile king works for food and sleeps with the calves, his only possession the single cloth that is tied around his waist. But Purūravas’ troubles are not yet over: Śani causes Purūravas to be accused of stealing jewelry from the local king’s palace. He is arrested and punished by having one leg and one arm cut off and is left to bleed outside the city.

In this miserable circumstance, Purūravas prays to Sarasvatī, and she appears in the guise of a low-caste, nose-chopped woman. She treats his wounds and feeds him with *amṛta*. From here onward his situation slowly improves. A compassionate merchant from the same city feels for Purūravas and gives him shelter in his home. There Purūravas sings and plays the *vīṇā* every night, until the local king’s daughter, named Puṣpāñcali, accidentally hears his music and falls in love with him. When her parents notice her signs of love-sickness they arrange a *svayaṃvaram*, to which all kings of the fifty-six states arrive. Puṣpāñcali, who is not interested in any of them, in despair throws her flower chain in the air, praying to Śiva

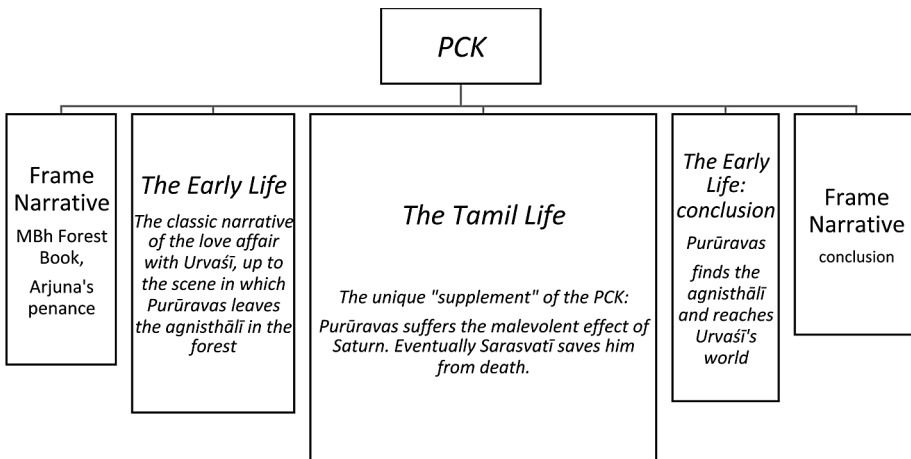
18. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

19. A few other deviations, which are of less importance to the general structure but which nevertheless express some of the author’s ideological tendencies, are noted below.

to fulfill her wish, and the flower chain magically falls on the neck of Purūravas, who stands in the crowd. Puṣpāñcali's father, humiliated by his daughter's marriage to a handicapped thief, exiles both of them from the city. They settle in the forest, where Sarasvatī supplies all their needs.

A short while later in the celestial world, *viti* (Skt. *vidhi*) and *mati*, the divine personifications of Fate and Knowledge, argue over which of them is greater. The gods advise them to settle the dispute by taking counsel with the human king Purūravas, who is famed for living by Manu's law. Disguised as brahmins, they approach him in his forest palace and present their arguments. Purūravas needs no time for pondering—he immediately replies that Fate is greater and proves it by giving many examples, one of which is his own (“Tamil”) life-story. This episode marks the end of Śani's period: Śani himself appears again before Purūravas, praises him for his ability to endure all these torments, and promises him his eternal protection. Śiva, Viṣṇu, and Brahma, along with all the other gods, appear before him, assure him that his arm and leg will grow back soon and that he will achieve the highest form of bliss—*cāyucciya-patavi* (“a state of identity,” with God). From this point on, the protagonists' problems begin to resolve: Purūravas and Puṣpāñcali's forest palace becomes famous as a sacred place with healing qualities and draws pilgrims from all over the country. Among them are Purūravas' two lost sons, who were adopted and raised by a shepherdess, as well as Nine-Crore-Nārāyaṇa with Jeyapiratai in the locked chest, and Purūravas' former head-minister from his old kingdom. All identities are revealed, Purūravas retrieves his old kingdom and family, and everyone lives together in harmony. Years go by and, upon reaching a suitable age, Purūravas decides to become a forest-dweller. He divides the kingdom between his sons and retires to the forest.

Thus ends the “Tamil Life of Purūravas,” and in a sharp turn the storyteller ties up all the loose ends, picking up the classical narrative from where he has left it: Purūravas, while in the forest, meditates upon Urvaśī. He finds the spot where the *agnisthālī* was left. However, in its place now stand two trees—an *aśvattha* and a *samī*. He makes kindling sticks (*araṇi*) from their branches and, as he rubs them together, the Om syllable manifests as the triple Veda in his mind, along with a vision of the standard form of Vedic ritual with its three fires. He performs the ritual and reaches Urvaśī's world. The storyteller then recounts the amazement with which Yudhiṣṭhira responds to this tale and lists the benefits it yields to those who hear it, tell it, sing it, or meditate upon it.



A schematic diagram of the PCK's plot structure (left to right)

THEMATIC AND STRUCTURAL ELEMENTS IN THE “TAMIL LIFE”

The “Fall and Rise” Theme and the Nala Story

The “Tamil Life of Purūravas,” taken as a separate narrative unit, has a clear and consistent theme: a prototypical king, endowed with all royal characteristics, undergoes a sharp and tragic process of “dissolution.” This process, which is depicted as the king’s inevitable fate, is manifested by social and physical degeneration. Only after being stripped of everything he has and hitting rock-bottom can the king climb back up to his former position and reach a harmonic happily-ever-after finale.

This “fall and rise” theme is, of course, not foreign to the Indian literary traditions. The cyclical pattern of exile and return has many notable parallels in both Sanskrit and vernacular texts.²⁰ One particularly important example for the current discussion, and perhaps the earliest instance of this theme, is the well-known story of King Nala (the *Nalopakhyāna*).²¹ After his long-awaited marriage to Damayanti, Nala has an unfortunate encounter with Kali (the personification of strife), which unfolds a tragic chain of events: he loses his kingdom, possessions, and wife, and his body becomes ugly and deformed. After a long period of “undercover” exile, he re-obtains everything he has lost.

The Tamil folk-narrative genre provides a more direct link between the stories of Nala and Purūravas: the *Naḷaccakkiravarti-katai*, a folk telling of Nala’s story, similar in style to the *PCK*. This telling replaces Kali with Śani as Nala’s tormentor²² and thus parallels the plot of the *Tamil Life*. The *PCK* itself indicates the connection between the stories in another way, namely by borrowing from the Nala story its frame-narrative, the *Indralokābhigamanam*,²³ thus relating them to the same epic context.²⁴ None of the various Sanskrit recensions of the MBh mentions the story of Purūravas in the textual proximity of the *Nalopakhyāna*, nor do any of the Tamil adaptations of the MBh. It is, therefore, a significant association made by the composers of the *PCK*.

The MBh narration of the Nala story is shaped to fit the condition of Yudhiṣṭhira, who, like Nala, lost everything he had in a dice game and went into exile. Placing the story of Purūravas in the setting of Nala’s story naturally results in a correlation of their functions, as conveying a message for Yudhiṣṭhira. In the *PCK* this relation between frame-narrative and main narrative hinges on the notion of fate (discussed below in its wider meaning) as the source of all misery. The unfortunate condition of the Pāṇḍavas and the tragic chain of events in the *Tamil Life* are both described as the ineluctable product of fate.²⁵ The only inconsistent part here seems to be what I will hereafter refer to as the “*Early Life*,” that is, the “classic” narrative of Purūravas, squeezed between the epic frame and the large Tamil

20. This is particularly true for South Indian narratives, in which, according to David Shulman, the “dissolution” serves as a fundamental characteristic of kingship. See Shulman, *The King and the Clown in South Indian Myth and Poetry*, 294–96.

21. MBh 3.52–79.

22. See Shulman, “On Being Human in a Sanskrit Epic: The Riddle of Nala,” 3.

23. That is, Arjuna’s “reaching Indra’s world,” MBh 3.42–51.

24. This is stated in the opening sentence of the *PCK*, in which Vyāsa comes to encourage the Pāṇḍava brothers by telling them some “good, happy stories, [such as] the story of Nala, and others,” one of which is the story of Purūravas (*PCK*, 3):

śrī viyācapakavāṇ āṇavar avarkaḷukku maṇaviṭṭukkaṅkaḷ tīrntu tīra muṛru maṇatu camātāṇamākumpāṭi naḷōpākkiyāna mutaliya cila pākkiyamāṇa puṇṇiya carittiraṅkaḷai collik koṇṭu.

It should be noted that in the MBh it is Bṛhadaśva and not Vyāsa who narrates the story.

25. On the third page of the *PCK* Vaiśampāyana tells Janamejaya that his forefathers lost the wealth of their kingdom due to their former-life karma (*ālvinaṭi vacattarkaḷ āy*), which is, as shown below, one aspect of the general “theory of fate” that prevails in the *PCK*.

supplement. However, as we shall see next, a structural comparison of the *Tamil Life* and the *Early Life* shows them to have some striking narrative parallels that reflect the essential dialectic of the text.

The Early Life and the Tamil Life: Structural Correlations

From a scholarly point of view, the “geological” layers of the *PCK* are easily discernible. However, since the text presents itself to its audience as one integrative unit, we must assume that the fusion of the two narratives—i.e., the *Early Life* and the *Tamil Life*—has a coherent internal logic. A comparison of the narrative structures of the two parts exposes this logic, for, in spite of differences in style, texture, and length, they share a similar morphological paradigm.

Both parts begin with a woman (Urvaśī/Jeyapiratai) learning by hearsay about the attractiveness of Purūravas and initiating marital relations with him. After a harmonious period, a sudden breakup occurs, caused by an unavoidable external factor (the expiry of Urvaśī’s curse / Śani’s appearance). This is followed by a quick degradation in the social and physical status of Purūravas, which comes to a halt as a result of an encounter with a divine woman—in the *Early Life* it is Urvaśī again, but in her divine form; in the *Tamil Life* it is Sarasvatī. This encounter marks the beginning of the way back up: the restoration of Purūravas’ relationships and the rise of his status to a divine or semi-divine degree, the latter only after he has introduced some kind of ritualistic innovation.

Thus the *Tamil Life* replicates a sequence of key elements of the *Early Life*.²⁶ These, however, are charged with notions that challenge the fundamental ideological and theological models the classical story presents. In the next few sections, we will exemplify this process of “inverse replication.”

Marriage and Sexuality

The Purūravas-Urvaśī pair is a highly potent fusion of two dyadic relationships: male-female and human-divine, thus accounting for its appeal to generations of storytellers and poets. In my comparison to the *Tamil Life*, Urvaśī plays a double role, viz., the human wife and the divine woman.²⁷ The encounter with “human” Urvaśī parallels the encounter with Jeyapiratai, and the two are clearly antithetical. Let us take, for example, the elaborate description of the sexual pleasures of Urvaśī and Purūravas that follows their *gandharva* marriage²⁸ (*PCK*, 17):

mātamālikaiyaic cērnta mēṛkaṭṭu vitāṇ[an]kaḷāna upparikkaikaḷiṅ mītu cuvarṇa-mayam ākiya puṣpa-cayaṅkaḷ oṭuṅ kūṭiya cukacapa[?]-kōṭi mañcaṅkaḷ iṭattilum puṣpa-vaṅkaḷilum puṅṅiya nati tīraṅkaḷilum kuḷirnta cōlaikaḷilum aṅk’aṅku poṅṅūcalkaḷilum iratṭacālaikaḷilum parvata cikaṛapara tēcaṅkaḷilum itu mutaliya manōramyamāna cukumāra stalaṅkaḷil taṅkaḷ

26. Due to the obvious chronological precedence of the classical story, the opposite seems highly unlikely.

27. Urvaśī first encounters Purūravas after she has taken a human form; yet on their second meeting she is back in her divine form. This is stated explicitly when Mitra-Varuṇa curse Urvaśī (*PCK*, 15):

nī cilakālam manuṣa-rūpattaiy aṭaintu maṅṭar pōkaṅkaḷaiy aṭaiyak kaṭavāy eṅru capittānarkaḷ

“You will have to take a human body for a while and experience human [sexual] pleasures!” they cursed [her].

And later when Urvaśī appears before Purūravas (*PCK*, 19):

carasvatī-nati tīrattattil anta tēva-kaṅṅikaiyāna ūrvaciy āṅavaḷ. . .vantu tōṅṅi niṅṅaṅaḷ

Urvaśī, the divine damsel, came to the sacred bathing-place of the Sarasvatī River and appeared [before him].

28. *Gandharva* marriage is one of the eight classical forms of marriage, according to the various Dharmasāstra texts. It is based on physical attraction and its main purpose is sexual intercourse. Kane, *History of Dharmasāstra*, vol. 2 pt. 1, 519.

iṣṭappirakāram mataṇa carittirattil colliya vitippaṭi cāstirattilum vaḷuvillāmal vicittiramāka tēva-kāntaruva-kiṇṇarāti laṭcana yuttamāyum cimma-cāpa-cārttūla-cakōra-cakkiravākāti-pacu-paṭcikal-pōla laṭcaṇa yuttamāyum innum anēka vicittiramākavum iravu-pakal tōṟṟāmal cilakālam mataṇum ratiyūm pōla kēli-vilācak kirīṭaikaḷākac cukāṅkaḷai aṇupavitt' iruntārkaḷ.

. . . They experienced the pleasures of love-play on crores of flower-covered beds, in the shaded golden balconies of the palace's roof tops, in thick flowering forests, on the banks of blessed rivers, in beautiful groves, here-and-there on golden swings, in huts of gem-laid walls, on mountain tops, and in other charming places like those. They did so as much as they wished, in exact accordance with the path of the lovers told in the Śāstras, and in various manners: like gods, Gandharvas, and kinnaras, like lion-cubs, tigers, partridges, cakravāka birds, and other animals and birds, and in many other ways, day and night without disturbance, like Kāma and Rati.

This endless love-making causes Purūravas to forget his royal duties, a fact Urvaśī herself hurls at him when her rams are stolen (PCK 1912, 13):

ā nātanē! it' eṇṇa aṇyāyam umatu aracāṭci niyati tappiṟṟō umatu irācciyāṅkaḷil cōrāl mikunt' irukkak kāraṇam eṇṇa nītiy uḷḷav aracaṇ ākiya nīr ippaṭṭik kotta-cāmāṇya kāmiya pōkattil cintaiyai layikkac ceytu smarāṇai tappi-y-irukkiṇṇat'ānāl allavā?

O, King! What is this injustice? Has morality disappeared from your rule? What is the reason for the increasing presence of thieves in your kingdom? Could it be that you, the righteous king, have ruined your mind with common sexual pleasures like some bricklayer, and now your memory is lost?

In the *Tamil Life*, on the other hand, Purūravas marries Jeyapiratai in a normative, arranged royal ceremony, followed by the obligatory stay of the newlyweds at the palace of the bride's parents. Here their conjugal life is portrayed rather differently (PCK 1912, 27):

vekunāl . . . cantōṣatt'ūṭaṇē tāṇum taṇ nāyakaṇum kūṭic cukattaiy aṭaint'iruntārkaḷ oruvar rukk'oruvar piriyaṇṇaiyāy pirāṇaṇ oṇṟu pontikaḷ iraṇṭumāka oru maṇat'āyk kalantu taṅkaḷukk' iccāiyāṇapaṭi kēlivilācamākap puṭpa-vaṇaṅkaḷilēyūm mēṭaikaḷilēyūm maṇmata-kēli-vilācaṅkaḷai naṭattik koṇṭu tarumanāti tavarāmal ceṅkōl celutti ulakam eṅkum taṇṇaik koṇṭāṭat takkatāka aracāṭci ceytu koṇṭ'iruntār.

. . . For many days . . . she (Jeyapiratai) and her husband were joyfully happy together. Inseparable from each other, two bodies with one breath and one mind, they practiced Manmatha's love-amusements as much as they wished, in flowering forests and in palaces, ruled justly in accordance with the laws of dharma without any fault, in a worldwide praise-worthy manner.

Note the smooth connection in the last quote, between the emotional yet modest description of love-making and the reference to the royal couple's "dharmic" rule. It seems as though the erotic feast of the *Early Life*, which causes the loss of dharma, is frowned upon by the *Tamil Life*. The latter "responds" to the lustful relations with Urvaśī with a normative model of human marriage, of which the eminent emotional aspect is in accord with the king's duties.

As a concluding remark on "proper" sexuality, the *Tamil Life* depicts Purūravas' third marriage, to Puṣpācali. This relationship too begins with an initial one-sided (female) attraction. Here, however, it is not driven by Purūravas' physical attributes but by his musical skills. His mutilation at this point may also be a metonymic expression for impotence, since the only allusion to their conjugal life is this short description, appearing shortly after the end of Śani's period and the restoration of Purūravas' limbs (PCK, 87):

oru nāl manatil puttira-pākkiyattin pēril iccai teḷintatai cakkiravarttiy aṟintu avaḷ manatiṇ paṭi puttira apēṭcaiyai nīraivēṟṟa vēṇum eṇṟu karuti iruvarukkun taṇatu cāttirattil colliyaṭi kirīṭitu ōr puttiraṇaip peṟṟu cukattil irukkum[pōtu]. . .

One day the Emperor realized that she [Puṣpāncali] is secretly wishing for a son and thought, “her heart’s desire for a son should be fulfilled.” The two of them copulated according to their śāstras’ prescript, obtained a son, and were joyous.

The gradual remodeling of sexuality that culminates in this nearly celibate relationship, in which sexual intercourse is described solely as an act of grace by the husband to his wife, represents the tendency toward ascetic values that prevails throughout the *PCK*.

The Feminine Divinity

After Urvaśī’s disappearance, Purūravas goes searching for her throughout the world. According to the *PCK* the search continues until she decides to reveal herself to him.²⁹ This encounter, a sort of epiphany, parallels the encounter with Sarasvatī in the *Tamil Life*: both serve the function of stopping Purūravas’ degeneration and mark the beginning of his way back up. However, Urvaśī and Sarasvatī are two opposite poles of feminine divinity: Urvaśī is an *apsaras*, a celestial courtesan and a symbol of pure sexuality.³⁰ Sarasvatī, on the other hand, is a symbol of sexual purity: her traditional spouse is Brahma, who is actually her father, and she can, therefore, be regarded as a kind of virgin-goddess. Both Urvaśī and Sarasvatī are childless, but in an opposite manner: Urvaśī gives birth to children, but never functions as a mother—she only hands them over to Purūravas.³¹ Her motherly care is expressed only toward her pet rams, which in most classical tellings she calls “my sons.”³² Sarasvatī, on the other hand, calls herself “the childless one” (*piḷḷaiyillātavaḷ*)³³ but at the same time adopts Purūravas as her own son³⁴ and nurtures him.³⁵

From a theological point of view, the Urvaśī-Sarasvatī parallelism is highly significant, since it introduces the notion of emotional *bhakti* toward the feminine divine principle as a complementary component to the *Early Life*’s theological perspective.³⁶ The *PCK* has a gen-

29. Unlike the BhP telling, in which he finds her himself.

30. Meyer gives numerous examples of epic and Purāṇic episodes in which *apsaras* are used to sexually seduce ascetics who accumulate dangerous amounts of *tapas*. See Meyer, *Sexual Life in Ancient India*, 261–63.

31. Some of Urvaśī’s other children were not even carried in her womb. Vasiṣṭha, for example, was born from the semen of Mitra-Varuṇa, emitted upon seeing Urvaśī and then put in a vessel. Yet he is still traditionally considered her son (see RV 7.33).

32. ŚB 11.5.1.3 (when Urvaśī’s first ram is stolen):

avīra iva bata me ’janā iva putrāṁ haranti

Alas! They are taking away my son as if in a place without men, without heroes!

BhP 9.14.29a (when the two rams are stolen):

yad viśrambhād ahaṁ naṣṭā hṛtāpatyā ca dasyubhiḥ

Because of my trust in him [Purūravas] I am destroyed, my children taken by thieves.

33. *PCK*, 59.

34. *PCK* 1912, 45. Sarasvatī to Purūravas:

nīra eṇakku-p-puttiraṅ tāṅ vēṅṅrukkum ālōcaṇai vēṅṅiyat’ illai

You are, indeed, my son. There is no other way to see it.

35. The suggested dichotomy between Urvaśī and Sarasvatī can be more generally viewed as an archetypal polarity: Urvaśī and Sarasvatī are two opposite mythological manifestations of the “Great Mother” archetype, standing at the two poles of what Erich Neumann refers to as “the transformative character of the feminine.” On the “negative” pole of Neumann’s schema stands the “young witch,” the seductress, who evokes experiences of madness and dissolution, closely akin to Urvaśī’s effect on Purūravas; on the opposite, “positive” pole—the “virgin mother,” producer of creative inspiration and patron of wisdom, which altogether coincides with the traditional image of Sarasvatī. Thus, the choice made by the *PCK*’s author, to place Sarasvatī in the *Tamil Life* as a mirror image of Urvaśī, coincides with a universal and fundamental polarity between mythological aspects of the feminine divinity. See Neumann, *The Great Mother: An Analysis of the Archetype*, 33–34; 64–83.

36. By the general term *bhakti*, I refer to the theistic religious system that emphasizes the notion of an intimate relationship with one’s God and that views the highest spiritual goal as the unification with God, gained through complete surrender of oneself to God’s grace.

eral Śaivaite tendency, evident from the standard “Śiva, Śiva!” cries of Purūravas after each blow he suffers, as well as from the prevalent references to *pañcākṣaram* chanting. However, Śiva is absent during the whole process of suffering and appears only to restore Purūravas’ limbs when Śani’s period of influence is over. The only cry for salvation that is actually answered is the one turned to Saravatī, whose compassion toward Purūravas is an expression of divine grace.³⁷ Interestingly, the only other similar act of divine grace in the *PCK* is performed by Saravatī’s parallel feminine divinity, namely Urvaśī, who relieves Purūravas from his mad grief over her loss by suggesting their annual conjugal meetings. These two acts are again emblematic of the essential polarity between the two feminine divinities: Urvaśī’s unsatisfying compromise emphasizes the remoteness and inaccessibility of the divine principle in the classical narrative, whereas the daily care provided by Sarasvatī expresses her absolute loyalty and the possibility of mutuality in a bhakti-oriented relationship with a feminine divinity. As an antithetical mirror-image of Urvaśī, Sarasvatī exemplifies an alternative form of relationship between man and the feminine divinity—the mother-child relationship. The cruel, cold-hearted seductress is replaced by a loving, nourishing mother.

Rebirth and Devotion

The process that Purūravas goes through in the *Tamil Life* was described earlier as a process of dissolution or degeneration. This process is a chain of disasters of increasing intensity that assail Purūravas from the outermost circle to the innermost—first his kingdom, then his family, and finally his own body. At the same time, he is pushed further and further away from his royal identity: Purūravas the universal-ruler (*cakkiravartti*) becomes first a clerk (*kaṇakkappiḷlai* ‘accountant’) who lives in a village house, then a herdsman (*iṭaiyan*) who sleeps in the cowshed, and finally a mutilated beggar (*muṭavan*) at the utter mercy of others.

The recurring metamorphoses of Purūravas function as metaphorical reincarnations; every disaster is a partial death, and every new identity is a new birth.³⁸ This is supported in the text by the symbolical act of either fainting or falling asleep after each disaster. The last “rebirth,” after being mutilated and left to bleed, is a very concrete one: Purūravas at this point is as helpless as a baby and is being literally fed and put to sleep by his new “mother,” Sarasvatī.³⁹ Thus the dissolution process, repeatedly explained as the result of former-life karma, has a purging function: the torments Purūravas goes through clear his karmic “load” by making him face absolute helplessness, an experience of human weakness at its most extreme that culminates in a bhakti-like surrender and a “rebirth” in a pure state. This combination of actual suffering (with its purifying force), insight, and surrender enables the termination of the dissolution cycle and the restoration of his royal identity.

Theory of Fate and the Heroic Model

The existential stance implied in the *PCK* depends largely on its notion of “fate.” The universe of the *PCK* is dominated by a highly deterministic system comprised of three

37. The emphasis on female divinities (as well as the overall Śaivaite tendency of the text) is typical of Tamil folk narratives. Women, human or divine, are frequently depicted as potential sources of divine power. Zvelebil, *Two Tamil Folktales*, xxv–xxvi.

38. Moreover, although he is not required to hide, Purūravas of the *Tamil Life* never reveals his true identity to those around him. Instead, he assumes a new name and social status in every transformation, as if he himself becomes less and less sure of his identity.

39. *PCK*, 59. The verbs used here are *ūṭṭu*, which is the specific verb used for putting food in a baby’s mouth, and *cayanikka cey* ‘to make [someone] sleep’.

elements: 1) “forehead fate” (*talai-viti*, Skt. *vidhi*), that is, the inescapable destiny that Brahma inscribes on the forehead of every baby born; 2) former-life-karma (*ūl-viṇai*); and 3) astrological influences. The first two elements (but *ūl-viṇai* in particular) appear frequently as justifications for suffering or misfortunes, announced by practically every character in the text—Urvaśī, Purūravas, the “Tamil” wives, Nine-Crore-Nārāyaṇa, and even Vyāsa and Yudhiṣṭhira. The personified representative and executor of fate is Śani (Saturn), who appears as an actual character in the story, devising the tricks (*māykai*) and deceptions that bring about all calamities.

This heavily deterministic climate has a significant ethical outcome: it shifts the focus of human responsibility in life from action to attitude, that is, from how one acts when facing disaster to how one responds emotionally and spiritually. Accordingly, the conflict (as a literary element) that lies at the heart of the *PCK* is set by the encounter with Śani. There is no other foe, villain, or monster to overcome.⁴⁰ As the single candidate for the role of the villain, Śani may be dark and sinister, but he is just an executor of a predetermined future. The only battle is the struggle to endure emotional and physical torments, and the battleground is the hero’s own consciousness.

In respect to Purūravas’ internal struggle and mental stand, the *Early Life* and the *Tamil Life* seem, again, antithetical. The most prominent characteristic of the “classical Purūravas,” in both the V- and K-branch tellings, is his obsessive persistence in getting Urvaśī back following his mental breakdown that results from her disappearance. This is reflected in his total madness while searching for her, which provided the theme for the whole fourth act of Kālidāsa’s *Vikramorvaśīya* and is described by Narayana Rao and Shulman as “the exemplar of royal insanity in ancient India.”⁴¹ In the *PCK*’s *Early Life* too, the mental breakdown is strongly emphasized (*PCK*, 18):

. . . anta ūrvaciyaik kāṇāmal payittiyam piṭṭavanaiṇ pōla mati mayāṅki pūmiyir paṭuttup
puraṇtu tukkittu mūrccittu teḷintu ā eṇ piriyam-uḷḷa mōkaṇāvatiyāṇa pirāṇa nāyakiyē! eṇru pit-
tam piṭṭavan pola tēṭit tirintuk koṇtu evaruṅ kāṇāmal ēṅki paratavittu. . .

Not seeing Urvaśī, he went out of his mind, like a madman. He lay down, cried, and wallowed on the ground until he fainted. He woke up in a delirious-like state and wandered, searching for her. “O, my love! My charming life-breath! My wife!” he cried in distress, but to no avail.

Now let us compare this touching scene with its parallel from the *Tamil Life*, that is, the disappearance of Jeyapiratai (who was carried away in the locked chest by Nine-Crore-Nārāyaṇa). Purūravas worries about his wife, who went to the merchant’s house to get their daily salary but has not returned. The servants at Nine-Crore-Nārāyaṇa’s house tell him that she went into the house but she is no longer present, and Nine-Crore-Nārāyaṇa has left on a ship to the Andaman Islands. Purūravas’ reaction is perplexing (*PCK*, 50):

kaṇakkap piḷḷaiy ākiya cakkiravarittiyun tikaittu aiya iyō ikkuḷantaikaḷai eṭuttuk koṇtu pōkamar
pōy viṭṭālē nāṅ eppaṭi kāppārrap pōkirēṅ civacivā itarkō nāṅ cariram oṭuttatu. . .

The Emperor-who-became-a-clerk was taken aback. “Alas! She left without taking with her these children! How will I take care of them? O, Śiva, Śiva! Was I born for *this*?”

Note the purely functional value Purūravas attributes to his wife, despite the earlier impression of an emotional depth in their relationship. This response stands in stark contrast to the

40. Nine-Crore-Nārāyaṇa may seem like a villain, since he abducts the protagonist’s wife, a typical “bad guy” move. However, the *PCK* presents him as a victim of Śani, not responsible for his own deeds. Accordingly, he is forgiven for his crime and richly rewarded by Purūravas for keeping Jeyapiratai safe during these years (*PCK*, 104).

41. Narayana Rao and Shulman, Introduction to *How Urvashi Was Won*, xix.

one we see upon Urvaśī's disappearance and shows that, at least from the narrator's point of view, this is a different Purūravas. His relative indifference to the coming disasters increases as the narrative advances. Thus, after being mutilated at the king's order for a crime he did not commit and left to bleed on the ground, he first cries to Śiva, saying "my suffering is in accordance with your divine will!"⁴² He thinks of his wife and children, falls asleep, and upon waking meditates on a verse from the *Nālaṭiyār*, a popular Tamil book of moral maxims (given below in Pope's prose translation):

When troubles arise, hard to resist, to cause them to break the vows which their lofty spirits have pledged, the men of power set griefs aside, and firmly fix their souls in right. These are the blessed, guarding 'decorum's' rule.⁴³

This verse inspires Purūravas: "all the sufferings that come—let them come. These are all God's divine sports,"⁴⁴ he contemplates. The *Tamil Life* often finds Purūravas meditating upon moral verses. Many of his actions and reactions are preceded by a meditation (*tiyānam*, Skt. *dhyāna*) of this kind, on verses that express an ideal of patience and self-restraint, with a general tendency toward asceticism.⁴⁵ This ideal appears to be the mirror opposite of *Early Life* Purūravas.

The *Tamil Life* presents a model of heroism that draws its inspiration from the early Tamil didactic literature, as indicated by the frequent quotes from the two most celebrated books on morals in Tamil—the *Tirukkural* and the *Nālaṭiyār*.⁴⁶ The vast majority of these quotes appear in the *Tamil Life* as the content of Purūravas' consciousness,⁴⁷ in a pattern identical to that found in the above-noted quote. The verses support an ideal model of right conduct that conforms with the existential stand of the text. Human life appears to be governed by random irruptions of pain and disaster, of personal tragedies and loss. These are stamped with a deterministic character, irrespective of one's actions in this birth. Moreover, as the *Tamil Life* demonstrates, they should be embraced as forms of penance and overcome with self-restraint and clarity of mind, as in the teachings of the texts of old. The attempt to escape one's fate is irrelevant to this cosmic scheme. Although present as a theme in other Indian folk traditions,⁴⁸ here escaping fate is not only impossible—it is simply wrong. As Purūravas himself says more than once in the *Tamil Life*: one should experience one's karma in full measure.⁴⁹ This is the real dharma, the real duty of any man let alone a king, which forms the didactic message that the *PCK* conveys.

42. *PCK*, 58: *eṇṇuṭaiya varuttam umatu tiruv uḷ[]attukkē pāṅku*.

43. Pope, *The Naladiyar, or, Four Hundred Quatrains in Tamil*, 39.

44. *PCK*, 59: *iṅṅam varukīra tuṅṅam ellām varaṭṭum itukaḷ ellām āṅṅavaṅṅukkuṭ tiruviḷaiyāṭṭ' eṅṅu*. . .

45. Many of these verses also mention the concepts of fate or karma (*vinai*) and the inevitability of their effects.

46. Quoting from these texts and from the *Kural* in particular is a common practice in Tamilnadu, documented by European travelers and missionaries as early as the sixteenth century. Gaur quotes a German missionary who writes in 1708: "[H]igh-class Malabaris . . . are always ready to quote a few verses from it to prove the validity of their words. It is the habit of educated Malabaris to confirm and demonstrate everything with one or the other verse; to be able to do so is considered a great art amongst them." Gaur, "Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg's 'Verzeichniss der Malabarischen Bücher,'" 69. See also Blackburn, "Corruption and Redemption," 455.

47. All in all, there are twenty-one quotes, nineteen of which appear in the *Tamil Life*. Fifteen of the twenty-one are quoted by Purūravas, two by Vyāsa (in the frame narrative), and the rest by Jeyapiratai, Nine-Crore-Nārāyaṇa, Purūravas' sons, and Brahma (one each).

48. Various examples can be found in Brown, "Escaping One's Fate."

49. For example, in the beginning of their exile Purūravas says to Jeyapiratai (*PCK*, 40):

ēṅ varuttappaṭukirāy? eḷiy aḷutāl pūṅṅai viṭumō? vanta vipatt' ellām aṅṅupavikkattāṅṅē vēṅṅum

Why are you grieving? Will the cat release the mouse if it cries? We must experience completely all the coming calamities.

The *PCK* is constructed in such a way that the audience, which joins Yudhiṣṭhira in listening to the story of Purūravas, first learns about a hero who cannot control his desires, one whose desires make him mad and who is satisfied by nothing. But then a change occurs: Purūravas leaves the *agnisthālī* in the forest and goes back to the city to live his life, his human life. This choice of human life over the fantasy of union with the celestial woman is the point at which the *PCK* breaks from the classic identity of Purūravas and adopts the ideal model of human behavior presented above. The “Tamil” Purūravas must live his human life in its entirety, experience tragedies and torments, and maintain his mental stability. Moreover, he must acknowledge his weakness and fragility as a human being. Only then is he eligible to fulfill the role that the V-branch accounts credit him with—that is, to become a “prophet” of Vedic ritual and an immortal in the afterworld.

A schematic chart of the structural oppositions and mirror-images between the two Lives summarizes the discussion above.

	<i>Early Life</i>	<i>Tamil Life</i>
Marriage	<i>Gandharva</i> marriage	Normative, royal marriage.
Sexuality	Endless love making, insatiable sexual desire. Causes neglect of royal duties.	Restrained, in accord with the <i>dharmasāstra</i> and with the king’s royal duties.
The feminine divinity	Urvaśī: -Heavenly courtesan. -Dysfunctional mother. -A remote and inaccessible divinity.	Sarasvatī: -Virgin goddess. -Nurturing mother. -An always-present divinity, with whom a bhakti-oriented emotional relationship is established.
Purūravas’ reaction to loss	Mental breakdown.	Acceptance, self-restraint.
Struggle	External (get Urvaśī back).	Internal (experience Śani’s influence / the result of former life karma).
Existential stance	Man can change the external circumstances of his life, by the power of his will.	A deterministic conception of “fate” as the single strongest force that dominates human life.
Right conduct	Vedic ritual.	Embrace suffering as penance, maintain mental stability, practice self-restraint. (Inspired by early Tamil didactic literature.)

A PREMODERN TAMIL TRADITION ON PURŪRAVAS

Relations between the Tamil Versions and the Sanskrit Versions

The treatment of an oral folk narrative like the *PCK* as a “text” that is “constructed” or “composed” demands some explanation. Despite its unpretentious presentation, there is good reason to believe that the *PCK*’s development into its current form involved conscious editing and shaping of the earlier materials. The carefully crafted reciprocal structure of the text argues for this, as does a comparison of the *PCK* to the possible textual sources to which its author could have had access.

As mentioned earlier, two other Tamil texts on Purūravas show a similar combination of *Early Life* and *Tamil Life* narratives: the *Purūrava-caritai* (*PC*) and the *Purūrva-nāṭakam* (*PN*). The *PC*, a highly stylized Tamil poem of 920 metered stanzas divided into twenty-seven “songs” (*pāṭal*), is the earliest of the three:⁵⁰ according to its partially damaged introduction, the *PC* was composed in the second half of the sixteenth century in Tenkasi (*Tenkāci*) by a poet named Aiyamperumāḷ-civanta-kavirāyar.⁵¹ The *PN* is a nineteenth-century “opera” (*icai-nāṭakam*, “musical-play”) of unknown authorship, compiled of both metered stanzas (intended to be sung) and dialogue sections in prose. Only a portion from the beginning of this work has survived.⁵²

Both the *PC* and the *PN*, like the *PCK*, present a “classic” Purūravas narrative followed by a *Tamil Life* account, namely an encounter with Śani and a consequent “fall and rise” narrative similar to the one found in the *PCK*, indicating the same narrative tradition across the texts. However, since each of them uses different Purāṇic sources for its *Early Life* and since they differ with respect to various details, such as names of the supporting characters in the *Tamil Life*, we can assume that they are not directly linked but rather represent different branches of an earlier tradition that was “floating” around the Tamil land from around the sixteenth century.

We have no knowledge of the materials available to the *PCK*’s author, but a general comparison of these three texts reveals that the narrative differences between them serve the general plan of the *PCK* that I have suggested above.

The first notable difference is the epic frame-narrative, which situates the *PCK*’s main narrative in a “dharma-oriented” setting and implicitly associates the audience with the story’s embedded listener, Yudhiṣṭhira. Neither the *PC* nor the *PN* has a parallel frame narrative. Both simply begin with the *Early Life* section.

The *Early Life* sections of the three texts show much variance: the *PCK*’s *Early Life* follows closely the V-branch BhP telling, while both the *PC* and the *PN* treat the classical story more loosely—the *PC* constructs a classical Purūravas-narrative that binds together almost all the Purāṇic traditions on Purūravas;⁵³ the *PN* features only the episode of Urvaṣī’s kidnapping and her rescue by Purūravas (that is, a K-branch episode) and then quickly moves on to the encounter with Śani, without referring to a romantic relationship between them.⁵⁴

The *PCK*’s adoption of one complete Purāṇic telling appears to be a compositional decision that in effect characterizes its *Early Life* section with a narrative style and flow of an actual Purāṇa. The choice of a V-branch account over that of a K-branch or a combination of the two is important. The K-branch tellings stress the romantic aspects of the relationship between Urvaṣī and Purūravas, and they concern issues of righteous royal conduct. The K-branch world does not feature a strict divide between human and divine: Purūravas is described as an ally of the gods, coming and going among them as he pleases, sitting beside

50. Although the *PCK* is undated, I follow here Zvelebil’s assumption that most Tamil folk narratives in their “final” form were composed between 1750 and 1850 (Zvelebil, *Two Tamil Folktales*, xxviii).

51. Irākavaiyāṅkār, “Nūlarāycci,” 81–84.

52. That is, only the first seventy-one verses, up to the point in the *Tamil Life* in which Purūravas’ city is attacked and he escapes with his wife and children. The rest of this work is, unfortunately, lost. See Jakannāṭan, introduction to *Mūṇṇu tamīlīcai nāṭakāṅkaḷ*, 25.

53. The *PC*’s “*Early Life*” is an exceptional combination of the two Purāṇic branches of the Purūravas narrative (V-branch and K-branch): the poet seems to have carefully gathered the major episodes and reorganized them in a logical linear sequence with as few refinements to the Purāṇic accounts as possible. The result is an “unabridged” Purāṇic Purūravas narrative that does not exist in any of the Purāṇic texts themselves.

54. It is unlikely but possible that this theme somehow reappears at the end of the drama, which is, unfortunately, lost.

Indra in the latter's royal hall and watching the *apsarases* dance. He is separated from Urvaṣī by virtue of a pride-induced curse or his preference for dharma over Kāma and Artha,⁵⁵ and not, as in the V-branch accounts, as a victim of some scheme. Above all, in the K-branch accounts neither ritual nor any other significant theological content appears,⁵⁶ while the V-branch accounts are never complete without Purūravas' revelation of the three fires of Vedic ritual.

The V-branch accounts' (narrative) affiliation with the Vedic versions of the Purūravas story and their repeated reference to Vedic ritual position them as Purāṇic fragments representing an "orthodox Brahmanism" that gains validity through recourse to Vedic texts and notions. It was the author's use of a V-branch account that enabled him to formulate the *PCK's Tamil Life* as an ideological counter-narrative of the *Early Life*.⁵⁷

The close concurrence of the *PCK's Early Life* with the V-branch accounts also works to highlight the few deviations it makes from the classical narrative. These are not many. Other than the splitting of narrative and the "sandwiching" of the *Tamil Life* between its two parts, all other deviations are related to Urvaṣī's time on earth. The most prominent of them is the rephrased condition for her marriage with Purūravas. As noted above, against the V-branch accounts' three nuptial conditions, in the *PCK* their marriage depends on Purūravas' agreement to let Urvaṣī go without grief when, at some point, she will see him naked and leave for good. This condition underscores the appropriate emotional reaction rather than action, and thus conforms to the rationale of the *Tamil Life* with regard to human competence. In addition, Urvaṣī's pet rams are said to have been magically created by her, after the couple's long period of love-making, to distract her from the king's insatiable sexual desire.⁵⁸ Unlike the V-branch accounts, Urvaṣī's initial liking for Purūravas is replaced at this stage with disgust, which may signal the text's critical stance toward voracious sexuality, particularly when a feminine divinity is involved. Lastly, when the Gandharvas arrive to take Urvaṣī back to *svargaloka*, they secretly inform her of their plan beforehand.⁵⁹ Consequently, when Urvaṣī urges Purūravas to get rid of the thieves and protect her rams, she is an active participant in the Gandharva's plot.

55. The curse episode varies among the K-branch accounts. In some accounts, both Urvaṣī and Purūravas suffer curses that cause their separation.

56. Naturally, they contain references to gods and aspects of devotion, but these do not influence the narrative.

57. Why the BhP was specifically chosen as the source for the *Early Life* (as I have suggested above) is unclear. The decision may have been influenced by the popularity (and therefore, accessibility) of the BhP in South India, as well as by the fact that its version of the Purūravas narrative is among the longest and fullest of the V-branch Purāṇic accounts. Interestingly, the BhP, a text that undermines orthodox Brahminism in favor of Kṛṣṇa bhakti (see van Buitenen, "On the Archaism of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa," 25) a few centuries later, is in the *PCK* an exemplar of this very Brahmanist orthodoxy. The BhP's adoption of Vedic form and contents is largely responsible for this fact.

58. *PCK* 1912, 13:

inta ūrvaciṅ āṇavaḷ taṇatu ēkāntam ākiya maṇḍipitīyil inta pūmiyil vantu vekunāḷ āccutu antat tēvataikaḷiṅ cāpamum niṇaivēri varukiṇṇratu aracaṇō tīrūpti aṭaiyav illai itark' eṇṇav upāyam eṇṇu cintittu oru kantaruva vittiyāmāyiyiṅāl irāṇṭu cuntaram ākiya āṭṭukkuṭṭikaḷaik karpittum [m]ikavum vekupōkattōṭu kāriyārttamāy vaḷarttuk koṇṭ' iruntaṇa

Urvaṣī secretly thought to herself with fear: "It has been many days since I have come to this world, the curse of those gods must be coming to its end, but the king does not reach satisfaction. What is the means for [solving] this?" Through a trick of Gandharva magic she created two beautiful young rams and was absorbed in fostering [them] with great pleasure.

59. *PCK* 1912, 13:

anta kantaruvarkaḷ ūrvacikku ēkāntamāy aṇivittu oru nāḷ iravil vantu ivaḷ vaḷarttuk koṇṭ' irunta ciṇumirukaṅkaḷai aviḷṭṭup piṭittuk koṇṭu pōka. . .

The Gandharvas secretly informed Urvaṣī, [and then] came one night, untied the two young [rams], and took them away.

These deviations foreground the ontological gap between Urvaśī and Purūravas, and particularly the naïvete and weakness of the latter, whose challenge (in the form of the single nuptial condition) is to be able to control his mental state and whose knowledge about his future is less than that of everyone else, especially Urvaśī. Thus, although the *PCK*'s *Early Life / Tamil Life* narratives are structured as oppositions, the deviations of the *PCK*'s *Early Life* from the standard V-branch narrative thus push the *Early Life* toward the *PCK*'s conception of Man, suggested above—weak, ignorant, and subject to the whims of powers greater than himself.

Compositional Choices in the Making of the Tamil Life

The *PCK*, the *PC*, and the *PN* are the only known texts to narrate the “Tamil Life of Purūravas.” As only a portion from the beginning of the *PN* has survived, the following comparative examination of *Tamil Life* versions will focus on the *PC*.

The *Tamil Life* sections of the *PC* and the *PCK* share several common themes: an encounter with Śani that launches a “fall and rise” process, in which the fall has three gradual phases (kingdom, family, body) and a quick rise from rock-bottom as a result of a divine act of grace. In addition, both feature two marital relationships (in addition to the one with Urvaśī), and both end with a reunion with the first, lost, wife and their children.⁶⁰ Where the *PC* and the *PCK* diverge with respect to detail—and they do so not infrequently—we can point to issues of genre. Alone of the two, the *PC* offers long, elaborate chapters on typical *kāvya* topoi such as the arrival of spring, water games, and flower-picking; on the other hand, citations from Tirukkural and Nālaṭiyār found in the *PCK* are absent from the *PC*.

Additionally, we can mention three major points of variance. First, Sarasvatī plays a crucial role in the *PCK*, both as Purūravas' caregiver and as a structural mirror image of the divine Urvaśī, a model of a “positive,” maternal, feminine divinity. By contrast, in the *PC* she does not appear at all.

Second, the *PCK* depicts the dispute between Fate and Wisdom, *viti* and *mati*, as a final test that Purūravas passes before the end of Śani's influence. His solid understanding of the lesson is attested by the telling of his life story as proof of the superiority of Fate over Wisdom. The *PC*, however, has a very different take on this episode, which also involves the third marriage of Purūravas: the future third wife of Purūravas, the princess whose name in the *PC* is Kāntimati, reaches puberty and her parents argue whether she should marry her maternal or paternal cousin. Meanwhile, in *svargaloka* a dispute erupts between Brahma and Viṣṇu concerning the relative worth of *viti* and *mati*. Brahma declares that he can prove the superiority of Fate through Kāntimati, whose fate is to marry a low-caste handicapped man (who would later turn out to be Purūravas). Angered by Brahma's arrogance, Viṣṇu secretly sends Garuḍa to kidnap Purūravas and take him to a remote, forsaken mountain. Purūravas begs Garuḍa to bring him some food, and Garuḍa, who pities the poor handicapped man, fetches a big chest he sees near a palace, which he believes to be a candy box. However, when Purūravas opens the chest he finds a beautiful girl inside—Kāntimati. It seems that she was smuggled by her mother out of the palace and sent in that chest to her maternal cousin. The mother provided her with a garland, which she was to give to the man who opens the box, as well as a marriage necklace (*tāli*) for herself. Kāntimati and Purūravas marry, and the heavenly dispute is resolved without Purūravas having any knowledge of it.

60. This refers only to the end of the *Tamil Life* section. The *PCK* then adds the second part of the *Early Life* and the narrative frame's conclusion.

This fantastic episode is narrated in the *PCK* as well, but as an embedded narrative that is told to Puṣpāñcali (the *PCK*'s parallel to Kāntimati) by her maid: Puṣpāñcali, who fell in love with Purūravas when she heard him play the *vīṇā*, is taken to the *svayamvaram* organized by her father. Knowing that her true love, a mutilated beggar, could not be among the princes who have come to ask for her hand, Puṣpāñcali is in a state of desperation. Her perceptive maid, noting her distress, relates this precise story (with different protagonists, of course). Puṣpāñcali is thus convinced of the power of fate and throws her garland (to be given to her chosen groom) in the air: the garland falls on Purūravas' neck.

Third, unlike the *PCK*, which ends with a return to the *Early Life* finale, the *PC* ends with Purūravas reuniting with his lost family, first with his two lost sons and finally with his wife, Puṇṭarīkavalli,⁶¹ who had been held captive in the merchant's boat up to that point. We find Puṇṭarīkavalli refusing to climb on the golden palanquin that was sent by her husband, choosing instead to walk beside it all the way to the city. Upon reaching the city walls, Puṇṭarīkavalli orders a pit to be dug and a fire to be prepared within it. With the flames touching the sky, she steps inside, and the fire becomes a clear sparkling water pool, from which Puṇṭarīkavalli emerges intact. In this manner, she proves her chastity to the citizens of the kingdom, despite her prolonged absence from the king.⁶² This episode of the *PC* is followed only by some concluding verses of salutation. The final chord of this text, therefore, is this powerful demonstration of female chastity, which is absent from the *PCK*.

We have no way of knowing whether these variations in the *Tamil Life* accounts are conscious compositional decisions made by the author of the *PCK* or, alternatively, can be traced to the author's acquaintance with another branch of this tradition. In any case, the *PCK*'s selection of episodes showcases Purūravas as the sole human hero. In addition, the choice serves the *PCK*'s agenda regarding the realization of the power of fate as a redemptive force and of the emotional attachment to the feminine divinity.

The most sophisticated editing work we can detect in the *PCK*, which is also the most radical manipulation of the classical narrative, is the adjacency between the *Early Life* and the *Tamil Life*. Both the *PC* and the *PN* place the two parts side by side, making the classic story seem like a foundation that allows the "real" story to develop. In the *PN* the episode of

61. The parallel to the *PCK*'s Jeyapiratai.

62. The whole episode is too long to quote here, but the first two verses, which contain Puṇṭarīkavalli's intentions, suffice to provide the general impression. *PC*, *Tēvicērpāṭalam*, 92–93:

arpiñai nīñkalāv aracai nīñkiya
verpiñaiy ulak' elām eñ colātarō
porpiñait tāñku pūm porṇṇaṇār muṇaṅ
kaṇṇiñaic ciṇṇiti yāñ kāṭṭa vēñtumāl ||
ātalār kuṇṇam oṇṇ' akaḷṭtir aṅkiyūm
pōtavē mūṭṭutir puravalañ raṇakk'
ōutir makkaḷukk' uraittirāl eṇap
pātalattā[yuṇap payam[pu?] oṇṇrākkiṇār ||

“Throughout the world, [people] would say about me:
 ‘Did [her] love not leave when [she] left the king(dom)?’
 I must show my chastity before the King,
 [who is] adorned with gold and flowers.

Therefore, dig a pit! Light a fire to rise high!
 Inform the king himself and [my] sons, too!”
 And they made a pit, as deep as the netherworld.

Urvaśī's kidnapping ends with Purūravas' returning her to *svargaloka*, and the text continues with the marriage of Purūravas to his "Tamil" wife (whose name here is Citrapai):⁶³

acuraṇaik koṅṟu ūrvaciyai tēvēntira capaiyilē koṅṟupōy viṭṭa[ṇ]ar. "maṅṟuvīṇṇāṇa-racaṇē ummuṭaiya upakāṛattai oruṇāḷum maṛavōm" eṅṟu tēvēntiraṅ mutalāṇa tēvarkaḷ purūrava cakkaravartti intira lōkam viṭṭup pūlōkattil intirapurip paṭṭaṇattukku varukira pātaiyil vitarppa tēcātipatiyāṇa cantiralōcaṇaṅ tavativalē piṟanta citrapai nālu camucukaḷ eḷutik kaṭṭi. camucu collukira rācāvai mālai cūṭṭuvēṅ eṅṟāl.

Having slain the demon, he (Purūravas) immediately brought Urvaśī to Devendra's royal hall. Devendra and the Gods said: "O King, proficient in Manu's doctrine! We will never forget the service you have done for us!"

The Emperor Purūravas left Indra's world, and while [he was] on the road leading to his city, Indrapuri, Citrapai, the daughter born by the harsh fire of the austerities performed by Cantralocaṇaṅ, King of Vitarppa (Skt. Vidarbha), was making up four riddles, [thinking]: "I will give the garland to the king who can solve these riddles."

The *PC* ends the *Early Life* chapter with a single verse implying that at the end of that eon (*yuga*) Urvaśī returned to the heavenly world, and Purūravas rightly framed her return in terms of the change of eons. The next verse concerns his marriage to Puṅṭarīkavalli:⁶⁴

*antav ūliyum akaṅṟ'ītav arivaiyum akaṅṟē
muntaiṇṇāṭṭakaṅ kalant'īta muraiy aṟintavaṇum
vanta kālattin ceyal ituv ām eṇa matittuc
cintaivēr' uṟāt' araciyaḷ celutt' iṭu nāḷil ||
taṅṇi' nērilāṅ kaṅkai cūḷ nāṭ'ūṭait talaimai
maṅṇaṅ ātava-varuṇaṅ mā-tavattiṇiṟ rōṅṟuṅ
kaṅṇi puṅṭarīkap-peyar-valli por kaḷapan
tuṅṇu koṅkai mēr cuyamvaram valitt'ītat tōyntāṅ||*

When that eon ended that woman "ended" as well,
"merged" back in her former world.

He [Purūravas], the Vedic expert, reflected:
"This must be the work of time."

And while ruling his kingdom with a flawless mind,
he won over the *svayamvaram* of a girl called Puṅṭarīkavalli,
who emerged from the great *tapas* to Mitra and Varuṇa
performed by her father, the peerless king of the Kaṅkai (Skt. Gaṅgā) land,
and married her, whose full breasts were anointed with golden sandal.

Unlike these two texts, in the *PCK* the *Tamil Life* is implanted *within* the classical narrative, in the highly charged moment of leaving the *agnisthālī* in the forest, the moment from which the *Early Life* is picked up again by the storyteller after the *Tamil Life* ends. This manipulation of the classical narrative transforms the story completely: the "classic" Purūravas is a man who gains sacred knowledge and achieves a certain form of deification (i.e., his ascent to the heavenly world) precisely *because* of his inability to restrain his lust or to accept his loss (of Urvaśī). This reflects the Man-centered world view that is at the basis of Vedic sacrifice and is featured in the V-branch accounts of the Purūravas narrative—Man can change the world at his will; through sacrifice Man influences the universe and the gods. Yet in the *PCK* Purūravas' longing for Urvaśī is dissociated from his sacred vision and ascent to *svargaloka*, by the splitting of the *Early Life* precisely at this point and the interposition

63. *PN* 18–19. In this citation, I have left only the prose sections (*vacaṇam*), omitting two verses that contain identical narrative contents.

64. *PC*, *caṅipakavāṅ-rōṅṟu-pāṭalam*, 1–2.

of the *Tamil Life* there. Thus the traditional cause-and-effect link between human desire and attainment of heaven through a revelation of a (Vedic) ritual practice is broken.

The composer of this text cleverly exploits the weakest spot in the classical V-branch narrative: there is no logical explanation for the fact that Purūravas leaves the *agnisthālī* in the forest and goes back to his palace.⁶⁵ He was told by the Gandharvas that the *agnisthālī* would enable him to be with Urvaśī forever; why should he suddenly let it go? This incoherence in the classical narrative is resolved by the *PCK*'s author. By planting the *Tamil Life* exactly at this point, he enables Purūravas to become a great man from a Tamil perspective, with only minor modifications made to the classical narrative itself. The role of the ritual reformer that is ascribed to Purūravas by the Purāṇas, as well as his ascent to heaven, become dependent on his new, "Tamil" biography.

CONCLUSION—THE "TROJAN HORSE" STRATEGY

The *PCK* fuses two narratives: the *Early Life*, a standard telling of the classical Purūravas narrative, and the *Tamil Life*, a unique (pre-modern) Tamil addition to the narrative. Although the *Early Life* and the *Tamil Life* incorporate diverse ideologies, these two narratives do not come into direct conflict. Instead, the tensions between them are expressed through their implicit structural correlations. The *Early Life* is manipulated in a manner that allows the *Tamil Life* to function like a Trojan horse: it is placed at a critical moment in the heart of the *Early Life*, which up to that point seems to be a standard adaptation of a Purāṇic text. As the *Tamil Life* unfolds, it dismantles the orthodox Brahmin ideology of the classical narrative. The symbolic ritual importance of the classical narrative becomes subordinated to a process of dissolution (on the part of the protagonist) that is incorporated in the *Tamil Life*. This process is comprised of a series of metamorphoses that drive Purūravas away from his original royal identity to complete degeneration, which is characterized theologically with a bhakti-oriented surrender. The outcome of this surrender is the establishment of a different form of emotional relationship with the feminine divine principle that "repairs" the aberration of the classical narrative's sexual relationship with it.

In the *Early Life* the *PCK* resolutely clings to the particulars of the V-branch classical narrative. This seems to counter the critical stance toward "Vedic-oriented" orthodox Brahmanism that the above analysis attributes to the text. However, this is a compositional decision that seems to be part and parcel of a single strategy: it empowers the *Tamil Life*'s function as a "counter-narrative" and simultaneously enables the *PCK* as a whole to claim continuity with the Sanskrit Purāṇic traditions, thus drawing its "orthodox" validity from their ancient authority.⁶⁶

65. Almost all the Sanskrit tellings ignore this problem. In some tellings Purūravas receives his son, Āyus, along with the *agnisthālī*, and leaves the *agnisthālī* in the forest while taking the son to the village (e.g., KS 8.10, ŚB 11.5.1). The ViṣṇuP says he left the *agnisthālī* because he thought he had made a mistake in taking a fire-pot instead of his wife. The Bhp explains this point as some mental confusion on the part of Purūravas (Bhp 9.14.42):

... urvaśīṃ manyamānas tām | so 'budhyata caran vane ||

Thinking it (i.e., the *agnisthālī*) to be Urvaśī, he walked in the forest.

Both explanations are unsatisfying, since they fail to provide a reasonable motivation for Purūravas' relinquishment of something with which he was rather obsessed.

66. The recursive use of ancient texts as a source of validity is a normative strategy in Indian culture, particularly with regard to Vedic texts. See van Buitenen, "On the Archaism of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa," 37.

The latter process may be described as a form of Sanskritization, in the cultural (and not linguistic) sense,⁶⁷ through which non-orthodox contents, such as the *Tamil Life* narrative and its implied ethos, move towards the orthodox sphere by claiming to be an actual part of the orthodox tradition.⁶⁸ But this is only one part of the picture. Eventually in the *PCK* the orthodox is appropriated into the non-orthodox and not vice versa: indeed, the *Tamil Life* is implanted within the classical *Early Life* narrative and thus implicitly suggests itself to be an integral part of the Sanskrit biography of Purūravas. Yet the *Early Life*, barely a fifth of the text, inevitably collapses—in the audience’s consciousness—under the considerably longer *Tamil Life*, only to be unfavorably evoked by its structural echoes.

In addition to the religious aspects, the *PCK* also displays a distinguished local identity thanks to the Nālaṭiṃyār and the Tirukkural quotations, which function as cultural signifiers of “Tamil-ness.” The Tirukkural stood for centuries at the center of debates about the history of Tamil and its status vis-à-vis Sanskrit and Brahminical learning.⁶⁹ Its author, Tiruvalluvar, appears in some of his hagiographies as a low-caste who defeats the “Brahmin” poets of the Madurai *Caṅkam*, who represent, in this legend, the “northern” Sanskrit tradition.⁷⁰ By emplacing the words of Tiruvalluvar in the mind and heart of Purūravas, the *PCK* pulls him over to the “Tamil side” of this socio-literary debate. Thus the above analysis of the *PCK* shows it to involve a simultaneous process of Sanskritization and Tamilization: a Sanskritization of the *Tamil Life* through its “enwrapping” within the *Early Life*, but also a Tamilization of the *Early Life* by its interweaving as a complementary part of the *PCK*’s larger ideological frame.

The author(s) of the *PCK* used two existing narratives, namely the classical Purāṇic (V-branch) narrative and the Tamil tradition, which existed at least from the sixteenth century. The manipulation and re-composition of the two plots work to contextualize the classical Purūravas narrative in the authors’ time and place. They adjust this ancient myth to their own cares and concerns, distinguishable through the theory of fate presented above and the use of ancient Tamil moral-texts as a source of ethical inspiration, and manifested in popular forms of Hindu religion and practice such as planet worship.

The analysis of the *PCK* presented in this paper suggests a possible model for a cultural mechanism through which belief-systems and cultural identities contend for superiority. This is not to imply any form of explicit rivalry between two communities or ideologies, as might be mistakenly understood from the Trojan horse metaphor. Rather, these are tendencies within one community, one collective consciousness, perhaps, which is undergoing a continuous process of development: strong local and popular undercurrents sweep over old notions while retaining their ancient façade. Further research on this Tamil genre of folk narratives, a relatively neglected field, is required to determine whether the mechanism presented here is characteristic of other works and cultural phenomena.

67. A conception introduced by M. N. Srinivas and further developed by van Buitenen in “On the Archaism of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa,” 34–35.

68. The religious tendencies of the *PCK*, namely the emotional devotion to the feminine divinity and the hazardous effect of Śani as a divine personification of an astrological element, are familiar from Purāṇic Hinduism and therefore they are not “non-orthodox” per se. Nonetheless, they belong to a “lower,” everyday stratum of Hindu religion. The central place they are given in the *PCK* may reflect their popularity, but in relation to the biography of a well-known Vedic and Purāṇic protagonist such as Purūravas, the centrality is definitely “non-orthodox.”

69. Blackburn, “Corruption and Redemption,” 452.

70. *Ibid.*, 469–71.

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