CRITIQUE OF PROFESSOR ISABELLE CLARK-DECÈS'S DENIAL THAT DRAVIDIAN KINSHIP SYSTEMS IN INDIA FORM WELL-DEFINED CROSS-COUSIN MARRIAGE SYSTEMS

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ABSTRACT

Professor Dr. Clark-Decès's research on Tamil kinship and marriage challenges Dumont's alliance theory and Lévi-Strauss's idea of marriage as reciprocal exchange between distinct social groups. Clark-Decès argues that there is nothing systematic or stable about the kin and affine distinction or the principle of opposition in the Tamil kinship and that the general vocabulary for kinship in the Tamil language shows the Tamil kinship to be about ownership rights rather than reciprocity, and that the Tamil marriage pragmatics portray inherent entitlement and violence rather than a spirit of equality and mutuality. Further, that the so-called cross-cousin marriage rule is not really indiscriminate but is marred by elitism based on side, seniority, rank and hierarchy, that the uncle-niece marriage is the most common and most favored marriage is said to provide the ultimate evidence that Tamil kinship is woman-centered, woman-powered and where females prevail and men willingly surrender. For all of these reasons and more, Clark-Decès insists that the structural approach taken in the past, showcasing reciprocal alliance as the cornerstone of Dravidian kinship, must be discarded.

The responder, Ruth Vaz, is a Tamil woman and she presents her view on the kinship, marriage and social organization of her own people, the Kallar of Thanjavur district in Tamil Nadu State of south India. She provides ample data affirming the fundamentality of the principle of opposition in Dravidian kinship and of the cross-cousin marriage alliance among her people. She challenges Clark-Decès' exegeses of the meaning of kinship in Tamil and provides a corrective by offering her own exegeses of the word for kinship in Tamil. She exposes the distortions in the professor's portrayal of the Tamil Mother's Brother and rejects the heavily biased and misleading conclusions made by Prof Dr. Clark-Decès. The responder also provides additional data from the Hill Madia kinship system of the central Dravidian variety to show how every major claim made by the professor is misguided by unreasonable biases.

1.00 AUTHOR BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

1.10 Who am I?

There is one thing on which Professor Isabelle Clark-Decès agrees with her rival, Louis Dumont. It is his praise for the Kaḷḷar people of Tamil Nadu, calling them "sociological geniuses" (Clark-Decès 2014: 11). She found it to be true that they "take pleasure in thinking and talking about their kinship" (and here she quotes Indira Arumugam 2011: 175).[1] Her own experiences working with this people were also very positive. She got to witness firsthand how "intensely personal" the subject of kinship and marriage is to them because her attempts to elicit data on kinship were frequently "interrupted" by the many personal stories that the people themselves wanted to tell her. Fortunately for her, the Kaḷḷar informants also seemed "to delight in tutoring anthropologists" (Clark-Decès 2014: 11). It is clear throughout her work that the author is keen on recording and defending the Kaḷḷar women's perspective. Such endorsements from her seem to be in my favor because, well, I am born a Tamil, a Kaḷḷar at that, and a woman.[2] I am inclined to think that Clark-Decès, had she been alive now, would have welcomed my critique of her work. I know I would have definitely enjoyed interacting with her face to face, and I am grieved by her passing.

1.20 Why do I Respond to Clark-Decès?

Brilliant and deeply perceptive are the works of the many western scholars who have uncovered the intrinsic nature of the Dravidian kinship (Lewis Henry Morgan, Louis Dumont, Claude Lévi-Strauss, and

Thomas Trautmann, to name just a few). A couple of scholars who seem to have missed this insight (Anthony Good and David Schneider) are exceptions rather than the rule. It is disappointing that not only does Clark-Decès choose to follow the dismissals of the latter two scholars, but she also goes overboard and ends up vehemently dismissing everything that is fundamental in the Dravidian kinship and doing so with disdain. I do understand how challenging it must be for anyone who did not grow up as a Dravidian to be able to fully grasp the intricate details of this kinship. That is why I desire to be of some help in explicating the Dravidian kinship system.

After reading the writings of Clark-Decès, I strongly felt that a Dravidian response was called for. I made inquiries of a few Dravidians who teach anthropology in three universities, each in a different major city in Tamil Nadu, only to find out that they were not familiar with Clark-Decès's works and were obviously not intending to write a response. Therefore, I decided that I would write a response. I was encouraged to do so by none other than Clark-Decès's own advocacy for 'local' voices, particularly that of women.

Though I was born and raised in Tamil Nadu, I have lived only the first half of my life in southern India, which is home to no less than two hundred million Dravidians. I have been greatly privileged to live the second half of my life in central India among the Madia, a small Dravidian tribe of only one hundred and fifty thousand. It is, in fact, the Central Dravidian kinship system's many intriguing features unknown in the South Dravidian that had originally aroused my curiosity and motivated me to take up a study of the Dravidian kinship system. I started with a doctoral program and continued my studies ever since then. It is a journey that set me on a path of many fascinating discoveries that I have been reporting on in a number of publications (see Vaz 2010, 2011a, 2011b, 2014). Consequently, I can say that I have experienced and know enough of Dravidian kinship that I cannot sit back and watch the onslaught of misinformation unleashed by the feminist reinterpretation of it go unchallenged.[4]

1.30 What are Clark-Decès's Main Arguments?

Prof Dr. Clark-Decès's research on Tamil kinship and marriage challenges Dumont's alliance theory and Lévi-Strauss's idea of marriage as reciprocal exchange between distinct social groups. Clark-Decès argues that there is nothing systematic or stable about the kin and affine distinction or the principle of opposition in Tamil kinship and that the general vocabulary for kinship in the Tamil language shows Tamil kinship to be about ownership rights rather than reciprocity, and that the Tamil marriage pragmatics portray inherent entitlement and violence rather than a spirit of equality and mutuality. Further, she argues that the so-called cross-cousin marriage rule is not really indiscriminate but is marred by elitism based on side, seniority, rank and hierarchy, that the uncle-niece marriage is the most common and most favored marriage and is said to provide the ultimate evidence that Tamil kinship is woman-centered, woman-powered and where females prevail and men willingly surrender. For all of these reasons and more, Clark-Decès insists that the structural approach taken in the past, showcasing reciprocal alliance as the cornerstone of Dravidian kinship, must be discarded.

1.40 What are Clark-Decès's Grievances?

Clark-Decès is open about her feminist biases from the beginning. It is the driving force behind the enormous efforts she takes to recast the Tamil kinship in a feminist mold, as a result of which she holds up, in the end, the female supremacy in Tamil kinship like a trophy. Clark-Decès makes no bone about her antagonism towards the structural analysis of kinship systems, and it is not hard to see that her grievances against the structural approach and alliance theory stem from her feminist biases. She dislikes the very idea of alliance because she thinks it makes women into objects of exchange. She disapproves Dumont's structural differentiation of relatives as kin and affine because, from her point of view, it makes kinship seem to be all about the male relatives. She is aggrieved that the mother-child relation is absent in Dumont's study that traces the child's connection to the Mother's Brother (MB) through the Father (i.e., the MB is a wife-giver to the F) and not through the Mother (M). She sees "an elimination of relationships (and emotions) between consanguine relatives" in preference to the affinal relations to be a major fault in alliance theory. Dumont's conceptualization of kinship, itself, is problematic to her because in it "the true

place where kinship originates is not in the nuclear family, nor in relations among individuals, but rather the systematic relations of exchange that links social groups." She rejects the structural approach wholesale, saying that it sidelined the female kin, the mother-daughter relation, the individual's experiences and emotions, and the nuclear families that she thinks should have been central in the study of kinship.

1.50 What are Clark-Decès's Methods, Purposes and Goals?

The structural approach was, Clark-Decès says, "misguided from the start" because it was imposed on the Tamils by the European anthropologists who failed to take into account the local peoples' own views on their kinship. Therefore, she sets out to correct the structuralist mistake by taking what she describes as an ethnographic and cultural approach. She gathered and interpreted the individuals' experiences of kinship rather than studying their kin classification and social organization. She analyzed cultural events and religious myths rather than kinship usage and kin behaviors, and she worked with a general kinship vocabulary but not with the kinship terminologies. Clark-Decès does not stop with finding ways to defend the value, the power and the role of women in Tamil kinship, but pushes to find the data with which to discredit the alliance theory in which men seemed to be the key players. For this purpose, she stacks evidence upon evidence in the form of story after story which she then interprets to say that the Tamil kinship is in fact the opposite of everything Dumont's alliance theory holds. Clark-Decès's goal is quite ambitious because it is to question and falsify every basic tenet of Dravidian kinship — from the fundamental opposition between kin and affine, to the cross-cousin marriage, to the distinction of descent and alliance, even to the very meaning of kinship and of alliance in the Tamil language. It is incredibly bold of her to attempt to do all of this single handedly and all at once. To attempt to demolish the knowledge base that social scientists have collectively built over more than a century is no small feat.

Unfortunately, however, Clark-Decès goes to war against a battalion of social anthropologists armed with a simple tool-kit consisting basically of three things: (1) a child's (rather than an adult's) perspective on kinship connections, (2) a couple of poorly chosen and ingeniously explicated Tamil terms for kinship, and (2) a few fallacious claims about the uncle-niece marriage with which to make a caricature of a key kinsman in Dravidian kinship; i.e., the maternal uncle. Clark-Decès compensates for these flimsy weapons with her unmatched gift of articulation which she uses maximally in forging her way through to her goal of deconstructing the alliance theory.

1.60 What are Clark-Decès's Major Conclusions?

The outcome Clark-Decès seems to desire is a re-theorization of Tamil/Dravidian kinship in line with her feminist ideology. In Clark-Decès's version of Tamil kinship, the principal distinction between kin and affine, known as the opposition principle, does not exist. Without such a distinction, marriage as a systematic alliance between men in opposite kinds of social groups cannot exist. According to her study, kinship in the Tamil language stands for 'sameness' rather than 'distinction'. Kinship is merely a matter of individual rights to ownership and marriage means entitlement, both of which, she asserts, lead not to alliance but to violence, not to order but to chaos, and not to social organization and integration but to divisions and disunity. Finally, Clark-Decès projects the uncle-niece marriage as even more prominent than the cross-cousin marriage and as the most favored and praised marriage practice and as the best form of marriage simply because, she claims, it elevates women over men, rendering the male kin less dominant and the females more powerful.

It seems to me that her approach is much more than anti-structural and anti-alliance. It displays an anti-male, anti-marriage, anti-kinship bias that ends up being anti-Dravidian as well. Some of her concluding remarks are distasteful and disparaging of the Tamil marriage, though her approach is camofloged as 'interpretive,' at times, it comes across as being less interpretive and more insulting. Clark-Decès's final conclusion is that what she has seen in the Tamil kinship and society is a negation of reciprocity, an "absolute rejection of the so-called 'exchange of women'" and even "a condemnation of marriage" itself. Tamil women, mothers in particular, seek to escape and be free from this institution of marriage (2014: 93). Kinship links make up an "unbearable chain," says Clark-Decès. She could not find any of "the ele-

gant, symmetrical patterns typically used by anthropologists to represent Dravidian kinship organization" but instead only finds "a confusing jumble of wayward arrangements that defy any notion of system" (2014: 98). It is, for certain, a far cry from the alliance theory. But it can also shock the light out of any thinking Dravidian.

1.70 What do I have to Offer?

If I were to respond by addressing all that I find problematic in Clark-Decès's book, *The Right Spouse: Preferential Marriages in Tamil Nadu* (2014), I would have to write one myself. For the time being, though, I have chosen, instead, to respond mainly to a chapter she has written for the *Cambridge Handbook of Kinship* (edited by S. Bamford, 2019) titled *The alliance theory of kinship in South Indian ethnography*, which contains all of the key arguments from her aforementioned book. Clark-Decès's chapter in the *Cambridge Handbook of Kinship* presents her arguments in three sections. I will follow the same order and present my counter arguments in the four chapters of this paper.

In the first section of her chapter titled *Louis Dumont and Dravidian kinship,* Clark-Decès criticizes Dumont's principle of opposition or parity, denying its presence and dismissing its impact on Tamil kinship. My first chapter in this article is titled, *The Principle of Opposition or Parity,* and proves Clark-Decès wrong, first by showing how fundamental and pervasive the parity principle is in the personal and communal life of a Dravidian, next by providing current data, in the form of wedding invitation cards, on the Ka‖ar community's clan system and social organization which upholds the parity principle as well as the reciprocal alliance system, and then finally by describing the concept of complementary mergers that is unique to Dravidian kinship and which serves as the ultimate proof of the presence and the pervasiveness of the opposition principle. To the extent of my knowledge, none of these data seem to have appeared in any of the anthropological literature written in English on South Indian kinship.

Clark-Decès's second section, titled *A kinship of rights,* presents exegeses of three Tamil key vocabularies for kinship in which she reduces their kinship to a mere matter of ownership rights and marriage with entitlement devoid of reciprocity. In her view, kinship means 'mine' and alliance leads to violence. In my second chapter, *The Meaning of Kinship and Marriage,* I examine Clark-Decès's choices of key terms to explicate the meaning of kinship and marriage and show how problematic her exegeses are. Then I present the most natural and popular key terms for kinship in the Tamil language and exegete these, giving ample examples of their usage in various contexts, thus revealing the true meaning of kinship and marriage in the Tamil society.

Clark-Decès's third and final section on *The Mother's Brother* is the most disappointing one. This is not only because the Tamils' beloved kin (i.e., the Mother's Brother) is caricatured beyond recognition. Unlike the earlier sections, where her arguments could be rebutted point by point, this section is full of misinformation and fabrication, which leaves me with nothing much to do except to list all that is fallacious, distorted and perverted. Most scholars would not find it enjoyable to make such a list, and I endured having to do it mainly because I am convinced that understanding Dravidian kinship accurately and in all of its richness is crucial for understanding the origins and transformations of human kinship — a well-recognized fact among kinship anthropologists.

There is more to Dravidian kinship than what social anthropology has shown so far. I give a glimpse of this in my last chapter, *The Challenge from the Central Dravidian,* where I share some fascinating data from the Madia kinship classification and form of social organization. The Madia kinship cosmology is built on fundamental principles such as parity, complementarity, reciprocity and symmetry. I then test the validity of every one of Clark-Decès's major claims about Dravidian kinship and the reasonableness of her accusations against the structuralists and the alliance theorists. Interestingly, among the Madia, as well as all the other central Dravidian tribal societies, the uncle-niece marriage is unheard of. The Madia Mother's Brother is not a marriageable category. This is bad news for the proponents of a feministic approach like Clark-Decès's because, unlike the Tamil Mother's Brother, the Madia Mother's Brother is not available for trampling upon. Furthermore, the Central Dravidian kinship has been recog-

nized as representative of the "Proto-Dravidian" by scholars such as Thomas Trautmann and Robert Parkin whose knowledge of Indian kinship systems is extensive. It just goes to show that any theorizing on Dravidian kinship should include the Central Dravidian data.

In my concluding chapter, *Perspectives and Perversions,* I question the usefulness of promoting perversions in the name of perspectives and the pitting of different perspectives against each other as though embracing and including one automatically means rejecting and excluding another.

CHAPTER I

2.00 THE PRINCIPLE OF OPPOSITION OR PARITY IN DRAVIDIAN KINSHIP

2.10 Introduction

Clark-Decès has denied the presence of a clear and stable distinction of relatives as kin and affine (i.e., the parity principle) in Tamil kinship. She has argued that parity is an abstract idea "much reified" by the structuralists. She has raised doubts about its practicality in alliance exchange, questioned its usefulness as an analytical tool in kinship anthropology, and rejected it as a mere structuralist projection. Therefore, in this chapter I will present data from the Ka‖ar community in Tamil Nadu that testify to the parity principle's presence, its vitality, pervasiveness, and its fundamentality in Tamil kinship. First, I will share stories that illustrate how parity manifests throughout an individual's lifetime and how a child's awareness of the parity principle grows along with age and experience. Next, using a Ka‖ar wedding invitation card as a test case, I will show how their clan system and their dual social organization as kin and affine supports and maintains the parity principle, giving it stability, and how parity functions as the basis for alliance exchange. I will discuss how parity is pervasive and is inclusive even of the non-kin, thus is also integrative. Finally, I will present an ultimate proof of its practicality in the endless process of complementary mergers of the kin and the affine categories which we, the Dravidians, employ in order to know who is who and how, and without which we would feel lost.

Parts of the data presented here, I believe, are heretofore unavailable and/or unexplored. This chapter highlights the significance of complementation in Dravidian kinship, an aspect which seems under-recognized though it is one of the main functions of parity. By the end of this chapter, it should be clear that there is more to parity than has been understood. Reciprocity and complementarity are the guiding principles in Dravidian kinship, and the principle of parity is the basis for both. Parity is the deep structure, deeply entrenched in our sentiments, and the blueprint for the construction of Dravidian kinship and society. It is essentially and uniquely Dravidian and that there is no way around it, not so at least for the peoples to whom it matters the most; i.e., the Dravidians.

2.20 What Dumont Has Said About Parity

Apparently, Dumont was the first anthropologist to identify the principle of opposition as such and to describe it as something fundamental to Dravidian kinship. Therefore, let us begin with what Dumont has said about the *principle of opposition*. Dumont highlighted the diachronic dimension of the cross-cousin marriage regulation in the Tamil society and described it as a pattern transmitted from generation to generation and whereby marriage became an enduring institution. For this reason, he described South Indian marriage as *alliance* (1983: 72). He argued that the key distinction in Tamil kinship is not between the parallel and the cross-cousins but the one between Ego's Father (F) and Ego's Mother's Brother (MB), the two male relatives who are linked by the *principle of opposition* (1983: 170). Dumont labeled these two distinct and opposite kind of social categories as the *kin* and the *affine*, and saw the principle of opposition between them as fundamental to Dravidian kinship. I see no serious problem in Dumont's theory because it does capture the most basic feature of the Tamil kinship. It is unfortunate that he is being attacked for doing that.

First of all, though 'alliance' is an English word, it is commonly used by the Tamil people when they arrange marriages for their young people. Parents say, "We are looking for a suitable marriage alliance for our son/daughter." This can be verified by looking at the matrimonial advertisements which appear in the English newspapers in Tamil Nadu. My readers can check out the sample matrimonial advertisements given at the very bottom of the page in the following website: https://www.advertisementindia.com/p/matrimonial-sample-advertisement. The key words used in these samples are *marriage* and *alliance*. Therefore, Dumont and other western anthropologists can neither be credited nor be criticized for the Tamil people's use of the word 'alliance' synonymously with marriage. South Indian communities

have always understood marriage in that sense; i.e., as an enduring alliance between different families, lineages, descent groups, and clans.

Secondly, the principle of opposition or parity is an undeniable aspect of the Tamil kinship system and social cosmology. Though the principle of opposition comes to the forefront mostly during the arrangement of marriages, it actually runs throughout our lifetime from the beginning to the end, like the main thread in the fabric of our social existence. No phase in our life is free of it. However, our understanding of the nature and function of this principle grows only gradually and in stages even as we go through different phases of our own lives. I will illustrate this with a few stories from my community, of the things that I have seen, heard and experienced living in my birthplace, which is an all-Tamil village named Thennavanadu, located about twenty kilometers south of Thanjavur town (or Tanjore, as it is written in the old literature) in the central, eastern part of Tamil Nadu. Let me begin with one story.

One day my father sent me on a small errand. "Go over to your brother-in-law's house and give him the news that *so* and *so* from *such* and *such* village has passed away. And ask him if he would go with me to the funeral this afternoon."

I said "Yes, Father," and left promptly.

I found my brother-in-law (who is much older than I am) and gave him the news. But he started complaining. "Heck with it! There is a funeral every other day. How am I supposed to get any of my work done?" After whining quite a bit, he finally told me to inform my father that he could not go to the funeral.

That is when I thought of telling him a story. It was about a certain rich man who had the nasty habit of sending his fancy walking-stick, hand-carried by his servants, to people's funerals because he thought he was too important to go in person. When he died, all the villagers responded by doing likewise — each sending a stick to his funeral. When I finished with my story telling, I gave my brother-in-law a piece of my mind: "Watch out because you may not even get sticks coming to your funeral."

My brother-in-law jumped up and started to chase me. I had anticipated that that would happen and I was already on the run. There was no way he could catch up with a six-year-old.

On reaching my home, I stopped to take several deep breaths and calmed myself before appearing serenely before my father to report back. After telling him my brother-in-law would not be going to the funeral, I stood still, waiting to be dismissed from his presence, which my father did with just a nod of his head.

This story is meant to illustrate that as a six-year-old I had already learnt that I was expected to be obedient, respectful, and talk very little (if at all) with my father and his brothers, while on the other hand I am allowed to be chatty and joking, even sarcastic, with men who are my brothers-in-law. Had my brother-in-law, whom I had shamed with my story-telling, caught me that day, he would have pinched me hard, which I would have hated. Pinching was something my brothers would never do to me.

Thus, I was growing up learning, like all Dravidian children do, that there are two kinds of relatives who behaved very differently towards us. It dawns on us pretty early in our lives that our social universe is bifurcated into 'us' and 'them'. Though no one gives us a crash course on parity, we become aware of it through our personal experiences of it.

2.30 Tracing the Presence of Parity Through a Lifetime

Tracing the presence of the parity principle through the different phases of an individual life lived as part of a Dravidian community can reveal how parity is experienced differently at different stages in life and how, as a result, the individual's awareness and understanding of this basic principle grows and changes along with the age and maturity of the individual. Only as an adult may one be able to fully grasp how parity works, how it manifests, and how it shapes and guides the social existence of our people. Even as adults, only those of us who are keenly observant may get to see what a genius idea parity is. Even so, how one makes meaning of various kinship experiences along the way, starting from one's childhood, is also important. Moreover, the data on a child's perspective on kinship becomes particularly relevant for our later discussions when we evaluate Clark-Decès's claims and address her feminist grievances. So, let us do that.

2.31 ***Childhood***

For children born in village communities, coaching in the principle of opposition may start when they are still babies. It may seem like a pastime for the village women to pinch and slap few months old babies in order to provoke them to respond with aggression, which they may do with screaming, kicking and pushing the offender away. But not all women would do this. Only those who belong in the 'affinal group', particularly the potentially future mothers-in-law of the baby. This is the very opposite of how the women in the baby's 'kin group' behave, who hug, comfort and console the crying baby. The women of the kin group show support to the baby by pretending to beat the offending affinal relative. Thus, even as babies we learn who to avoid and who to reach out for comfort. In time, we also learn that such actions and behaviors on the part of our affinal kin are simply staged. (The pinching of little babies is apparently supposed to train a child in *rosham* — a concept tied to honor that refers to the ability to take offense quickly and respond with rage when unreasonably provoked. It sounds primitive, I know!).

When we begin to talk, the first thing we are taught is *who is who*, and what *kin term* to use to refer to or address those in our extended family. We are also taught how to behave appropriately towards each of them. If by mistake we use a wrong kin term, we receive loving correction, but making a mistake in kin behavior invites a rather different kind of response from the elders. There are about four dozen kin terms in Tamil, but the smart kids can manage to learn to use these appropriately in the first five or so years. Kin behavior, on the other hand, is a tricky thing for children. What is 'appropriate' and what is 'inappropriate' behavior varies depending on the contexts and particularly with regard to different types of kin relations. Showing humility is a value in one type of relation, but showing off (pride) is a value in another. Submission is expected in one, but aggression is permissible, even praised, in another. Using shaming as motivation is okay when it comes from one kind of kin, but shaming coming from the other kind of kin may end in family quarrels. Playing pranks on one kind of kin is fun and a socially accepted pastime, but it is a dishonor to do so with the other kind. Patience is appropriate with one kind of kin, but taking quick offense and reacting to the other kind is accepted, even expected, as an outward proof of one's inner sense of family honor. Oh, it is very much like walking through a maze!

While growing up, it seemed to me that there were a thousand little codes of conduct, and there seemed to be more of these for girls than for boys. To whom I could talk and to whom I could not, with whom I could make eye contact and with whom I could not, when I could walk with my chin up and when I must walk looking at my big toes, whose house I could drop by casually without needing an invitation or parental permission, whose house I should not visit except with an escort — and the list went on and on. We were regularly reminded of these little rules for behavior. What made it difficult for me was that many of these rules for good conduct seemed arbitrary and much unlike other, general, ethical values. However, in time we realize that these values are kinship based and it is all about kin classification, not about morality per se.

The men in my own family; i.e., my Father, Father's Brothers, and my elder Brothers disciplined me, taught me general good behavior, helped me with my school work, and trained me in life-skills. It did not take long for me to see them as my own kin, my extended family. Then there were those relatives such as the Mother's Brother, Mother's Father, Father's Sister's Husband, elder Sister's Husband, etc., who seemed to be something else. They seemed mostly interested in making my little life difficult. They teased me, chased after me, and tickled me just so they could have fun at my expense. I recall there was one particular old man, a classificatory Mother's Father, who would hide on the pathway leading to my school and jump in front of me, giving me such a fright. Or, he would block my way and not let me pass, either to his right or to his left. Worst of all, he would break out into a wild dance and a romantic song, causing me much embarrassment in front of my schoolmates who would watch and laugh along with him. I also had a relative who was a classificatory elder Sister's Husband and who loved to pull my pony-tailed hair and mess up my hairstyle. My Father's Sister's Son, twelve years older than me, was very athletic, and he would throw me up in the air and twirl me around fast only to suddenly put me back on the ground and walk away. Then he would watch and laugh as I staggered around like a drunk. It's not that I did not have fun because sometimes my brother and I would beg him to do it to us.

On the contrary, the men in my own family; i.e., my Father and his Brothers and my own Brothers, never did any of what I just described. The difference in the behaviors of these two types of men was only too obvious. My readers may wonder why it is that I have referred mostly to my male relatives so far. Didn't the Fathers' Sisters and the Mother's Brothers' Wives tease me and joke with me? They, too, did that. However, these women's behaviors were not as markedly different as the men's. As children, we spent most of our time with the womenfolk. I learned a lot about our kinship classification, kinship rights and privileges, duties and obligations, rituals and roles, and about kin behavior from my beloved Mother, Aunts, Sisters and Sisters-in-law who answered my questions and explained to me why things are the way they are in our kinship system. I also did this with the men folk in my family. The difference is that we learned from the men folk mostly by observing them in action and it is behaviors that I mostly report on here. That is the reason why many of my illustrations in this article tend to be about what the men do.

2.32 ***Young Adulthood***

As we move from childhood to young adulthood, a different aspect of the opposition principle becomes evident. This is about sexual socialization, and we learn about the difference between the nature of our own relationships with our parallel cousins and with our cross-cousins.

All the little boys and girls of our village community attended the only school in our village during the day. In the evenings we played together on the streets and in one another's homes and enjoyed frequent sleepovers. It did not matter much how the parallel cousins may be different from the cross-cousins. Despite the constant reminders from our parents, we could only think of our schoolmates as friends rather than as our kin. While we did learn to use the appropriate kin terms for those friends who were older than we were, the meaning of the kin distinctions did not sink in much. But then eventually they did.

Everything changed at puberty. It changed overnight, literally. The meaning of the cross-parallel distinction among cousins was driven home by means of the puberty rituals done to usher us into adulthood. A girl's puberty is euphemistically referred to as 'the coming of age', or 'becoming an adult', or 'being confined to home', or 'the wearing of half-*sari*', etc. This was around the time when the Brothers turned into escorts for their Sisters, and it became their main job to keep us out of the sight of young males, particularly the males in marriageable categories. For their part, the male cross-cousins would try to find some excuse to come visit our homes or try to contact us using their own sisters who had free access to us. The day we came of age, we were done with playing on the streets. We became confined to our backyards where women generally gathered and did their work and had their fun. We were also done with sleepovers, forever. We were not allowed to visit the homes of our Father's Sisters and our Mother's Brothers, especially if they had young sons. The male cross-cousins who had been our good friends and playmates until that day disappeared from our lives abruptly. This sudden and poignant transition into young adulthood also thrust us into a new level of social awareness. The distinction of 'us' and 'them' moved from our parental generation to our own. This is the period when the understanding of our society's rule of marriage starts to develop. The strange behaviors we had observed all through our childhood in the men of the opposite group begins to make sense to us. We began to realize that, after all, *there was a method behind all that madness.*

A girl's puberty was celebrated almost like a wedding. The girl's parents distributed printed invitation cards, the affinal kin came in processions through the streets with the bands playing before them and their women folk displaying their gifts for the girl, and a few thousand people gathered to celebrate the occasion by feasting together. Gifts of gold and silver, silk and velvet, and various personal items which a young girl may desire, from fancy jewelries and fashion accessories to basic things such as bath soaps and lotions, were showered on the girl. And guess what. These gifts did *not* come from any of the girl's 'kin' group but actually from the 'other'; i.e., the families of the Mother's Brothers and Fathers' Sisters' Husbands, close affines as well as the classificatory ones. Receiving such expensive gifts did help to change a young girl's opinion about the former "*tormentors."* We began to realize that *these may be nice people after all*. Of course, there was more to this celebration than just collecting gifts. The function was meant to be an announcement by the girl's parents that she had attained physical maturity and they were

open to receiving proposals for marriage alliance. The families who gave expensive gifts are all stakeholders with vested interests (in taking a bride, of course). In this function, two different kinds of emotions were on display; one by the 'us' and another by the 'them'. The women of the girl's *own* family may get all emotional and weepy because their daughter or sister will soon get married and leave them to go live in another family. On the contrary, the 'other' (affinal kin) rejoiced, and their women sang songs, teased the girl, and performed some fun rituals, enacting what was soon to come into play in the young girl's future, such as becoming a wife, a mother, and so on.

Puberty celebrations are still common in many parts of South India. Take a look at Figures 7.1 and 7.2 in Appendix I that show banners announcing, as well as welcoming, the guests to the celebration on the occasion of a South Indian girl's puberty. The banners were displayed at the entrance to a hotel where the function was held and welcomed all those who came to attend the ritual of their daughter wearing a "half-sari" (literally half of a five meter long *saree* or *sari*), which is a symbol of young adulthood for girls. Note that the date is December 2024, barely a month ago at the time of my drafting this article.

2.33 ***Adulthood and the Arrangement of Marriage***

The parity principle is most evident during the arrangement of a marriage and around this time it becomes clear to the young adults that, all along, the behaviors have been about the upcoming wedding. We now get the big picture encompassing our entire society and begin to understand our social organization. The brief description I give below of our clan system and social organization bears witness to the vitality of the parity principle in our society. I have already mentioned that I was born a Kaḷḷar. Kaḷḷar communities live not only in Thanjavur district, but also in several other districts around that district. Kaḷḷar population is put at around six million and this vast group falls into several hundred clans, each with a distinct clan name (or clan title). In my own village, consisting of more than a thousand families, most of them Kaḷḷar, and there are about fifty different clans. Every clan is related to every other clan through the exchanges of brides, either in the current generation or in the past. Thus, I grew up with a village full of kin and affine. I shall explain how the Kaḷḷar clan organization works using my Father's family as an example.

I was born in the Sendapiriyar clan and thus all people born in the Sendapiriyar clan, whether or not I can trace direct kin connection to them, are my kin. All the men who have the same clan name or title are considered to have had a common ancestor, real or fictive, and therefore are kin to one another. The Tamil word for the kin group is *pangali*. The other clans in the village who are not Sendapiriyars are generally considered to be the Sendapiriyar's real or potential alliance partners[5] (i.e., partners in exchanging brides). The Tamil word for the affinal group is *uravumurai*. (It would be helpful for my readers to commit these two Tamil terms to their memory because they reoccur throughout the rest of this paper.)

The genealogy of my family shows that the Sendapiriyar clan has made several alliances exchanging brides with two clans in particular: the Sedhurayar and the Madhurayar clans. My Father's lineage has occasionally had alliances with a few other clans as well, but the Sedhurayar and Madhurayar have been their more regular exchange partners. This illustrates the fact that families generally like to renew and maintain their key alliance partnerships from the past generations, which they do by making sure that *at least one* marriage per generation occurs with the key alliance partners. At the same time, it is also true that families like to venture into making new alliance partnerships by arranging marriages for *the rest of* their children with those clans with whom they have never had a chance to interact through marriage. It is a matter of pride for families to have a broad base of marriage alliance networks and kin connections. Men like to boast about how wide their network of alliances is, listing the number of different clans as well as the many different places and regions where they have taken a bride from or given one to. Thus, both old and new alliance partnerships are valuable for a Kaḷḷar family's social resume. The long (or diachronic) as well as the wide (or synchronic) networks add value and prestige to a family. This is one of the reasons why people in our community give a long list of their past and present alliance partnerships in their wedding invitation cards. A lot can be learned about Tamil kinship and alliance by merely looking through a typical Tamil wedding invitation card. We shall do that below.

2.40 Presence of the Parity Principle

The kin and affine distinction is not just an "abstraction" by the analysts "from the form of the terminological system" as Dumont has said (1983: 75). The clan system and how it relates to clan exogamy among the Ka‖ar show that it is not just an analyst's invention.

2.41 *The Case of the Ka‖ar Wedding Invitation Card*

The wedding invitation card referred to in our current discussion is from my native village, Thennavanadu, and it is dated as recently as 2023 (see Appendix II). The format of this card is typical of Ka‖ar invitation cards and it is revelatory of the Dravidian conceptualization of kinship, marriage and social organization. This particular card was sent out by the family of the groom and therefore the information given in this card is about the kin and affine of the groom's family. The card from the bride's side would contain information about the bride's Father's kin and affine. Occasionally, we may get a wedding invitation that is jointly printed by the groom's and the bride's families and it mentions the kin and the affine from both sides.

2.42 *Title Page*

The title page of the wedding card (Figure 8.1) starts with invoking the blessings of the groom's deceased mother (in the photo), then gives the names of the groom and the bride, and mentions the date (using the English calendar) and the venue of the wedding. The inclusion of family images and photos are optional.

2.43 *Content Page*

Page 2 of the wedding invitation card (Figure 8.2) is the actual invitation. At the very top, it mentions first the names of the male and/or female clan deities of the groom's clan. Similarly, the invitation card from the bride's family may mention the bride's Father's clan deities, which would necessarily be distinct from the groom's side deities, for if these were one and the same then it would mean the bride and groom are sibling categories and thus they would be non-marriageable. The information on clan deities is followed by details such as the date and the time according to the Tamil calendar, the position of the stars to show the auspiciousness of the time chosen to perform the wedding ceremony, and the details about the venue of the wedding.

Then follows the introduction of the groom, made step by step by mentioning the names of first the groom's Father's Father and Father's Mother, and then the names of the groom's Mother's Father and Mother's Mother. Next, the names of the groom's Father and Mother are given. And finally, the name of the groom appears. The introduction the bride follows the exact same order giving the names of her Father's Father and Father's Mother, then those of her Mother's Father and Mother's Mother, then of her Father and Mother, and finally her own name. At the bottom of this page are the names of the groom's siblings, their spouses and all of their children who together make the groom's family.

A few important observations can be made from this content. (1) Every adult male mentioned here has his clan name or clan title following his personal name. Only the personal (or first) names of the adult women are given, which goes to show women do not use clan titles. Nor do the unmarried youth and children. (2) We can see that the groom's immediate family consists of four to five generations of relatives. (3) The introduction of the groom and the bride makes it very clear that they belong in two distinct kin groups; we can see this in the fact that their Fathers have two different clan titles. The groom's Father has the clan title Pullavarayar. The bride's Father has a different clan title which is Valankondar. (4) It is also important to note that the groom's Mother and the bride's Mother were born and raised in two distinct kin groups (or clans). We know this from the fact that the groom's Mother's Father's name has the clan title Madhurayar and the bride's Mother's Father's name has the clan title Sedhurayar. Thus, in the introduction of the bride and the groom, we see the record of marriages in three successive generations and in

each and every case the man and his wife belong in two distinct kin groups or clans. We see no mix up of the kin and affine. This testifies to the principle of opposition.

2.44 ***Lists of the Affine and the Kin in Two Pages***

Figure 8.3 and Figure 8.4 present the lists of names of the groom's extended family and close relatives. It reads somewhat like an honors list and the names of different kin categories are given under different section headings. First is the list of names of all the affine (*uravumurai*); i.e., the exchange partners from the previous generation who have either given to, or taken brides from, the groom's family. Only then is the list of names of the groom's *pangali* or kin included. This is typically how it is done in Kaḷḷar wedding cards, presenting first the family's affines and only then the family's kin. The kin and affine are *always* given in separate lists. No individual's name can appear in both lists simultaneously; it never happens. There is no overlap between kin and affine, and this means that the distinction is neither fuzzy nor fluid as Clark-Decès claims. The fact that all close relatives invariably fall into either one of the two social categories testifies to the fact that parity is the most fundamental aspect of the Tamil kin classification.

The names of the groom's affinal kin appear under four separate sections, each with a different *section heading* which appear in red color on the card. These are as follows.

The first section heading says '*Mother's Father and Mothers Mother*' and the names listed here are those of the groom's Mother's Father and his wife, and also those of the groom's Mother's Father's Brother and his wife, who have the same kin categories as the former,

The second section heading says '*Mother's Brothers*'. This section includes the actual as well as classificatory mother's brothers. These are the *bride-givers* in the groom's Father's generation.

The third section heading says '*Father's Sisters*' *Husbands*'. These are the *bride-takers* in the groom's Father's generation.

The fourth section heading lists the groom's '*Sisters*' *Husbands*', and these are the *bride-takers* in the current (i.e., the groom's) generation. Thus, the bride-givers and bride-takers in the four sections jointly make up the groom's *affinal group* or what is known in Tamil as the *uravumurai*.

What follows in the fifth section is the long list of the groom's *kin group* who are known as the *pangali*. The heading for this section means 'Your Presence is Desired By'. What this means is that the groom's kin group are the *inviters* whereas the groom's affinal group are the *invitees,* or the guests of honor. The 'us' and 'them' distinction comes through clearly.

The invitation card from the bride's side will have a similar format presenting separately the names of those in the kin and the affine of the bride's Father. It must be noted that I say the bride's Father's kin and affine and not the bride's. It is because a Tamil woman does not have stable kin and affine and the indigenous notions of *uravumuraiyan* and *pangali* do not apply to women. This is an important observation that will be elaborated in another section.

At the very end of the fourth section there is a short list of special guests such as the village administrators and leaders, personal friends and colleagues etc., whom the inviter wishes to honor. This is optional.

The most important observation to be made from the data in the wedding invitation card is, as already noted, that the kin and affine are distinct and non-overlapping categories. Another important observation that comes out through these data is that the Kaḷḷars practice clan exogamy. Here is how we know this. The men in the groom's affinal list come from twenty different clans, which are Madhurayar, Ammanathevar, Vakkaniyar, Kandiyar, Vanathiriyar, Pallavarayar, Saranginattar, Vikiramithar, Kalingarayar, Thuraiyundar, Sedhurayar, Vallazhathevar, Thenkondar, Nithyapiriyar, Vanniyar, Sendhamudaiyar, Saluvar, Kalappalar, Samaiyar and Mankondar. All of these twenty clans have either given to, or taken a bride from, the groom's clan and have done so in just two generations; i.e., the current and the previous

generations. What is obvious from this list is that the Pullavarayar, which is the groom's clan (it should not be confused with the Pallavarayar clan who are the affines) has never given to, or taken from, within their own clan. This demonstrates the clan exogamy among the Thanjavur Kaḷḷars.

2.50 Parity in the Absence of Clan Titles

Not all communities in South India use clan titles. Communities without clan titles practice *lineage exogamy*. What is defined as a 'lineage' may be different for different communities. Even the subgroup known as the Piramalai Kaḷḷars (referred to by Dumont as well as Clark-Decès) of Madurai and nearby districts does not seem to have clan titles like the Thanjavur Kaḷḷars do. The Piramalai Kaḷḷars seem to practice lineage exogamy and for them anyone who has the same deity (*kula deivam)* as their own is considered to be a kin and so is unmarriageable. Their invitation card, too, contains lists similar to what we have seen in the Kaḷḷar invitation card, distinguishing the affine from the kin, although these lists are not presented in the same order (see Appendix III, Figures 9.1 - 9.3). The following are the six section headings used in this card and it shows they chose to follow a different order: 1. *Groom's Mothers Brother*, 2. *Groom's Maternal and Paternal Grand Parents*, 3. *Groom's Father's Brothers*, 4. *Groom's Father's Sister's Husbands*, 5. *Groom's Brothers and Sisters*, and 6. '*The People Who Welcome You*' (meaning the '*inviters*', or the 'kin' distinguishing these from the affine who are 'guests of honor', or the '*invitees*').

There is additional information given in this invitation card that is not found in the Thanjavur Kaḷḷar invitation card. The seventh heading, which is at the very bottom of the last image that is on the last page of this invitation card reads '*People who also Desire Your Presence*', and under it is a list *not* of relatives' names but of the names of different deities of different lineages. The mention of the names of lineage deities serves the same function as do the clan titles of the Thanjavur Kaḷḷars – namely group exogamy. The main difference between the marriage practices of the two sub-castes is that the exchange unit for the Thanjavur Kaḷḷars is the *clan* whereas for the Piramalai Kaḷḷars, who do not have clan titles, it is the *lineage*.

2.60 Parity's Purpose and Function

What is the purpose of putting in the wedding cards and distributing to the community the lists of all of one's own family's relatives, dead as well as alive, mentioning all the men's personal names along with their clan titles? What is identifying oneself in this way useful for? How is it relevant to the rest of the community who are the inviter's kin and affine?

2.61 *Why Keep the Kin and the Affine Distinct?*

The main purpose of providing lists of the close kin and close affine in the wedding card is to produce evidence to the community that both in the groom's and the bride's immediate families, their kin and affine are kept distinct and there is no overlap of these two kinds of kin categories.

The first evidence of this is given in the fact there is no overlap of the kin and the affine in the grandparents' generation of the groom and of the bride. In the current card, the groom's Father's Father belongs in the *Pullavarayar* clan and the groom's Mother's Father belongs in the *Madhurayar* clan. This proves that the marriage of the groom's Father and Mother was done correctly. Similarly, the bride's Father's Father belongs in the *Valankondar* clan and the bride's Mother's Father belongs in the *Sedhurayar* clan. This proves that the marriage of the bride's Father and Mother was done correctly.

The second evidence is that in the current alliance, too, there is no overlap. The groom's Father is a *Pullavarayar* and the bride's Father is a *Valankondar*. This shows that the kin of the groom and the kin of the bride are distinct. This is necessary but not sufficient. There must also be no overlap between the key affine on the bride's side and the key affine of the groom. This is verified by looking at the clan name

of the bride's Mother's Father and the clan name of the groom's Mother's Father because these men must also belong in two distinct groups. And so they do. The bride's Mother's Father is a Sedhurayar and the groom's Mother's Father is a Madhurayar. Why is this important? It is because if the bride's Mother's Father and the groom's Mother's Father both have the same clan name, then it would mean the two mothers are classificatory sisters, which would make the bride and groom parallel cousins who are in the same category as siblings and therefore could not be married. (As is well-known, in the Dravidian kinship system the same sex siblings' children are parallel cousins, who are non-marriageable relatives.) All of these clan affiliations prove only one thing: that the bride and the groom are not siblings to each other, neither through their Fathers nor through their Mothers. These details are necessary to make sure beyond doubt that there is not a single sibling gene, so to speak, that the groom and the bride share in common. *Phew!*

Let me show how this is done using the invitation card we have. The groom's Father is from the Pullavarayar clan and the bride's Father is from the Valankondar clan. Thus, the bride and the groom are born in two different clans, and this is absolutely necessary. If their Fathers have the same clan title, then as their children the bride and groom would be like siblings and would be unmarriageable. While this is necessary, it is not sufficient. We must check the couple's Mothers' clan affiliations. Since women do not take clan titles, we have to check the clan titles of the bride's Mother's Father and the groom's Mother's Father. In this card, the groom's Mother's Father is a man from the Madhurayar clan and the bride's Mother's Father is a man from the Sedhurayar clan. Thus, we see that the groom and the bride are not siblings, neither through their Fathers nor through their Mothers. This proves there is no overlap of the respective kin groups of the bride and the kin of the groom and their respective affinal groups.

2.62 ***Marriageability and Morality***

Apparently, it is not enough to show the acceptability of the current marriage alone. The long lists of the kin group and the affinal relatives of the groom are meant to show that all the other marriage alliances over a couple of generations within his family (his siblings and parallel cousins included) have also been carried out in strict adherence to the rule of clan exogamy and the parity principle. Long lists of the male names from the extended families, along with their clan titles, of both the kin and the affine of the groom as well as the bride are important feature of Kallar wedding invitations, and this is why the wedding invitations in our community often come in the format of booklets. What is demonstrated from these lists is the fact that the kin and affine have been kept distinct and there has been no mixing up of the two groups.

In any wedding card, we would not find an individual man's name appearing simultaneously in both the sections; i.e., both as a kin and as an affine. Any and every relative is either a kin (*pangali*) or an affine (*uravumurai*) to Ego. Thus, we see that the purpose of providing the lists of relatives is to show that parity has been maintained in one's lineage and to present that fact as a proof of the marriageability of the bride and the groom. Parity is the order of our society, and people do not violate it. Those who adhere to this order are honorable and anyone who mixes up the two is in an immoral (incestuous) relation and is shamed for it.

Therefore, it is very surprising when Clark-Decès says that the kin and affine distinction is not clear, is not stable and that there is a lot of overlap of the two. She blames the structuralists for 'reifying' the kin/affine distinction because she has failed to see how real and vital the parity principle is to Tamil kinship.

2.63 ***Is Parity Fuzzy?***

Is it possible that one of the clan titles that appear on the affinal group may also appear in the list of the kin group? Yes, it is possible. In fact, there is at least one instance like that in the current wedding card. What it means is that an individual man from the affinal group happens to be the groom's 'sibling through the Mother'. Recall the fact that in the Dravidian kinship system, same sex siblings' children are parallel cousins who are in sibling categories (i.e., kin). This means the children of two Mothers who are sisters (actual or classificatory) are *parallel* kin or in sibling categories. This would be so even when these chil-

dren's Fathers are in two different clans and thus affine to each other. As has already been discussed, this is the reason why the Kaḷḷar invitation cards carry the name and clan titles of the Mother's Fathers of both the groom and the bride – simply to show that the bride and the groom are not siblings through their Mothers.

Let me illustrate the case of 'siblings through the Mothers' using my own family. My mother has married a man in the Sendapiriyar clan and one of her sisters is married to a man in the Rajapiriyar clan. Now, the Sedapiriyar clan and the Rajapiriyar clan have been, traditionally, alliance partners. However, the five sons of my Mother's Sister, even though they are born in the Rajapiriyar clan, are very much my siblings. These five men are my 'brothers' because our Mothers are sisters. They are non-marriageable even when their clan, Rajapiriyar, is traditionally our bride takers/givers. Not only my Mother's Sisters Sons but every Rajapiriyar in my age group from my village and surrounding villages would be like a classificatory sibling to me. However, this siblingship through our Mothers is only a *temporary* situation because three generations down the line for these two families (Sendapiriyar and Rajapiriyar) would revert back to being the affines they used to be in the past and resume giving and receiving brides, which is a permanent situation as these clans are by no means a kin group.

What the above example shows is that the parity principle is systematic and enduring despite the temporary fluctuations (i.e., having 'siblings' among the affines) which do occur routinely but are cancelled in the successive generations by restoring the order of the clan exogamy for alliance, which is a permanent set up. While these fluctuations that invariably occur (because sisters born together do marry men in different clans) may seem to be problematic inconsistencies in the kinship system, it is actually a brilliant strategy to maintain an optimal balance between the two distinct social fields; i.e., of the kin and the affine, the positive and the negative currents, if you will, that give light to Dravidian social existence. (An entire chapter in my PhD dissertation is devoted to analyzing and explaining this issue.)

The case of the 'siblingship through the Mothers' may be what Clark-Decès has mistaken for an "overlap" of the kin and the affine. This has led her to falsely claim that the kin and affine distinction in the Tamil kinship is not stable and that parity is too fluid and fuzzy to be useful as an analytical tool for studying Dravidian kinship. Clark-Decès has failed to see that the kin and affine distinction is an issue of great significance with structural implications for the Kaḷḷar community. The same can be said about the Tamil people in general.

2.64 ***Alliance Power and Integration***

A couple of more observations from the wedding invitation card need to be made before we move on to the next section. Kaḷḷars take pride in publishing such long lists and showing them to everyone to see how numerous their kin are and how widespread across the society their alliance networks are. The longer the list is, the more prestige for the family. It adds value to one's social profile. Families boast about having an army of alliance partnerships because it means a large support base. It gives them a sense of significance and security. People are less likely to pick up a quarrel with a family that is widely connected, and especially if some of them are influential people. Like muscle-power and money-power, this is alliance-power, so to speak. Publishing long list of kin and alliance partners is also intended to motivate potential exchange partners to seek alliances with the inviters' family in the future. Any Kaḷḷars family would like to build their social resume by adding on even newer alliance partnerships.

Moreover, the Thanjavur Kaḷḷars's desire to have ever widening networks of alliance partnerships with many different clans all across the surrounding villages and districts testifies to the socially integrative power of reciprocal alliances. The level of social integration a people group or a society can achieve is directly proportionate to how large the exchange unit is. We have seen how the Piramalai Kaḷḷars follow lineage exogamy; a lineage is much smaller than a clan. The Kaḷḷars follow clan exogamy and a clan is comprised of a countless number of lineages that use a single clan title from ages past. The Madia of Central India practice *section* exogamy where each section consists of several clans. There are about a hundred clans among the Madia and all these clans fall into the four sections. A man in one section should

marry a spouse from one of the other three sections. In this way, the Madia have achieved the highest level of social integration. It is a completely integrated single group of people; i.e., a tribe, thanks to their rule of alliance exchange. (We will return to discussing this fascinating group of people in Chapter IV in this article.)

2.70 Parity Is Pervasive and Inclusive

It is true, and Clark-Decès's own case studies testify to this, that love marriages are more common now than was the case a few generations ago, and inter-caste marriages are also becoming increasingly acceptable in the Tamil society. Contrary to what Clark-Decès claims, these types of changes do nothing to weaken or cancel the kin and affine distinction. The new relatives who are gained through these (unarranged) marriages will also fall into the kin and affine categories. This means no kin relation escapes parity. Interestingly, even unrelated peoples are integrated into it. Let me give a contemporary example.

It is very common among the male college students in Tamil Nadu who are in the same age group and who are otherwise unrelated to call each other *machan* or *machi* (the Tamil kin term for the male cross-cousin or the younger Sister's Husband). What this reveals is that any two men who are not already connected through sibling categories are, practically speaking, potential alliance partners for each other. In fact, it does open up real opportunities for either one to marry the other's sister. This is so because the ethos of kinship permeates all of our human connections.

2.71 *Parity Is Felt*

Clark-Decès has accused the structuralist approach for ignoring people's emotions related to kinship experiences. She has claimed that Dumont himself has treated parity as something abstract rather than actual. If, in fact, Dumont did so, he was wrong. Parity structure is deeply entrenched in our sentiments. The stories I told earlier in this chapter are examples of that. But the contexts of those stories are my extended family and close relations. What follows here is an example for how pervasive the kinship categorization and the emotions attached to it are and how these can, and do, impact our connections and interactions with even those who are not related to us.

It is very common among the city dwellers, far removed as they may be from their parental/ancestral homes and traditional rural settings, to use kin terms for people who are not related to them. They teach their children to address all adults, whether they are their neighbors, or their parents' colleagues from the office, or street vendors, or waiters in the restaurants, or co-passengers in a train – I mean to say practically everyone – using kin terms. The children may address any adult male as *mama* (meaning Mother's Brother) and any adult female *athai* (meaning Father's Sister). It is not only convenient but it is also a safe thing to do. Let me explain.

When the children from one family address the parents of the other family as *mama* and *athai*, it automatically connects the parents of the children in such a way that, according to the kin terminological rules, the woman in one family becomes a sister to the man in the other family and the man in one family becomes a brother to the woman in the other family. This means the two men connect with each other as brothers-in-law (affine). This is helpful because the women who may otherwise feel uncomfortable and unsafe around a male neighbor can now relax and relate with him as though he were her brother. Their attitudes towards each other and their behaviors would tend to be along the lines of what is appropriate for opposite sex sibling categories. Let us imagine another scenario where two men neighbors, who are unrelated, choose to relate as brothers. Consequently, one man's wife would become like a sister-in-law to the man in the other family and this would open up opportunities for joking/teasing or avoidance behaviors between the two. These are attitudes and behaviors associated with kin relations that are marriageable. These attitudes and behaviors come with a whole range of emotions which are not exactly of the sibling-type. Such potential complications are prevented or minimized by teaching one's children to address one's adult neighbors as *mama* (Mother's Brother) and *athai* (Father's Sister). This is why it is extremely rare, if it occurs at all, for children to address the male neighbors as *chithappa* or *peryappa* (Father's younger or elder Brother).

Thus, parity is not an abstract notion "reified" by the structuralists, as Clark-Decès has said. Parity is felt. If it is a tool, it is so only for the analyst. No one seemed to think it was an exaggeration when a male scholar speaking in a conference recently on Tamil culture made this comment as though he was representing all Tamil males: "For a man, just knowing that a girl is his female cross-cousin is enough to trigger the chemistry." Surely, sexual orientation and nurture play their role in all of this, but would that make the sentiments and emotions attached to the idea of crossness any less real for a Dravidian?

2.72 ***Parity Is a Strategy***

Clark-Decès's biases prevented her from seeing that parity is the ultimate Dravidian strategy for creating a unified kinship cosmology in which no one needs to be left out. The principle of opposition is a strategy not for dividing, as the word 'opposition' may make it sound like, but actually for uniting. Parity positions the people in distinct groups in such a way that they can reciprocally interact. Parity facilitates and even compels interactions. I discuss this more in another section where I discuss complementary mergers that make it clear how Dravidian kinship is a well set up strategy for inclusion.

The practice of children addressing the unrelated adults using kinship terms can be found almost everywhere in South India. If you ask why our children have to use any *kin term* at all for unrelated people, we may say that it is because we consider it rude and disrespectful for children to use any adult's name (even with Mr. and Mrs.), and that it is expected of children to be polite and use instead the kin terms for all adults. However, what is even more important is to note is that our kinship system does allow for the non-kin to be included in its scope.

2.73 ***Parity Is the Deep Structure***

The Kaḷḷar clan system works like the scaffolding that upholds reciprocal alliance and is also reinforced by alliances. This is how kinship and marriage have become enduring institutions within the Kaḷḷar community. Reciprocal alliance would not work without parity. Parity, complementarity and reciprocity give the Dravidian kinship its essential character. These function to unite and integrate the Dravidian society. This must have originally served as a blueprint for society making. There is more to parity than what has yet been explored and my Chapter IV on Madia kinship will take us to a deeper understanding of it. But even a simple observation about all four of the dimensions of the Dravidian kin terminological system can show that each dimension is based on opposition. Kin and affine or parallel and cross dimension is only one dimension. The other three dimensions also display opposition as a general underlying principle through Sex Dimension (male and female), Generation (above and below) and Relative Age (elder and younger). Thus, parity is the fundamental principle. It is deep structure. The rest is just details.

Gift exchange and inheritance, ceremonies and symbols, emotional connections and conflicts – as important as these are, are details which can differ from one family to another, from one community to another, and one caste group to another even within the Tamil society. With regard to the cultural ideals people are expected to follow in all matters related to personal rights and obligations, privileges and duties are all ideals – all of which fall under the rubric of best practices – that people try to emulate while at the same time constantly evaluating, and reinterpreting these on the basis of their own individual contexts and renegotiating them for their own benefit.

Many of the stories that Clark-Decès cites actually exemplify the type of negotiations made by the protagonists of these stories who found themselves in various dilemmas. While Clark-Decès is right in taking a cultural approach for describing many of these dilemmas in greater detail, she is wrong when she fails to discern what is negotiable and what is nonnegotiable in the local peoples' perspective. Much of the drama she reports from Tamil social life pertains to things that are negotiable. She tends to treat the kin and affine opposition as one such thing, but there is usually no negotiation as to who is in a marriageable category and who is not. In the rare case of a distant cousin who might be linked through one parent as a parallel cousin and through the other parent as a cross-cousin, the kin distance is measured and the closest of the two kin connections is used to make the decision. Typically, the kin connection through the Father carries more weight than the one through the Mother.

The point is that there are ways and means by which the locals settle such issues and assign a distant relative the kin status of either being a kin or an affine. No relative is left dangling in the middle; no

one is neither here nor there. And no relative is both simultaneously. Even for our normal interactions with those who are our distant relatives, we must pick a kin term to use and stick with it, and that kin term reveals whether that relative is a kin or an affine. Thus, every one of our relatives is either a kin or an affine for all practical purposes. Parity is not optional. Parity is not avoidable. It is foundational for the construction of the Dravidian society.

2.80 The Ultimate Proof of Parity: Complementation

The ultimate proof that the opposition principle is fully in operation in the Dravidian kinship can be found in another aspect of it; i.e., the complementary mergers of kin and affine relations. Complementary merger is undoubtedly a unique feature of the Dravidian kinship system. Let us now dive into this fascinating feature.

How complementation works in Dravidian kinship is comparable to the complementary base pairing in the DNA. In the DNA there are two strands that run in opposite directions, thus facilitating the complementary bonding of base pairs from either strand. In a Tamil marriage, the relatives from the two sides — the bride's and the groom's — merge in such a way that can be best described as complementary mergers. I have already presented a detailed comparison of the DNA's structure and dynamics with the structure and dynamics of the Madia kinship in an article which has appeared in the journal *Mathematical Anthropology and Cultural Theory* (Vaz 2014). Therefore, I will be very brief here.

In a typical Tamil wedding, the bride and groom have both grown up with their own set of parallel (or kin) and cross (or affine) relatives. Their marriage brings together the extended families of the groom and the bride and binds these families in kinship ties. In the case of a cross-cousin marriage, the two families would already be relatives. If it is a new alliance, the families of the groom and the bride are previously unrelated but are coming together for the very first time by virtue of this new marriage alliance. Irrespective of whether the alliance is new or old, the merging of the two sides occurs following the same two rules I give next.

Rule 1: The groom's parallel kin become the bride's cross kin and the bride's parallel kin become the groom's cross kin. E.g.: The groom's Father's Brothers (parallel kin) becomes the Mother's Brothers (cross kin) to the bride and vice versa.

Rule 2: The groom's cross kin become the bride's parallel kin and bride's cross kin become the groom's parallel kin. E.g.: The groom's Mother's Brothers (cross) become the Father's Brothers (parallel kin) to the bride and vice versa.

This is the same as saying that the kin on one side is merged with the affine on the other, and the affine on one side is merged with the kin on the other side.

The key point to be made here is that such complementary mergers would not be possible except for the clear distinction of one's relatives as kin and affine. (Those who are knowledgeable about the DNA structure can easily see that in this analogy the kin are the purines and the affine are the pyrimidines. Just like the difference [in structure] between the purines and the pyrimidines is fundamental to the base-pairing in DNA, so is the kin and affine distinction in Dravidian kinship. The purines on the one side bond with the pyrimidines on the opposite side, and vice versa.) If the kin and affine of the groom make up one strand of the kinship DNA, the kin and the affine of the bride make up the other strand. These two sides are like the two strands in a DNA that run in opposite directions. It is only because of such oppositions that there can be the complementary bonding. If the kin and affine opposition is not there, the complementary rules for mergers that I have listed above would not work. Thus, complementary mergers are the irrefutable proof that the principle of parity is at work. Therefore, the principle of opposition is vital in Tamil kinship and social organization and its fundamentality cannot be overemphasized. A denial of the parity principle is equal to keeping one's eyes shut in broad daylight and claiming there is no such thing as a sun.

There is another analogy which also helps in grasping what an exceptionally clever idea Dravidian complementation is. As indicated earlier, if we were to think of the kin and the affine in terms of positive and negative charges (let us say, for convenience sake, that parallel is positive and cross is negative), then the above rules for mergers would mean that the positive on one side switch to become the negative

on the other side and the negative on one side switch to become positive on the other side. Complementation works by simply changing the spatial coordinates. This simple strategy makes it easy for us Dravidians to know how we will be relating to all the relatives on our spouse's side. Here are a few examples to make this point clear.

My husband's Father's Mother (his negative) becomes the same category as my Mother's Mother (my positive).

My husband's Mother's Mother (his positive) becomes the same category as my Father's Mother (my negative).

My husband's Father's Brother (his positive) becomes the same category as my Mother's Brother (my negative).

My husband's Mother's Brother (his negative) becomes the same category as my Father's Brother (my positive).

Thus, all we have to do to know who is whom is to simply flip the positive and negative signs. This switching of the kin and affine categories from one side to the other works like a process known as parity inversion, a fundamental aspect, in particle physics. In an upcoming paper I present a detailed comparison of the parity in Dravidian kinship and the parity in elementary particles. It suffices to say here that in both the physical and the social cosmology, parity is a fundamental feature.

The fact that complementarity and parity, the basic principles of Tamil kinship, are also the basic principles, respectively, in the gene structure and in the classification of the elementary particles, seems to attest to the logicality of the Dravidian kinship conceptualization. Therefore, Clark-Decès's denial of the principle of opposition in Dravidian kinship reveals that she has completely missed the point about the basic character and operation of the Dravidian kinship system.

Let us conclude this section on a lighter note with a couple of real-life examples for the practicality of parity in Dravidian everyday life. Watch this funny clip from a recent Tamil movie and it may be a surprise to the non-Dravidian to see how these two principles are applied extensively: https://youtube.com/shorts/BsRKkh_0jH8?si=wi1URwZh1l4O_pap. There are many such movie clips available to illustrate how parity works in Dravidian kinship but these do not always come with English captions. Fortunately, this one does. Perhaps it is clear from this clip how it only takes a couple of minutes for an elderly woman witnessing a marriage engagement ceremony to trace through a chain of several kin and affine connections of the groom (who is to marry her granddaughter) and to arrive at the conclusion, unfortunately for the enthusiastic groom, that he is actually a *kin* category to the bride, a classificatory uncle (Father's Brother, to be precise), and therefore he cannot marry her granddaughter. It is hilarious to watch how the relatives, who are horrified to hear this piece of information, cancel the engagement event instantly. The English captions are not accurate translations but it is still clear from the series of questions the old woman asks the groom that she is actually applying the principle of complementation to calculate who is whom. The practicality of parity and complementarity as a means to assess marriageability comes through clearly.

Parity and complementation are not just about arrangement of marriage alliances. These are also critical for daily interactions in social circles. For example, I recently tried to connect with a relative, who is a distant kin but is still close enough to be in my kinship circle. My kinship connection to him is as follows: this man is my Mother's elder Sister's Son's (elder to me) Wife's Father's Father's younger Brother's Son's Daughter's Husband. To give this relation using kinship notations, he is my MeZSeWFFyBSDH. It took me less than a minute to figure out that he would be a classificatory Son-in-law to me. This is a simple calculation using parity and complementation. Such calculations are how we can know who is who among distant relatives. This is important for us because our cultural etiquette does not allow us to use people's first names (except possibly for those who are in the Children's generation) or to treat someone as though he/she is a nobody when they are, in fact, related to us, however remotely. It is crucial that we use not just any kin term but the appropriate ones depending on whether a relative is a kin or affine. Since we do not have in Tamil generic kin terms like English Cousin (since cousin is either a parallel or a cross-cousin), or Uncle or Aunt (they are either paternal or maternal uncle/aunt) or niece or nephew (they are either same-sex sibling children or opposite-sex sibling children), it is crucial for us to know how to use

the parity principle for knowing who is who among the not-so-close relatives. We find it awkward, even mortifying, when by some mistake we end up behaving with the kin as though they were our affines.

2.81 ***Parity In Death as In Life***

In births and in deaths and in every large and small rite of passage in between, parity is evident in the distinct roles played by the kin and the affine. While it may seem that we have discussed a lot about Tamil marriage already, all we have done so far is to look through a couple of Tamil wedding cards. A Tamil wedding is a series of several events. Simply by observing 'who does what' in these rituals or ceremonies one can know 'who is related to whom and how'. However, time and space does not allow me to get into details of a Tamil wedding. Therefore, let us conclude this chapter by fast forwarding to the final event in life: namely death.

The kin group, even while mourning along with the bereaved family, becomes the undertakers for the funeral, which happens either the same day or the day after the death. The kin group takes care of everything that needs to be done, starting from the announcements to making physical arrangements, to organizing the wake, to supporting the bereaved family as they have to go through a serious of rituals that can be heart breaking, and to managing the procession to the cremation site. Once there, they go through the painful processes that are part of the last rites, along with the nuclear family that have lost a dear one. They may choose to observe the many fasts and keep the many taboos related to death along with the bereaved family. There are rituals to perform on the second day after the cremation, and after a week, two weeks, four weeks and after a year. The kin group takes part in all of these rituals along with the bereaved family because the kin group, or *pangali* ,are siblings. In case the dead person does not have a son to light the funeral pyre, which is the main event, the closest kin who is in a Son category, would be required to light the funeral pyre and perform all the necessary rituals until the last one, which is the death anniversary ritual, after a year.

The role of the affine is very different. Their arrival at the funeral is a show of their power and wealth as well as the strength of their own kin group who come following them in a procession. Though this procession is not as pompous as the one held during the occasion of a puberty or wedding ritual, it seems typical of the affines to act with pride. A band of drummers who they have hired for this purpose goes before them as though to announce their arrival. They come walking, dignified and bringing with them garlands and wreaths, and their own kin group follows them. After paying their last respects to the deceased these affine might stay back until the burial/cremation takes place, but many of them would not stay back for this event. The major role of the close affine is to give expensive gifts to the bereaved family (into which their sisters and daughters have been married), which would help the family financially though this might be hard on them when a death has occurred suddenly and unexpectedly. The affine supply food and provisions for the first two weeks or so after the death, and then at the end of the period of mourning, they are expected to bring gifts of cash and kind, new clothes and gold jewelry.

The kin group are not obligated to bring any gift but are only expected to take responsibility for running all of the errands related to the funeral. The affine group does not have to work hard like the kin group. Just as they are the guests of honor at a wedding, so they are guests at a funeral, but this time they give honor to the deceased and to the bereaved by bringing in gifts. The affine may also provide practical help if they wish to do so. But the one thing the affine will never be allowed to do is to light the funeral pyre. That is a duty to be carried out only by a member in the kin group because the kin are believed to share the same life. The affine are like guests who bring honor and expect to be treated with the same respect. Life and honor: what value does one have without the other?

Like all other life cycle rituals and during a funeral as well, we can know who is who and how they are related simply by observing who does what. Parity is unmistakable.

2.90 Summary

I have, hopefully, provided sufficient data in this first chapter to show that the principle of opposition does in fact exist, that it is fundamental to our kinship conceptualizations, is vital to our communal life, is a deep structure, is deep in our sentiments, is pervasive and inclusive, and has the potential to integrate and unify a vast population. Parity is a fundamental guiding principle and provides the blueprint of our

kinship and social organization. There is no way we Dravidians can get around it. Without parity, Dravidian kinship would cease to be.

Unfortunately, though, this set up seems to upset the feminist anthropologists. Clark-Decès's main concern seems to be about the women folk and her objections to the Dravidian set up comes up in these questions: What about the women's experiences in Tamil kinship, marriage and family? What about their membership and significance in Dravidian kinship? What about their inheritance? What about the Mother - child connection? What about their emotions which are at the "core" of Dravidian kinship? I will present my views on these issues at the end of this paper.

In my conclusion to this chapter, the dismissal of the parity principle as being inconsequential to Dravidian kinship is the fatal misstep in Clark-Decès argument. With the fundamentality of the kin-affine distinction being lost on her, what she has argued for is the "sameness" of all aspects of the kin-affine dimension. This is another major problem in her work and to which I turn my attention in the next chapter.

CHAPTER II

3.00 THE MEANING OF KINSHIP AND ALLIANCE IN TAMIL

3.10 Introduction

Clark-Decès's second line of attack on the formal structuralist studies of Dravidian kinship starts with faulting them for not factoring in "the general kinship vocabulary" used by South Indian people. According to her, the earlier anthropologists' obsession with the *kinship terminologies* (leading them to erroneously observe a two-part classification of kinship into "kin" and "affine") that prevented them from recognizing the importance of studying the *general words* in Tamil for kinship for interpreting indigenous meanings of the concept of kinship. In her effort to rectify their mistake, she takes up the study of general terms for kinship in the Tamil language. This is indeed a worthwhile attempt and, if done well, could help shed light on the foundational values in Tamil kinship. Unfortunately, though, Clark-Decès's exegesis of the general words in Tamil for kinship is misguided from the start. Ironically, "misguided" is how she has described Dumont's structural approach. It is true that Dumont did not exegete the meanings of kinship and alliance in Tamil; but if he had, it could have led him to find additional support for the parity principle and his alliance theory, which is exactly what comes through in my own exegesis which I present in this chapter.

In the first section, titled '*Kinship or Ownership*', I present Clark-Decès's, as well my own, explication of the meaning of kinship and alliance in the Tamil conceptualization of kinship. The second section, titled '*Exchange or Entitlement*', addresses several issues Clark-Decès has raised against the systematic nature of Tamil alliance. I want to reassure my readers that I will not be engaging in a structural analysis of the Tamil *kin terminology*. This is something the feminist anthropologists generally seem to avoid (if the *Cambridge Handbook of Kinship* is any indication) and, therefore, for their sake, I will restrict myself to doing mainly two things in this chapter: (1) reviewing Clark-Decès's exegeses of two Tamil key terms related to kinship and alliance, and (2) finding the most appropriate *key* term for kinship and alliance in Tamil and exegete this term for my readers so that the true meaning of Tamil kinship and alliance becomes evident.

Let me also add here that while my command of the English language may be a far cry from being professorial and is no match for the author's gift of articulation, I have a good handle on the Tamil language, which is my mother tongue and has remained my first language to this day. In addition, I am a translator by vocation and I have been trained in how to do exegesis of key terms. Exegesis is an activity I enjoy doing, and I will do my best to make this chapter enjoyable for my readers.

3.20 Kinship or Ownership?

3.21 *Clark-Decès's Choice of Terms*

Clark-Decès chooses two Tamil terms in order to explicate the meaning of kinship and alliance in Tamil: *contam*, and *murai* (2014: 38). The first term, *contam,* is a poor choice, as I shall now show. It is also an inexcusable choice because her informants have actually supplied her with another term (i.e., *uravu*) which is the best one for kinship, but she chose to ignore that one in preference for *contam* because, I suggest, the latter serves her own agenda better. In her analysis of the first term of her choice, she deals selectively, emphasizing only those meanings that support her own biases. In her explication of the second term, *murai*, she starts off well but then makes a serious misstep that leads her to false and unreasonable conclusions. Her explication becomes muddled when too many Tamil terms and phrases are included in her discussions in her book in order to draw support for her claims, but the words *contam* and *murai* are the main two words that she discusses and so I will focus on just these two words.

3.22 *An Unproductive Analysis*

Ironically, the Tamil terms Clark-Decès focuses on, claiming that these are "more productive" than the distinction between 'parallel' and 'cross' kin, actually turns out to be unproductive. Clark-Decès chooses to explicate Tamil kinship using the term *contam,* which simply means 'related'. In order to describe relatedness in Tamil, she juxtaposes the term *contam* with another Tamil term *anniyam* that means 'unrelated'. When she begins her exegesis in this way, I cannot help but wonder how the dual framework that she proposes, of 'related' and 'unrelated', or 'kin' and 'non-kin', is going to be in any way "more productive," as she claims, than the structural framework of 'kin' and 'affine'. How far can comparison of 'related' with the term 'unrelated' take us in understanding the fundamental characteristics of 'relatedness' or kinship among a people? Not very far, as I shall now show.

What does Clark-Decès discover by putting aside the *distinction* or classification of the relations as kin and affine, and by choosing to focus instead on a comparison of 'related' with 'unrelated'? Not surprisingly, she discovers the '*sameness*' of all kin relations! She argues that relatives within a caste or community consider themselves to be of the 'same kind', as opposed to the 'other kind', which refers to those who are outside one's own caste or community and with whom the Tamils generally do not interact by means of bride exchanges (because inter-caste marriage is a taboo). If the structural approach is to look *within* kinship for indigenous meaning, Clark-Decès's approach is to look *beyond* kinship and to bring in the non-kin to define the kin. A superficial comparison of *kin* and *non-kin* cannot reveal the depths of how the Tamil view relatedness or how they perceive, sort and order kin relations. Such an approach is not justifiable, and so it will not be productive. I find that she does not get far with this approach and quickly ends her argument by saying that Tamil kinship is more about 'sameness' than it is about 'distinctions', which does not make any sense.

3.23 *A Problematic Term*

In her exegesis of the term *contam*, Clark-Decès also claims to make another "discovery," namely that Tamil kinship is not as much about biological connections or procreation, or about marriage rules or alliance exchange, as it is about *ownership rights*. However, *contam* is a problematic choice for this claim. The fact that the term *contam* is found in the Tamil lexicon does not assure its value in anthropological discourses. It is a polysemous word and using a polysemous word in the explication of any key concept is risky as it can take one in the wrong direction unless the person is adept in the language. This word, indeed, proves to be a bad choice since Clark-Decès attempts to establish a deep semantic connection that is non-existent among the different meanings of this term and then attempts to use this non-existent connection to not only falsely reinterpret Tamil kinship but also to re-theorize what is meant by Dravidian kinship. Let me present my review of Clark-Decès 's exegesis so that my readers can judge for themselves whether or not my criticism is valid.

The word *contam* means, first and foremost, 'kin' ,'relation' ,'relative', and 'related'. When I say someone is my *contam*, I mean that person is a relative, either through birth or through marriage. The person can be a close or a distant relation.

The word *contam* has another meaning, which is 'to belong'. For example, we may ask: "Who does this child belong to?'.

The etymological connection between the first and the second meanings may be obvious. It is a reasonable thing to say that someone is my kin and that we belong together. (It brings to mind the saying "*I belong, therefore I am*").

The word *contam* has a third meaning as well, which is 'to own' or 'to possess' something. A couple of examples for this meaning follow:

> One may say, "I have not been able to afford a *conta* home". (Here it refers to 'owning' a house).

A public announcement may be made, saying: "A handbag is in the lost and found section. If you are the bag's *conta-karan* (meaning 'owner'), please come and claim the bag."

In these last two examples, the word *contam* means 'ownership'. Thus, we see that the word *contam* has three meanings: 'kin/relation' ,'to belong to' and 'to own'.

Polysemous words abound in Tamil just as much as they do in the English language. The different meanings of a polysemous word in English do not necessarily have deep semantic connections. However, let me see how Clark-Decès exploits the multiple meanings of this Tamil word to make what I consider to be an unreasonable argument.

3.24 *A Twisted Exegesis*

It is reasonable to connect the first and the second meanings of the word *contam* (which are 'kin' and 'belonging') to say that people who are relatives see themselves as belonging together. It is also reasonable to connect the second and the third meanings ('belonging' and 'owning') to say that a house or a handbag belongs to its owner and so the owner can say, "The house/handbag is 'mine'."

The difference is that in the first case it implies reciprocal belonging, a relationship. But in the third case it is non-reciprocal belonging, indicating ownership with no relationship. Thus it would be misleading to take this word in its first sense as referring to a kinship relationship but then interprets it to mean ownership in its third sense of a non-reciprocal relationship.

Yet, in her exegesis Clark-Decès connects the first and the third meanings and concludes that in Tamil kinship means 'mine' in a non-reciprocal sense. ("Kinship means 'Mine'" is, in fact, a title she has used for a section in Chapter 2 of her book.) She says that *contam* "refers to one's property and by extension to one's relative in a general way" (2014: 42). This is how she reduces Tamil kinship to simply being a matter of "ownership rights." I find this absurd! If one followed a similar reasoning pattern and connected the second and the third meanings of this word to suggest that a 'kinship relationship' exists between the person and the house or bag that person owns, it would sound ridiculous!

It is vexatious to read Clark-Decès's arguments that Dravidian kinship relationship is essentially about the relatives *owning* and sharing *things* in common. All I can say is that the Tamils can and do understand the fundamental difference between people owning material things and people belonging together and they do not conceptualize kinship as one of owning people. Equating kinship to ownership might work when people use words such as *Dog Mommy* or *Dog Daddy* in reference to the people who own dogs. But such an idea is not applicable in the context of human relations, and certainly not in the Tamil language. Unfortunately, this seems to be the view she doggedly holds on to throughout her analysis.

Clark-Decès grounds her interpretations on the simple observation that the Tamils can help themselves to food, utensils, tools, etc. from relatives' homes. Here, she finds support for her claim from another Tamil word, *pangali.* My readers may recognize this term from my earlier chapter where I discussed the two social categories: *pangali* ('kin') and *uravumurai* ('affine'). Clark-Decès chooses to focus only on the *literal* meaning of the term *pangali,* which is 'share-holder'. It is only rarely that one finds communities in rural Tamil Nadu where the *pangali* families; i.e., the men of a lineage consisting of two or three generations, live in an ancestral house and choose to farm their ancestral lands together. But this cannot justify Clark-Decès's reduction of the Tamil kinship concept to mere shared ownership of land, house and materials. It is unreasonable on her part to insist that for the Tamil kinship simply means 'what my kin owns is mine'. She thus reduces Tamil kinship to "A Kinship of Rights" (the heading for Section 4.2 in her book chapter).

Clark-Decès ignores the fact that property is not the only thing the *pangali* share. They also bear the same clan title, they are members of the same lineage/descent group, they share the same clan deity and fall under one and the same category as 'kin' as opposed to 'affine'. Yet she chooses to make light of these matters and disproportionately focuses on the single aspect of property ownership. That this is a purely materialistic interpretation is only one of the problems I see in her account. Another major problem

is that it practically does away with the other half of the Tamil relatives who are not the *pangalis* but the *uravumurai* ('affine'). To me, it is unjustifiable to define kinship as ownership rights and then apply this definition to identify only the category of *pangali*. Clark-Decès effectively strips the entire affinal group of their significance – both structural and cultural – in the Tamil kinship system. Yet this should not be surprising; haven't I already shown how she laid the foundation for this interpretation in the first section of her chapter by denying the presence and the impact of the principle of opposition? Her arguments in the second section are also in line with her original goal, which is to refute most everything that the social anthropologists of the past have observed to be valuable and as fundamental or characteristic of the South Indian peoples' kinship and marriage alliance systems.

What Clark-Decès has done is to present quite a few terms that need to be clarified. I will start this task by finding the right word for kinship, check for its popularity, put it through a test of translation, and finally do the exegesis before coming to a conclusion about the real meaning of kinship in Tamil. I will close with a comment about where Clark-Decès went wrong, how, and why.

3.25 *The Right Word for Kinship In Tamil*

Thankfully, I do not needc to introduce a new key term here but simply point to a term that Clark-Decès herself has heard often during her interviews. It is intriguing as to why she did not choose to do her exegesis on this particular term. Clark-Decès begins each and every chapter in her 2014 book with a few epigraphs and the following are the three epigraphs found in her concluding chapter, all of which are statements made by her informants on Tamil kinship:

1. "We can develop *uravu* with unknown people" – Abi, October 2007,

2. "*Uravu* is the basis of human life" – Mayanti, February 2008, and

3. "First *uravu* is Mother; only through mother do we come to know the father" – Srinidhi, September 2008.

Note that in each of these examples Clark-Decès uses the Tamil word *uravu* for kinship, but has glossed over the term *uravu* as 'kinship relations' in the text (2014: 42), though, somehow, it is not included in the book's index with all of the other Tamil terms that she has referred to are listed. Another interesting absence is that there is not a single occurrence of the term *contam* in any of the other epigraphs that appear at the beginning of each of the other chapters. Yet it is the word *contam* that she chose to work with to explicate and uncover the meaning of Tamil kinship. With just the term *contam,* she could get away with defining Tamil kinship as ownership, but there is no way to do that with the term *uravu*. On the contrary, the term *uravu* has a strong connotation of a romantic, marital and affinal relation, and it would have led Clark-Decès straight to the alliance theory that she appears to want to stay away from.

We must also note that the three informants quoted above are all young people and two are women; a fact that Clark-Decès herself brings to the reader's attention. From the beginning of her book she has been keenly interested in recording the views of women and youth on kinship; it is the representation and help from this portion of the Tamil population that Clark-Decès has mostly sought in her efforts to re-theorize Tamil kinship and marriage. These informants, as part of expressing their opinions and attitudes towards kinship, automatically chose a term that came to them naturally in free-flowing conversations. *Uravu* is their natural choice of a term for kinship. If Clark-Decès were truly searching for "local exegesis," then it is this term that she should have spent her time investigating. But by ignoring this term, she is guilty of the same error that she has accused the structuralists of making; i.e., not paying attention to the "local" meanings.

3.30 Proof In the Public Discourse

Let me check out the popularity of the term *uravu*. It, indeed, seems to be a very popular term in public disclosure as a way to refer to kinship. In addition, public debates and discourse are an important aspect of Tamil culture and tradition and these have as long a history as does the Tamil language. The oldest Tamil literature has records of debates between gods, between gods and humans, and among the bards of the different schools of thoughts. Debates are cultural events in which kings as well as peasants, and intellectuals as well as the ignorant, enjoy listening to. Public debates remain a craze in South India even to

this day. Every TV channel in Tamil has debates going on throughout the year. Every major festival (Pongal, Deepavali, New Year, etc.) are seasons for celebrity debaters to appear on TV and to be heard on the radio. There are innumerable Tamil clubs, federations, conventions, conferences, and whatnot all over the world that conduct debates for, and by, the Tamil Diaspora on any and every topic. Many of these debates are available on the YouTube Internet channel and they show that kinship is alive and well among the Tamil. A simple search on Google or YouTube shows that millions of Tamil viewers follow these debates. Even if kinship is considered a "closed corpus" among the academicians, this does nothing to dampen the interest Tamil viewers have in matters dealing with kinship.

One particular topic that has been popular is "Kinship or Friendship?". It is very engaging to watch the contestants argue and counter argue about the significance, usefulness, power to endure, practical value, current status, etc., of the different aspects of kinship in western society. Of course, they do not use an English title but a Tamil one. What do you think the Tamil title is for this debate? It has always been "*Urava? Natpa*? (which translates as Kinship or Friendship?). The title has never been "*Contama? Natpa*? I have not come across even one example of a title for such a debate where *contam* is the term used to denote kinship. This is the case irrespective of the dialectal differences between the north, south, east, west and central parts of Tamil Nadu. The term used for kinship in the titles of these events has always been *uravu*. Another common title I come across is '*Nanbarhala? Uravinarhala?*', which translates as 'Friends or Relatives?'. Once again, the public choice for a title word is *uravu* and not *contam*.

To date, I have seen that *uravu* is the natural as well as the popular term used to refer to kinship. Now let us check to see whether it is also used in scholarly circles.

3.40 The Test of Translation

If Clark-Decès's article or book is ever translated into Tamil, the instances where she refers to South Indian kinship, Tamil kinship, and Dravidian kinship would be translated, respectively, as *thenindhia uravu murai, thamizh uravu muari* and *dhiravida uravu muari*. To translate these using the term *contam* would be unnatural and even nonsensical. This, too, is strong evidence that *uravu*, not *contam,* is the Tamil word for kinship.

Most of my writings on Dravidian kinship, including my doctoral dissertation, are in English. The only article I have written on Tamil kinship in Tamil appeared in a special magazine published during the 36th annual convention of the Tamil Federation in the USA held in San Francisco (2023: 170 - 173). The title is *Dhiravida Uravumuraiyin Thaniperumai*, which translates as "The Uniqueness of Dravidian Kinship." Once again, there is no way I could have used the word *contam* in my title to denote kinship. Why can't I write *contammurai*? I cannot because there is no such expression as *contammurai* in the Tamil language.

Is this just me that knows this? No. Let me cite three examples from other authors and translators.

Example 1: M.I. Fathima Safna (Lecturer, Department of Languages, Faculty of Arts and Culture, South Eastern University, Sri Lanka) has published an article as recently as June 2024 which is written in the Tamil language, but thankfully it also carries an English title (see https://journals.indexcopernicus.-com/api/file/viewByFileId/1994195). Her title is translated into English as 'A Study of Kinship in Tamil Proverbs' and in Tamil it is given as '*Thamizh Pazhamozhihalil Uravumuraihal, Oru Aaivu*'. Note that the Tamil term used in the place of kinship is *Uravumuraihal* (a plural form of *uravumurai*). Throughout her sixteen page article, the term *uravu* appears everywhere but nowhere do I see the term *contam*.

Example 2: Readers can look up Wikipedia: The free Encyclopedia, in Tamil language following this link: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kinship, and see that the translators have used the term *uravu* and *uravumurai* for kinship. *Uravu* is used throughout the article, whereas the term *contam* is not used at all. The following is a table of the English terms and their Tamil equivalents that the translators of this web page have used.

Table 1: Translation of English Words to Tamil

English word(s)	Translated in Tamil
a. kin relation	*Uravu*
b. Relatives	*Uravinar*
c. marriage	*thirumanam or uravu*
d. genealogical connection	*Uravu*
e. general kinship bond	*Uravu*
f. kinship :	*Uravumurai*
g. kinship structure	*uravumurai kattamaippu*
h. kin terms or words for relatives	*uravinar corkal*

The Wikipedia also lists "*Iroquois uravumurai,*" "*Eskimo uravumurai,*" "*Hawaian uravumurai,"* and "*Sudanese uravumurai*" in addition to "*Dhiravida uravumurai.*"

Example 3: Finally, let me quote the translation of an article written by none other than Janet Carsten who is known for her feminist and gendered approach to the study of kinship. The Encyclopedia Britannica presents both the English and Tamil versions of her article. I followed this link https://www.britannica.com/topic/kinship, then clicked on 'Ask the Chat Box' and chose the command to 'translate into Tamil'. This way, I was able to see the Tamil translation of Carsten's article and I found that the Tamil word used by whoever translated Carsten's article always used *uravumurai* and never *contam* in the place of the English term kinship.

Note that in all the translations cited above there is not a single occurrence of the alleged Tamil word *contammurai*. The two terms, *contam* and *murai*, the very ones that Clark-Decès chose to explicate Tamil kinship and alliance, do not even connect linguistically. Putting the two together would make an unnatural expression, and that is why nobody does it. The word *murai* ('order') that Clark-Decès emphasizes (and rightly so) can only be suffixed with *uravu* and not with *contam*.

Thus, we see that the Tamil term *uravumurai* is not only the natural and popular term but is also the scholarly choice. If so, is it not important to exegete this particular term in order to get to the true and full meaning of it? I will do that in the next section.

3.50 Analyses of the Key Terms

The first thing to note here is that the word *urvaumurai* is a combination of two words: *uravu* and *murai*. The exegeses of both of these terms are necessary. When we are done doing that, we should have a good grasp of the indigenous understanding of kinship. Exegesis of these terms is an easy thing to do because many examples are available and are found in various interesting contexts. And it is enjoyable, as well!

3.51 *Exegesis of Uravu*

The term *uravu*, like *contam*, is used to refer to kin relations in general. What makes it the favorite term in popular and scholarly uses? Unlike the word *contam,* which has secondary meanings such as 'ownership' of material possessions, the term *uravu* refers *only* to relationships involving humans. I suggest that this is probably why *uravu* is the natural term the Tamil use for kinship. For this reason, it should be the most suitable and useful one for anthropological discussions as well.

There is no context in which the term *uravu* can be interpreted as meaning ownership rights. On the other hand, and this is worth noting, the term *uravu,* in fact, carries strong connotations of romance, marriage and sex.

The following are five examples for how the Tamil use the term *uravu* in different contexts.

1. The word '*uravadal* (*uravu* and *adal* 'dance') means *romancing.* The term '*uravadal*' describes the relation between potential or actual spouses, but it is never used in reference to the relation between a brother and a sister.

2. *Udal-uravu* is, plain and simple: the act of sexual intercourse (*udal* 'physical body').

3. *Uravu-kondadu* is an expression used in the context of two different families giving and/or taking a bride. When one family approaches another family to ask for a bride, they would take the customary gifts (a large plate filled with *betel* leaves, fruits and sweets, flowers and a box of red *kumkum* powder symbolizing marriage and female fertility), and place the gifts before the other family and say: "We have come seeking your *uravu.*" Here, *uravu* means marriage alliance and nothing else.

4. The term *uravumuraiyan* refers to 'partner in alliance or exchange' (i.e., the giver or taker of a bride/groom) or simply put, the 'affine' (as has been mentioned already in this article).

5. *Uravumurai* means not only 'kinship', but also the type of kin relation that exists between categories of people who are 'marriageable'.

Thus, in the indigenous linguistic understanding, the idea of *uravu* (or kinship) is tied up with other ideas such as romance, sex, the practice of bride giving and taking, enduring partnership in reciprocal alliance and, in essence, with ideas about marriage and marriageability. It shows that in Tamil conceptualization, the notions of kinship and marriage are inseparable. The exegesis of *murai* (which is the second half of the term *uravumurai*) also confirms this meaning, as I will discuss next.

3.52 *Exegesis of the Word Murai*

The word *murai* can mean slightly different things in different contexts, as I shall now show in the following eleven examples.

1. In a complaint such as "Is what you have done *murai*?," the word is used to mean 'right' 'appropriate', or 'proper'. (Is what you have done right/appropriate/proper?)

2. To do something *muraippadi* means to do it according to the 'rules'.

3. When people are standing in line going one by one to something or somewhere, and when one person is told, "Now it is your *murai,*" it is used to tell that person "it is 'your turn' now." It refers to a rotation process following in order.

4. *Palamurai* means 'many times', where *murai* carries the meaning of repetition or regularity.

5. *Thalaimurai,* meaning 'generation', is a combination of *thalai* 'head' and *murai* 'order', and refers to the order in which the heads are to be counted; i.e., generation by generation. For example, FFF, FF, F, S, SS and SSS is the order in which head counting proceeds in a lineage.

6. *Murai-paduthu* is a command to 'to regulate' or 'to arrange something or make it happen in an orderly fashion'.

7. In the arrangement of marriage, one can talk about the *murai paiyan* (right boy) and *murai ponnu* (right girl), meaning the boy/girl is the closest cross-cousin with the moral (not legal) right to marry.

8. I say that someone is *kalyana murai* (*kalyanam* means 'wedding') to mean that the person is marriageable. The opposite would be *murai illai,* or 'unsuitable', which does not mean 'illegal' but 'inappropriate'.

9. In cooking, *ceimurai* means a 'recipe' and it refers to a methodological procedure; i.e., the *order* of the steps to be followed in the preparation of a dish.

10. The word *varaimurai* defines or describes the 'boundaries' within which one must operate in order to acceptably carry out a specific activity.

11. The word *nerimurai* means ethics or the disciplines of morality

Thus, I see that the word *murai* stands for rule, regularity, order, rightness or acceptability, suitability, repetition, morality, discipline and boundaries. There is a key sense that seems to underlie all of these different meanings. It is 'order' or 'regulation'. I can take this to be the basic meaning of this term.

Clark-Decès's own exegesis of *murai* also brings out its meanings as 'order' in the classification and distinction of relations, 'rule' and 'rightness' (2014: 42 – 43). However, instead of staying on course with these meanings, she chose to pursue another Tamil word, *van-murai*, once again a poor choice that misdirected her exegesis and resulted in a major misunderstanding. It would be a distraction from my current exegesis, however, if I discuss this problem here; therefore, I will take it up at the end of this section.

Now that I have done the exegesis of *uravu* and of *murai* separately, let me bring the meanings of the two together and formulate a working definition of what *uravumurai* in Tamil means. That should help to make clear the meaning of kinship according to the Tamil conceptualization of it.

3.53 *The Meaning of Kinship In Tamil*

The meaning of *uravumurai*[6] becomes clear when I bring together the two exegeses I have done above. The exegesis of *uravu* reveals that it carries strong connotations that connect it to romance, sex, marriage and alliance. The exegesis of the term *murai* has revealed that it basically means 'order' or 'regulation'. Putting the two together, I can say that the general word for kinship in Tamil; i.e., *uravumurai*, means *the ordering of kin relations*. This, then, is the definition of Tamil kinship. Whereas *contam* refers to any and every individual kin connection, *uravumurai* stands for a kinship system and the systematic ordering of kin relations such as through a kinship terminology.

Moreover, considering the strong connotations of the term *uravu*, I may say that the main purpose or function of ordering kin relations in Tamil kinship is to *regulate marriage.* Similarly, the additional meanings of *murai* which I have considered above tell me, for one thing, that the marriage regulation is done on the basis as to what is perceived by the community as being suitable and acceptable, and therefore prescribed/preferred. Tamil kinship is certainly *not* a random collection of kin relations (or *contam*) as Clark-Decès has portrayed it. Rather, our kinship is all about the ordering (which includes distinguishing, classifying and categorizing) of kin relations with the original purpose of *regulating* marriages on the basis of socially agreed upon prescriptions/preferences. As the term *murai* indicates, kinship classification is not random but systematic.

Isn't this what many social anthropologists, for over a century, have understood Dravidian kinship to be? Marriage is, indeed, the cornerstone of Dravidian kinship, even as the alliance theorists have said all along. In the Tamil social cosmology, each of kinship and marriage do not make sense in isolation and without the other. It is not an exaggeration to say that kinship and marriage are inseparable Tamil concepts. Lévi-Strauss was not wrong in equating marriage with kinship in his study of elementary structures. As I have shown in this section, the Tamil term *uravu* for kinship is also the term for marriage and alliance. Therefore, it is not farfetched to say kinship means marriage. Yet, this is what Clark-Decès opposes from start to finish. However well written may be her writing, I find her explications to be manipulated and misleading. I now take up one such argument from her text in the following sections and I leave it to the readers to judge the fairness of my criticism.

3.54 *Where Clark-Decès Goes Grievously Wrong*

Clark-Decès's exegesis of the term *murai* starts off well but ends up as distorted, as happened with her earlier exegesis of *contam*. In the instance of *contam*, she conflated kinship with ownership. In her explication of *murai* she conflates kinship with violence. It is unclear why she turns a blind eye to kinship as alliance, yet has no problem with seeing kinship as violence.

Her exegesis begins well enough with the statement that "the word *murai* has classificatory meanings, designating the specific terms used to distinguish kinship relations one from another" (2014: 42). Here she takes support from none other than her bête noire, Dumont (1986: 301). She does a good job of presenting the different meanings of *murai* as 'order,' 'approved course of conduct', 'regularity', 'right,' 'rule,' 'petition,' etc., and even connects it to the acceptability of marriage with a certain kin category. Then, suddenly, she changes course by taking a serious misstep to bring in another Tamil word *vanmurai.*

The only reason Clark-Decès makes this connection between kinship and violence is that the Tamil word for violence, namely *vanmurai*, contains '*murai*' in it. Just like her earlier mistake of making a semantic connection between different meanings of the polysemous term *contam* that leads her to interpret kinship as ownership, the error she now makes on the basis of the formal similarity between *murai* and *vanmurai* is also misleading. Her explication is marred by faulty reasoning. The terms *murai* and *vanmurai* are opposites. We can say that *vanmurai* is the lack of *murai*. But how is it justifiable to say that the intent and goal of *murai* is *vanmurai*? How can *murai* (order) be the cause of *vanmurai* (disorder/violence)? Isn't this the same as saying that where there is no light there will be darkness and therefore the light is the cause of the darkness, so the intent and goal of light is to bring darkness and the light must bear the blame for the darkness? This does not make sense, yet that appears to be the reasoning that Clark-Decès's argument follows.

Some of her concluding statements are puzzling. She says that violence is "the cultural intent" and that the "goal" of the Tamil people is "to do violence" and "to bully" the less powerful kin until they retreat to insignificance (2014: 54). It is striking how she finds ways to place the blame on Tamil kinship for every evil she seems to have seen or heard in the region of her fieldwork. In a section of her chapter titled "The Legitimacy of Violence," she describes how the South Indian kinship hurts more than it helps, how the families in these communities are "not automatically 'loving' or 'happy'" and how their kinship is an "unbearable chain" for the Tamil people to bear (Clark-Decès 2014: 98). Such provocative statements punctuate her description of Tamil kinship while it masquerades as being an interpretive approach. It seems to me that Clark-Decès brings her materialistic worldview and individualistic ethic to bear upon her interpretation of a South India community that is, instead, I assert, built on social morality and collectivism. Her advocacy for local perspectives at the beginning of her text appears to be mere lip service as she ends up making several faulty conclusions that seem to be heavily influenced by her own deep biases.

It is unfortunate that Clark-Decès selectively chooses case studies that report on the violence, competitions and conflicts in the community of the area of her fieldwork and then uses these cases to misrepresent Tamil kinship as something random and chaotic, thereby causing disunity among kin. It is not hard to see that her goal is to show that the Tamil kinship is the exact opposite of 'cohesion' and 'integration– ' the very aspects the structuralist studies celebrated in the past. No one will disagree that there is a potential for conflicts among kin because there is constant interaction among them. But should we take that to mean that conflict is the *function* of kinship? Rather, conflict is a *malfunction* of kinship. A system is not defined by its malfunction. Therefore, conflicts cannot be used to define Tamil kinship.

I can say with confidence that for every case of conflict among relatives that is reported in the newspapers in Tamil Nadu, there are tens of thousands of unreported cases where kinship connections actually deter individuals from resorting to violent actions, restrain people from pursuing revenge, prompt them to seek peaceful resolutions and reconciliation, and provide the motivation to forgive and let go of offenses and to prefer and preserve unity in the extended family as much as possible. This is because the Tamil view kinship relations as precious and of enduring value. People generally are embarrassed to take a relative to court. On the other hand, people may not care as much about reconciliation and peacemaking if the conflict is with those who are unrelated or distantly related. Clark-Decès failed to see all of this. Instead, she quotes some informants who were only too willing to tell her about incidents of gore and violence. She also cites from a local newspaper known for sensationalist, graphic descriptions of horrific incidents in order to make her point that kinship leads to terrible violence. The reason why cases of cruelty get reported in cheap tabloids is that such news sell for their shock value. Sadly, these seem to have captured Clark-Decès's attention and imagination as well.

Adding to the highly arbitrary semantic and morphological connections made previously, Clark-Decès makes a crude and unnecessary symbolic connection when she compares family conflicts over kinship rights to the bullfights and the ram fights that are celebrated traditional sports in the particular region where she did her data collection. She describes the outcomes of these sports and compares them with the rivalry in the families of some of her informants. It is unfair to describe Tamil kinship and alliance simply as a cruel game. What she did not seem to realize is that the Tamils have a name for these traditional

sports, which is *veera vilayattu,* and this translates as 'valorous games'. What the local people understand as valor is what she calls violence. Despite so much initial championing for 'local exegeses', she lets down the local informant understanding in the end. A question comes to my mind. Are not wildly dangerous sports known throughout the world? In her own country, do not men hurl themselves at each other at insane velocities, often resulting in grievous injuries, and call it a game of football? Yet, these men are considered to be heroes and celebrities in their own nation.

3.60 Rights Versus Reciprocity

Accusing the alliance theorists of having created the "false impression" that the Tamils systematically and indiscriminately marry cross-cousins, Clark-Decès sets out to correct that view and looks for evidence to the contrary. She presents what she calls two 'new observations', with which she claims to expose "the selective and discriminatory aspects" of Tamil marriage. She labels these two as 'side' and 'seniority' and these 'aspects' of Tamil marriage alliance are supposed to reveal how unsystematic and random marriage alliances are. I shall first determine what she means by these terms and how she uses them to refute reciprocal exchange. Then I will examine if, indeed, these are real issues impacting Tamil alliances.

3.61 *The Issue of Side*

What is 'side'? According to Clark-Decès, the cross-cousin marriage rule does not view the Mother's Brother's Daughter (MBD) and the Father's Sister's Daughter (FZD) as equals. Rather, only one side; i.e., either only the FZD or only the MBD, is the 'right' girl to marry. This preference for one side (or *pakkam*) over the other, she says, is discriminatory, and therefore is lacking in the spirit of reciprocity.

First of all, this is misinformation. Generally speaking, the Tamil have equal access to both sides because both the Father's Sister's Daughter (FZD) as well as the Mother's Brother's Daughter (MBD) are marriageable categories. Neither one of them is more marriageable or more accessible than the other. My own extended family, which lives spread out in several villages, abounds in both FZD and MBD marriages. Sister exchanges (known as direct exchange) are also well-known. Only the so-called *harijan* or *paraiyar* (the untouchable) community is known to have a preference for FZD marriage (Deliège 1987: 225, 230), while the opposite of this; i.e., a preference for the MBD as bride, is found among the so-called high caste groups like the Brahmin communities. The rest of Tamil Nadia; i.e., the vast majority of the South Indian societies, do not show the 'discrimination' that Clark-Decès uses to argue that Tamil marriages exclude reciprocity and are one-sided. Based on their study of this large majority, researchers in the past have described Tamil alliances as bilateral because of their preference for cross-cousins regardless side. The FZD as well as the MBD, are equally marriageable categories. Therefore, Clark-Decès's use of 'side' as the basis to discredit reciprocity in Tamil marriage, in general, is untenable.

Secondly, Clark-Decès says that there is no reciprocity in the marriage with the Father's Sister's Daughter. She is not the first one to say so; she only follows the same claim made by Lévi-Strauss. Actually, this involves a serious misunderstanding. The FZD alliance is, indeed, a bilateral exchange, but with a fundamental difference. In a *direct* exchange, the bride-giver is also a bride-taker because he gives and takes a bride *at the same time* and *in the same generation*. The FZD exchange is different in that the bride-giver in one generation does not also take a bride at the same time, but waits a generation in order to take his sister's daughter as a bride for his son, thus completing *the cycle of reciprocity*. The bride must be returned after a gap of only a *single* generation and not after two or three generations. This is a *systematic* delay and not an arbitrary one. The Madia tribe, with whom I have been working for more than three decades, practices the FZD alliance. Starting with my PhD thesis, I have been periodically writing on their kinship and alliances, describing what a uniquely beautiful form of reciprocity theirs is. My understanding of the Madia kinship system counters her fallacious claim that a preference for FZD does away with mutuality and reciprocity and the concept of exchange. Nothing could be farther from the truth. The FZD alliance is reciprocity par excellence (Vaz 2011).

On the other hand, it is true that reciprocity is, indeed, absent where there is a preference for the Mother's Brother's Daughter (MBD). Even though Clark-Decès says this is the case, she has not presented any analysis to show the reason for lack of reciprocity, which is why I must add the following. In the MBD marriage there is no real exchange of brides because the bride-giver is always a giver and the bride-taker is always a taker in any given generation. Here, the debt of a bride is never returned to the original giver. Thus, the preference for the MBD would create a hierarchy, and that is indeed a sociological fact arising in the high caste groups. I have already mentioned that the MBD marriage is practiced among groups in the Brahmin community. It is important to note that the Brahmins are not a Dravidian society to begin with and therefore the lack of reciprocity in this community's marriage practice (i.e., MBD alliance) cannot be used to define the form of Dravidian kinship. (The Brahmin kinship and alliance is said to be a 'Dravidianized' kinship system).

It can be said generally about the South India societies that there is no rule prescribing either the MBD or the FZD as a bride. It varies in each individual case, depending on many factors that help determine compatibility; i.e., education, location, cordiality between the two families, economic parity, height, weigh, etc.

3.62 *The Issue of Seniority*

According to Clark-Decès's second 'new observation', the cross-cousin marriage rule among the Kaḷḷar community does not apply equally to all young boys and girls, but rather is dependent on 'seniority'. This, too, is actually a non-issue. Even if it were an issue in the individual cases that Clark-Decès knew about, it would not qualify to become one of the tenets of Tamil marriage as she makes it seem. Side or seniority is something that I have not heard expressed in any of the discussions I have sat through regarding arrangement of marriages in the social circles about which I am knowledgeable. In my case, as well, more than a handful of classificatory male cross-cousins had parents who would come to talk to my parents, but there was never a mention made of either side or seniority. While I do not think it is worth the reader's time to delve into this non-issue, let me briefly mention two real issues in Tamil alliances that the author may have mistaken as being a preference for seniority.

Suppose there are two families, or clans, that have been exchanging brides over many generations. They usually are keen to arrange the marriage of their first-born children. Why? Not because of some kind of requirement for 'seniority', but in order to make sure that an alliance does, indeed, take place in the current generation between the two historic partners and while the grandparents or great grandparents on either side are still alive, can witness the renewal of the alliance, and be present to bless the wedding. The 'golden oldies' tend to be sentimental and quite anxious to see that the alliance partnerships from the past are continued in successive generations as much as is possible. It is a cliché for a grandparent to make a demand like the following: "I cannot go into my grave in peace without seeing my grandchildren get married. I must see the old exchange partnership continue." This is also the standard 'last wish' of a dying old man or woman.

It is the senior women who are more likely to use such emotional demands and not so much the senior men. My grandmothers did this, and so did my mother and her sisters. (Clark-Decès has used examples like this as an illustration of *woman power* among the Tamils, though she does it only in reference to the uncle-niece marriage. In fact, it applies to all marriage alliances.) I was still in graduate school when my Mother's elder Sister placed in my hands the new born baby boy of her *youngest* Son, and pronounced a blessing over me saying that the boy would someday be my son-in-law. Now, I am the *youngest* in my family and I am relatively closer in age to the youngest of her four sons. Her older sons, too, had boys, but she knew that the children of her older sons would be much too old for my daughter (yet to be born at that time). The reason why she thought my (future) daughter was likely to marry this particular boy is that this boy would be closest in age to her. The issue is not one of seniority, but of relative age.

The Kaḷḷars are quite particular that the groom should be older than the bride. This is known as a *positive age bias* which, I suspect, Clark-Decès may have mistakenly interpreted as a seniority principle.

The positive age bias does restrict the choice of the female cross-cousin. If the closest female cross-cousin bride happens to be older than the male cross-cousin, she would, in all likelihood, be rejected and one of the younger ones, even if only a classificatory cross-cousin, would be considered instead. It is in such situations that the second issue, one of *kin distance*, comes into play. This is another criterion which the Tamils use while looking for a bride, and this may be what Clark-Decès mistook as an issue of rank or hierarchy.

Kin distance is the criterion applied when a man has no female cross-cousin who is younger than him and thus suitable to marry, in which case he has to choose a bride from among his classificatory cross-cousins. Whether a relative is close or distant can be judged by the number of kin connections one has to trace through to define the relation. For analysts, it is approximately the number of alphabetic characters needed to denote the kin status. Thus, a FZD or MBD (three letters) is the closest female cross-cousin. The MFyBSD or the FFSDD (5 letters) is a closer cross-cousin than the MeZSWFyBD (7 letters). The point is that the closer the kin distance the better the chance for a marriage alliance to work out.

Both the positive age bias and the kin distance are real issues for us, but neither one is a discriminating factor. Moreover, the positive age bias cannot be cited to discredit the theory of Dravidian alliance in general because such age bias is not found in the Central Dravidian kinship classification. Neither can we define kin distance as discriminatory because the motivation here is not to *reject* but to *include* even the distant relatives as much as possible in the alliance exchange. Both age bias and kin distance work *for* the cross-cousin alliance rule and not *against* it.

In conclusion, let me reiterate that marriage alliance, as it is known among the Kaḷḷars, as well as among the majority of Tamil peoples, is not based on issues that Clark-Decès has labeled as side or seniority. Even if such preferences or requirements were present in some cases that she had come across, it is hard to imagine that such issues have had significant impact on the rule of cross-cousin marriage. Clark-Decès has blown these up to distorted proportions and does so with the sole purpose, I suggest, for projecting Dravidian kinship and alliance as being discriminatory and unsystematic. Her main goal seems to be to somehow dismantle Dumont's alliance theory. In her effort to do this, she aims her critique at Dravidian kinship and alliances, which is like trying to chip away at the Himalayas with a chisel.

CHAPTER III

4.00 THE MOTHER'S BROTHER

Clark-Decès's biases are most evident in the last battle of the war she wages against the alliance theory. The last section (Section 4.3) of her 2019 article, as well as Chapter 4 in her 2014 book (pp 76-97) brandishes the uncle-niece marriage as her sure-fire weapon with which to undo the very notion of reciprocal exchange. Her ambitious attempt, though, does not do anything more than simply make a victim of the most sentimental of the South Indian kin connections; i.e., that of the Mother's Brother. While one could attribute her denial of the fundamentality of the opposition principle to a lack of understanding of the deep and intricate structure of South Indian kinship, and, likewise, her misinterpretations of the meaning of the key kinship vocabularies in Tamil to a lack of expertise in the local language[7], it is hard to make similar excuses for her portrayal of the Tamil Mother's Brother because it is founded on too many false premises and is built on unsound arguments. Therefore, in this chapter, I bring these issues to light, one by one.

4.10 Pitting the Uncle-Niece Marriage Against the Cross-Cousin Marriage

Clark-Decès says that a young girl's uncle (specifically her Mother's *younger* Brother) is the holder of the first right *urimai* to marry her because this man has more claim on her than does her male cross-cousin. Thus, she says, "the man comes before any 'right' boy" (Clark-Decès 2019: 96). The problem is that she argues for the uncle-niece marriage as though this alliance stands by itself, and as though there are communities in South India that practice this type of alliance exclusively. Caste groups that practice the uncle-niece marriage *exclusively* do not exist in Tamil Nadu. Rather, uncle-niece marriages exist alongside cross-cousin marriage practices. The categorical distinction which she makes between the uncle-niece marriage and the cross-cousin marriages is artificial. It is a fallacy to treat the uncle-niece marriage as a distinct rule and as a prescription in the same sense as this occurs with the cross-cousin marriage.

The uncle-niece marriage cannot be practiced regularly over a few generations for the simple reason that the uncle and the niece belong in two different generational levels and it is impossible to find in every generation an uncle who is close in age to his elder Sister's Daughter so they could be a match. *This is a practical problem*. It would be an extremely rare case where an old uncle gets married to a very young niece. And it is impossible to imagine such a thing happening consistently. If it cannot be practiced regularly over many generations, then it is not even qualified to be a marriage rule or prescription.

What can be reasonably said is that the uncle-niece marriage falls under the general rubric of cross-cousin alliance because it can, and does, coexist with either the *bilateral* cross-cousin alliance (which is widespread in the Tamil societies) or the matrilateral cross-cousin alliance (which is widespread among the so-called high caste or Brahmin groups). The uncle-niece marriage makes no structural difference either for the bilateral kin terminology or for the dual social organization as kin and affine. Thus, it is not a distinct marriage alliance to begin with. This marriage practice neither has an independent existence nor can it. Let me explain.

When the uncle-niece marriage occurs in a second consecutive generation, it automatically turns into a cross-cousin marriage. *This is a logical problem*. Suppose my brother has married our elder sister's daughter (this would be the first uncle-niece marriage) and they had a daughter. The daughter born to them could marry her maternal uncle who is my sister's son provided that the son is younger than his sister mentioned in the previous sentence (this would be the second uncle-niece marriage that occurs in the very next generation). In the second uncle-niece marriage, the bride is both a niece and a cross-cousin to the groom, and therefore this is simultaneously an uncle-niece as well as a cross-cousin alliance. The diagram (see 2019: Fig 4.1) provided by Clark-Decès demonstrates that when the uncle-niece marriage is practiced consecutively it inevitably turns into a cross-cousin marriage, and to be specific, a marriage with a Mother's Brother's Daughter. The point is, firstly, if the uncle-niece marriage does not have an in-

dependent existence, it is not a marriage rule in its own right. And secondly, if the uncle-niece marriage practiced a second consecutive time reverts to being a cross-cousin marriage, how can it be used as a challenge and a competition to the cross-cousin alliance that is the standard practice?

Note that the fact that the uncle-niece marriage automatically turns into a MBD wedding when done consecutively over two generations explains why the uncle-niece marriage is more common among the Brahmins who prefer the matrilateral (MBD) alliance, while it is relatively uncommon among the caste groups that practice bilateral alliance.

Another important fact to consider is that the practice of uncle-niece marriage seems to be totally absent in the Central Dravidian societies. In sharp contrast to the South Indian societies, among the Central Dravidian peoples the uncle-niece marriage is considered to be an abomination. *This presents a theoretical problem*. The Central Dravidian societies (most of them are smaller tribes) prescribe marriage with the patrilateral cross-cousin (i.e., a man marries his Father's Sister's Daughter [FZD]), and I can simply say, without going into the details, that the FZD alliance is incompatible with the uncle-niece marriage. If the numerous Central Dravidian societies prohibit the uncle-niece marriage, how can it be used as the basis for re-theorizing the 'Dravidian alliance', in general?

Another fallacy evident in Clark-Decès's argument is that the (bilateral/matrilateral) cross-cousin marriage and the uncle-niece marriage impact the structure and organization of a society differently. She says that cross-cousin marriages keep the bride's and the groom's descents distinct whereas the uncle-niece marriages conflate the two forms of descent. This is not the case. This, and other such fallacies, are discussed below.

4.20 Presenting the Uncle-Niece Marriage as the Commonest Practice

In her comparison of the percentages of the cross-cousin marriages and the uncle-niece marriages, Clark-Decès gives a wrong report, saying that the latter used to be more frequent than the former. Let us examine the data she has quoted from two authors (Brenda Beck and Anthony Good) and on the basis of which she has made this claim (see note #4 in Clark-Decès 2019: 102). Beck apparently recorded 525 marriages from the Konku area of Tamil Nadu in which 5.9 percent were marriages with the matrilateral cross-cousin, 5 percent were marriages with the patrilateral cross-cousin and 6.5 percent were marriages with the niece. Good apparently recorded 194 marriages in Tirunelveli district in Tamil Nadu and found that 5.6 percent of them were with the matrilateral cross-cousin, 6.3 percent were with the patrilateral cross-cousin and 8.2 percent were with the niece.

In both of the instances that Clark-Decès has quoted, the occurrence of uncle-niece marriages is actually less than the occurrence of cross-cousin marriages. According to Beck's data, the cross-cousin marriage alliances represent a total of 10.9 percent of the marriages versus the uncle-niece marriages that form 6.5 percent of the marriages. Similarly, Good's data shows that the total of cross-cousin marriage alliances is 11.9 percent and that of uncle-niece marriages is 8.2 percent of the marriages. However, this is not how Clark-Decès presents these data. Clark-Decès keeps the alliances with the two female cross-cousins separate, as though these are two distinct types of marriages. By doing this, the percentage of the uncle-niece alliances is now the highest. She presented the marriages in this manner in the form of what she refers to as a 'new observation' in which she claimed that either only the patrilateral or only the matrilateral cross-cousin, but not both, is a preferred bride among the Tamils, which is not correct. It is only by separating the patrilateral and the matrilateral alliances that it appears as if the uncle-niece marriage is the most popular and favored marriage in Tamil society, which is not the case.

As far as my knowledge goes, based on several decades of observation, the uncle-niece marriage is usually resorted to only when a cross-cousin marriage is not possible (due to non-availability or to `negative age bias, or other such practical problems). And, as mentioned earlier, the uncle-niece marriage is more common among the Brahmins (Subrahmanyan 1967) who prefer the matrilateral (MBD) alliance (and this preference has been well documented in the anthropological literature on the South Indian Brahmin communities). It is very rare among the caste groups that practice bilateral alliance (as stated by Dumont and quoted by Clark-Decès). Among the Dravidian tribes of Central India, uncle-niece marriage is an abomination and a defilement that makes ritual cleansing necessary.

Taking the Tamil Kaḷḷars as an example once again, I find in my own extended family a dozen cross-cousin marriages but only one uncle-niece marriage. I also carried out a survey among my Tamil friends and contacts. They hail from different parts of Tamil Nadu and belong to a variety of different caste groups. All of the feedback I received, with only one exception, reported several cross-cousin marriages in their extended families but either none or at most two MyB-eZD marriages. (The one exception was the report I got from the Sivaganga district.)

The uncle-niece marriage among the Tamils, then, is more situational than preferential. In ages past when couples liked to have a lot of children and kept having children even after their oldest children were married and had started to have their own children, the uncle-niece marriage was more of a possibility. That created a situation where the oldest daughter in a family would have a daughter who would be close in age to the last of the sons born to her parents, and, thus, the two could be married. Such large families are extremely rare these days. Therefore, any report that says the uncle-niece marriage is more common or more favored in South India must be treated with skepticism.

In the research data that Clark-Decès cites (see #4 in her Notes) I have already shown that the cross-cousin marriages (combining the FZD and MBD marriages) are more frequent than the MyB-eZD marriages. Still, in her note #5, she accuses Dumont unfairly of having overlooked the "most common and most valued marriage in South India." Initially I was intrigued by Clark-Decès's arguments in favor of the uncle-niece marriage superseding and supplanting the cross-cousin alliance, but now I find that the data do not support her argument.

4.30 Praises for the Uncle-Niece Marriage as the Most Beneficial

A point which she repeatedly makes and on which she bases many of her arguments is that the uncle-niece marriage is the "most preferred" in Tamil Nadu and they "praised" it. She has listed four reasons why the Tamils "praise" the uncle-niece marriages the most. 1. This marriage allows the daughters to stay close by and people do not like their daughters to move far away. 2. People do not want to lose money and jewels by marrying their daughters to people who are not relatives. When marriages are repeated in subsequent generations, the valuable gifts given to the bride, such as gold and cash, keep rotating with the families involved.3, A daughter-in-law who is already a kin is more affectionate and takes better care of the parents-in-law when they get old than an outsider would. 4. Marriages with the kin are more stable as problems within the family do not escalate.

Yet each of these four statements are also the reasons why the Tamils say they prefer the cross-cousin marriage alliances. Therefore, asserting that these four statements prove that the uncle-niece marriage is preferred are simply misleading.

4.40 Preeminence of the Niece (eZD) over the Female Cross-Cousin (MBD)

Taking her lead from Anthony Good, Clark-Decès also presents the niece (elder Sister's Daughter or eZD) as surpassing in favorability the female cross-cousin (particularly Mother's Brother's Daughter or MBD). I will respond to Good first and then to Clark-Decès.

Anthony Good has apparently theorized that when the uncle-niece marriage is practiced *regularly* the MBD becomes "conflated" with the other kin category, the eZD (Clark-Decès 2014: 80). However, this makes no sense.

First of all, I have already shown why a 'regular' practice of uncle-niece marriage between two groups over a few generations is not practical.

The second problem in Good's theoretical conjecture is that neither the MBDy nor the eZD is identified by specific kin terms. In the Tamil language there are no distinct kin terms to denote these relatives. (Only the MBD who is elder to the speaker is recognized with a specific kin term: MBDe = *athachi*.) Therefore, it is not a sound argument to say that the kin categories MBDy and eZD become conflated since these two relatives are not recognized as distinct kin categories to begin with. Further, in the Tamil language, there is no equivalent to the English kin terms 'niece' and 'nephew'. As a Tamil speaker, I consider the children of my same-sex siblings to be sons and daughters and the children of my opposite

sex siblings to be sons-in-law and daughters-in-law. When Good and Clark-Decès make sweeping statements about the niece and the cousin, they seem to be thinking of the niece and cousin categories in their own societies. This is an example of what happens when anthropologists neglect to study the local kin terminologies yet claim to understand the cultural meanings of kinship as it relates to indigenous practices.

Thirdly, in the Tamil families, people can often trace close kin connections in more than one way. This, in itself, is not a problem. For example, a man's Father's Sister's Daughter can very well be also his Mother's Brother's Daughter (due to sister exchanges in the previous generation). In the rare case of uncle-niece marriages occurring over 2 consecutive generations, the man ends up having a wife who is both his MBDy and his eZD (and she herself has understood this to be the case). My point is that these two kin connections are not incompatible with each other and there is really no competition between these two kin statuses. In any case, once the woman becomes his Wife, the earlier relations (where she was originally the groom's eZD and his MBD) take a back seat. Therefore, the question which Clark-Decès raises as to which one of the two original connections has a priority or preeminence over the other, is irrelevant. And so is her observation that these two relations get conflated.

Clark-Decès (2014: 80) takes this discussion further and adds her own twist to it by saying that, rather than a *conflation*, it is a case of *occlusion* where the maternal female cross-cousin (MBD) entirely disappears:

> …repetitive marriage with the elder sister's daughter dislodges the mother's brother's daughter, and if the latter girl "goes missing" (at least the category she occupies dies), then she cannot be wed.

What I am saying here is that repetition of uncle-niece marriages rules out the possibility of matrilateral cross-cousin marriage. All such arguments are built on issues that are not valid and therefore they do not appear to make sense.

In fact, it can be argued that the opposite is true. One can say that the groom in the uncle-niece marriage ritually gives up his role of being the MB, but he does nothing to indicate that he gives up his role as a male cross-cousin. Let me explain. A Mother's Brother plays a key role in each of the life cycle rites in a nephew's or niece's life (such as ear-piercing, puberty, wedding etc., as Clark-Decès has discussed at length in her book). The most significant of his roles as a Mother's Brother is, of course, during the wedding of his niece/nephew. The Mother's Brother is the first to sign in the *muhurta-olai,* or 'the agreement to marry', which the two families; i.e., that of the boy and that of the girl, enter into and sign prior to the printing of the wedding card. The Mother's Brother of the boy and the Mother's Brother of the girl give their consent first by signing the agreement even before the parents and the key kin in the extended families do so. Securing the consents of the Mother's Brothers on either side is done first in full recognition of the possible risk involved because the Mother's Brother has the authority to object to, and even cancel, a marriage proposal. During a wedding ceremony, as well, the Mother's Brother is the one to lead his niece/nephew to the wedding podium (similar to the role the Father of a bride plays in the traditional western weddings by bringing her to the altar). After that, the bride's Mother's Brother hands the garland to her and the groom's Mother's Brother hands a garland to the groom. The exchange of the garlands is when the boy and the girl publicly give their consent to getting married to each other.

The role the Mother's Brother plays in the wedding of a niece or nephew is known as *maman-sthanam*, (*maman* means Mother's Brother and *sthanam* means place or role). Now, the question that is most relevant to my discussion is this: Who plays the role of the Mother's Brother in the uncle-niece marriage where the Mother's Brother is the groom if the groom is the only Brother of the bride's Mother? Does the groom also play the role of Mother's Brother to his bride? Or, is the ritual of the *maman-sthanam* cancelled? The answer to both of these questions is "no." One of the groom's classificatory Brothers is brought in to perform the *maman-sthanam* role. If this is the case, isn't the groom giving up

his position and role, as the only Mother's Brother, to his niece who is now his bride? If so, can't I then argue that the bride's relation to him as a niece is no more existent or, at the least, no more a priority? Shall I then say that the niece (eZD) 'goes missing' from the day of her wedding because the man relinquishes his role as her Mother's Brother in their wedding ceremony? Couldn't I interpret this, instead, to mean that the bride's position as the man's niece is actually transient and that the more prominent female cross-cousin "dislodges" the niece?

Thus, I assert, it is not hard to turn Clark-Decès's entire argument on its head. I bring this up only for argument's sake and to show how unproductive, even nonsensical, such arguments can be. As I mentioned earlier, whether the eZD or the MBD is a predominant kin is not an issue at all. Why, then, does Clark-Decès make it an issue? As far as I can see, it is crucial for her to do so because she must somehow make the "cross-cousin disappear" backstage and push the uncle-niece connection into the spotlight. Clark-Decès uses the uncle-niece marriage as the final shot in her arsenal aimed at destroying the alliance theory. In order to bring it into prominence, she must make the cross-cousin alliance look weak by comparison to the uncle-niece marriage. In what ways, then, would the uncle-niece marriage help her destroy the alliance theory? I answer this question in the following sections.

4.50 Picturing Mother's Brother as a Filial Kin

Attacking the structuralist view where the Mother's Brother is essentially the Father's affine, Clark-Decès uses the Tamil word for Mother's Brother, *tay-maman,* wherein the word *tay* stands for Mother. She uses this as proof that the Mother's Brother relation is traced through the Mother rather than through the Father. There are problems with her argument. First of all, *tay-maman* is not a kin term. Another term she invokes for Mother's Brother is *ammon*, and since *amma* is the kin term for Mother, she reiterates the same point. However, using the term *ammon* for Mother's Brother is not popular. The kin term used for Mother's Brother is *maman*. And *maman* is also the term for the father-in-law (Husband's Father and Wife's Father), the term for Father's sister's Husband, the term for Husband, and also the term for elder Sister's Husband. To say the same thing as a kinship term equation:

> *maman* = Mother's Brother, Husband's/Wife's Father, Father's Sister's Husband, Husband, elder Sister's Husband.

Look at all the kin relations who are placed in the same kin category as the Mother's Brother — isn't every one of them an affine? This shows that the Mother's Brother is an affine, *pure and simple*, just as Dumont pointed out. There is a reason when, and why, the Mother's Brother is referred to as '*tay-maman*' (but is never addressed as such) only in the context of a ritual or a ceremony when such a specific reference is necessary. The wedding card in Tamil is an example of this. The Mother's Brother has specific roles to play in the wedding of his niece/nephew and that is why his position as *tay-maman* is mentioned as such in the Tamil wedding cards. But in other situations with no ritual significance, the Mother's Brother is referred to as *maman* and addressed as *mama* — thus, the same kind of kin as the rest of those listed above. Therefore, Clark-Decès's description of the connection to the Mother's Brother as filiation rather than affinity indicates that she has got it upside down. Such a misrepresentation would not have happened if adequate attention had been paid to the reference and address terms with which to understand kin categorization in a Dravidian society. Thus, the kin term for the Mother's Brother in the Tamil language is not *tay-maman* but simply *maman*.

Clark-Decès also tries another way to show that the Mother's Brother is a filial kin. She equates the Mother's Brother to the Mother herself and describes him as "another mother" because he is as affectionate and as generous a giver as only a mother can be. She describes the Tamil Father's authoritativeness as "aggression" and shows it as the opposite of the "affection" that characterizes the Mother's Brother.

This affection supposedly makes the Mother's Brother a filial kin. However, no amount of such concoctions can convince a Tamil that the Mother's Brother is not an affinal kin.

Filiation is a concept tied to descent. Using this concept as Clark-Decès has done only causes confusion for her readers. If the Mother's Brother is indeed a filial kin, then how do I explain his joking behavior that characterizes him and sets him apart from the Father's Brothers who are the real filial kin? Moreover, if the Mother's Brother is a filial kin, then how does a woman marry him? The attempt by Clark-Decès to position the Mother's Brother in the descent line through the Mother is incorrect and misleading because the Tamil communities are typically partilineal societies and I do not know of any exceptions.

4.60 Conflation of Descent and Alliance

There is only fiction and no fact in Clark-Decès's account in which the uncle-niece marriage conflates the two descent lines; i.e., the Father's and the Mother's Brother's. She says that through the uncle-niece marriage, the Mother's Brother gets to reproduce in his mother's line. This argument makes no sense. Let me illustrate how this cannot be true.

Let me take the case of the Kaḷḷar community I discussed in Chapter I and let me say that a Sendapiriyar man marries his niece who is a Sedhurar girl. Even if we imagined that an uncle-niece marriage occurred regularly between these two families over several successive generations, the Sendapiriyar sons would still belong only to the Sendapiriyar descent line, just as the Sedhurar sons would remain in the Sedhurar clan. A Sendapiriyar man would never reproduce in the Sedhurar lineage or clan. There is no way these two descent lines could ever become conflated. The uncle-niece marriage will always be an alliance between two exchange units; i.e., between two clans. The uncle-niece marriages cannot, and do not, create problems for the systematic practice of bilateral alliance, for the bilateral kin terminology, or for overall dual organization as *pangali* and *uravumuraiyan*,

But in Clark-Decès's fictional account the repetitive uncle-niece marriage conflates the two and a dual social organization that anthropologists celebrated in the past collapses around the uncle-niece marriage. Quoting Dumont as having said that the Piramalai Kaḷḷars "condemn the uncle-niece" marriages, she presumes that the reason for such condemnation must be the power of the uncle-niece marriage to disrupt a clear distinction between kin and affine. This, I assert, has been her end goal all along. This is the very reason why she has put forth the many false and misleading propositions listed above. Her attempts to show that the uncle-niece marriage is distinct from a bilateral marriage, that it is the most popular and most desired marriage, and that the Mother's Brother is a filial kin, are all intended for this one goal: to be able to reiterate, once again, that the kin and affine distinction is neither feasible nor stable. If there is no distinction between the two, the very idea of 'exchange' is not valid. Clark-Decès wants to replace exchange with entitlement. The following is how she describes the way entitlement works in the uncle-niece marriage, and it turns out to be a parody of the uncle relation.

4.70 Cancellation of Mutuality and Reciprocity

Clark-Decès's observation that the Mother's Brother is a generous and sacrificial giver is a fact. His gifts to his sister and her children are usually unspecified and unreciprocated, which makes him look like a "one-sided" giver. The Tamil women receive gifts from their brothers throughout their lifetimes, not only during the life-cycle event in their own lives but also during those of their husbands and every one of their children, as well. However, this is certainly *not* so for the reasons she cites. The real reason for this is that Tamil women traditionally do not receive any share in the parental inheritance. Only the sons/brothers get to share in the inheritance in the form of immovable properties (thus the name *pangalis* in reference to men of a lineage, meaning 'shareholders in the same inheritance'). The daughters/sisters are compensated with large amounts of gifts in the form of dowry either as cash or household items, or both, besides considerable jewelry. A woman who receives these gifts is not expected to give any return gift to her brothers or to his children.

In my case, by the time I got married my father had passed away and therefore my brother took my father's place and so has spent on my engagement function, my wedding, and, later on, for the delivery of my first child. He has, ever since, been giving large amounts of cash as well as expensive gifts to me and to my daughter as well. I have reciprocated only minimally, if at all, because I know I am not expected to do so. The gifts my husband, my daughter and I have been receiving from my brother are, in fact, a compensation given to me in increments throughout my life time simply because I do not get a share in the immovable properties that my parents left as part of inheritance. The value of my parents' properties would run into several millions, many times more than what I would ever receive as gifts from my brother. This is the reason why I do not have to reciprocate with return gifts.

Clark-Decès missed the main point of the gift-giving by the Tamil men to their sisters and their children, and she has made her own interpretation of it. She interprets that the MB's one-sided and unreciprocated gift-giving means a lack of mutuality. As there is no mutual exchange of gifts, so, she argues, there is no mutual exchange in the uncle-niece marriage. Therefore, she asserts, it "transcends mutuality" and falls outside of the Maussian paradigm of "reciprocity." Such is her commitment to the repudiation of concepts of exchange and reciprocity in Dravidian kinship! For the same purpose, she even makes a parody of the Tamil Mother's Brother.

It is on the basis of these many false premises and unsustainable arguments that Clark-Decès has reinterpreted the uncle-niece marriage and redefined who the Tamil Mother's Brother is. It is instructive to see the grievous and disastrous consequence of such an approach.

4.80 A Parody of the Tamil Mother's Brother

While, on the one hand, Clark-Decès describes the Mother's Brother as a personification of love and as 'another mother', she also presents a ridiculous picture of him when she writes: "the mother's younger brother has the freedom to come to his sister's house whenever he wishes, ransack the place, elope with her girl and joke about it, if it pleases him" (Clark-Decès 2019: 96). That these two images of the Mother's Brother are contradictory does not seem to have bothered her. In both of these descriptions the end seems to justify her means. In the first image, the Mother's Brother is conflated with the Mother and this is used by her to imply that the connection to the Mother's Brother is through the Mother rather than through the Father. Therefore, she argues, the Mother's Brother is a filial kin and not an affine. The second image is meant to show the popularity of the uncle-niece marriage among the Tamils, which is then used in her argument that structuralist ideas such as a stable opposition between kin and affine, reciprocity and exchange would all collapse in the face of repetitive uncle-niece marriages.

And this is not all. She claims that the full generosity of the Mother's Brother is manifested when the man makes ultimate sacrifices by marrying his niece. The man, she asserts:

> … relinquishes his sexual desire (because he is not exactly attracted by his niece), his autonomy and rank (he is dominated by his elder sister and mother), his 'right' to enter more profitable matrimonial transactions (he takes less [meaning dowry]), his political role in public life (his ability to form 'alliances' with other men) as well as his own independent line of descent (which mergers with that of his sister/mother) (Clark-Decès 2019: 98).

And why does the Mother's Brother relinquish all of that? Clark-Decès claims that he makes such ultimate sacrifices just "in order to reclaim the family women." She argues that his attempt to *keep* the women in the family is the opposite of *sending them away* as brides who then belong to a different social group. This serves as her proof that reciprocity is really not a value in Dravidian kinship.

There are more such claims. Clark-Decès goes on to say, by invoking psychology as well as citing from Hindu mythical stories, that the Mother's Brother would do all of these things as a mark of his devotion to the three women in his life: his Mother, his elder Sister and his elder Sister's Daughter. And "what is the reward or pay off" for all of his sacrifices? He gets to reproduce in his mother's direct line through

her daughter's daughter! and derives his ranking in public life "from his sacrificial relationship to mother and her daughter" (2019: 99). All of this is supposed to show "at the very least" that "the source of a man's kinship and ritual primacy lies in his surrendering to the mother's side." How about that! She turns Dravidian kinship into a battle field of the two sexes. In the end, it is female supremacy that wins out!

If she describes the uncle-niece marriage as "the best kind" of marriage it is because "its main orientation – women-centered, consanguineous, inward and sacrificial – is unique" (2019: 100) and because, in it, "women, the very gender group ignored by the French structuralists, prevail" (2019: 100). In this caricature, the Tamil Mother's Brother is shown as voluntarily taking a "weak position in the household" just so he can "keep the women at home" and even "put them (mother and elder sister) before men (fathers and older brothers)" (2019: 101). "In essence," says Clark-Decès, the Mother's Brother "sacrifices his masculinity, autonomy, and higher ranking in the household in order to give women first place in the world of kinship" (2019: 101). This is how a beloved kin in Tamil kinship, namely the Mother's Brother, is emasculated and sacrificed on the altar of feminist anthropology. Such an extreme step is the means by which Clark-Decès chose to condemn reciprocity in the Dravidian kinship and marriage. Neither the means nor the end makes any sense to me.

CHAPTER IV

5.00 THE CHALLENGE OF THE CENTRAL DRAVIDIAN KINSHIP

Despite being aware from the beginning that none of Clark-Decès's arguments against the structuralist approach and the alliance theory of Dravidian kinship can stand in the light of the Madia data, I still chose, in my first three chapters, to address, first of all, the key issues Clark-Decès has raised from the context of her own fieldwork, which is the Tamil Nadu, in order to be fair to her. In this chapter I present the data from the Madia people, a forest dwelling tribe in the Central Indian highlands, in support of the value of a structural approach and the validity of the alliance theory.

There are many advantages to bringing in the Madia data from the Central Indian Dravidian tribes as a test case to bear on the main arguments and claims that Clark-Decès has made about Dravidian kinship in general. Though the Madia kinship structure is extremely complex, the Madia tribe as a research field is the least complicated. The Madia have a much smaller population than the Tamils, and both the Madia social structure and the kinship terminology are entirely homogeneous. The unique features of the Madia kinship are hard to miss and are found uniformly throughout the Madia region. Unlike the Kallars, the Madia do not have a thousand clan titles but only about a hundred and do not have caste groups like the Tamils nor variations in alliance prescriptions to further complicate matters. Nor does the Madia language have many dialects. Most importantly, the practice of uncle-niece marriage is unheard of among the Madia and this means there is no room for the contrived arguments made by Clark-Decès about the uncle-niece marriage among the Tamils. For all of these reasons, the Madia make for an excellent ethnographic case that is valuable for the discussions presented in this article. Yet there is still more.

The Madia kinship system represents the central Dravidian as well as the proto-Dravidian. The Madia kinship happens to have several unique features that have been identified by different anthropologists as signs of great antiquity. Lévi-Strauss (1969) identified *patrilateral marriage* as the most ancient of alliances (though, ironically, he did not think this alliance would have major structural implications). Aberle (1967) identified *alternate generation mergers* as markers of great antiquity. Trautmann (1981: 237-239) noted the same about the *crossness* in G + 2 in the Madia data. Dziebel (2007: 245-247) used *self-reciprocal* and *super-reciprocal terms* as the criteria for determining the ancestry of kin terminologies and has mentioned the Gond[8] of Central India as an example. Trautmann (1981) and Parkin (1988)) have said that the Central Dravidian kinship "most closely represent Proto-Dravidian kinship system." They said so on the basis of the Madia data available to them at that time; i.e., to an incomplete list of Madia kin terms found in the appendix of a book written by a British administrative officer in colonized India (Grigson 1938: 305).

The data I use come from my first hand experiences while living among the Madia tribe for the last thirty years. My data are not only current but are also exhaustive. Being well acquainted with both the South and the Central Dravidian varieties of Dravidian kinship has helped me to see the Big Bang like transformations in Dravidian kinship. The only place the Madia data fit in is through their connections with the historical beginnings of Dravidian kinship (Vaz 2011). The Madia, indeed, represent the proto-Dravidian and it must be made clear that any theorizing on Dravidian kinship should include the Madia data (given the fact that a detailed analysis of any of the other Central Dravidian kinship systems is not yet available). Any claims and conclusions made about the general structure of Dravidian kinship can only be tentative until these are checked against the data from the Central Dravidian.

As I mentioned in my introduction to this article, it is the intriguing complexity of the Madia kinship terminology and its many unique features that are unknown in the Tamil kinship terminology that aroused my curiosity and motivated me to take up research on the Madia kinship system. Studying the Madia kinship system has proven to be a never-ending treasure hunt and particularly so since I started working on a paper (pending publication) in which I draw conceptual as well as structural parallels between the physical universe made of elementary particles and the Madia's social universe made of different types of kin. I am certain that the other Central Dravidian[9] kinship systems are anthropological gold mines waiting to be explored; there are quite a few of them and these could keep a generation of kinship

scholars fully engaged, digging into them. However, in this chapter, I will limit myself to the Madia as representative of the Central Dravidian and I will confine myself to only three issues that Clark-Decès has raised. These three issues are parity or the principle of opposition, the meaning of kinship in the local language and whether the terminology highlights reciprocity in marriage alliances or highlights entitlement and rights of ownership and the Mother's Brother and his status and role as a filial or as an affinal kin. As I will show, the Madia data prove Clark-Decès wrong about her objections to the alliance theory, her rejection of the structural approach and her dismissal of Dravidian kinship.

5.10 The Principle of Opposition or Parity

5.11 *The Parity Principle in the Madia Social Organization*

The Madia society is divided into four sociological sections. Originally these may have also been geographical sections but not anymore. Every member of the entire Madia population of one hundred and fifty thousand people fall into one of these four sections. There are no names or totems to mark these sections as being distinct from one another. Rather, each of the four sections has a specific number of 'gods' or *penk* [10] with which to distinguish each section from the other sections. Each section has between four and seven *penk*. Always no more than seven and no less than four. There are about 100 Madia clan titles, and each and every one of these belongs to one of these four sections, each of which is described as a *pen-mullu* or 'god-group'. The Madia inherit the god-number from their father, and the adults generally know their god-number even though they may have difficulty remembering the names of these gods. It's clear that the names of one's gods are not as significant as *how many* one has. The god-number serves as the social identification and without it one cannot be a Madia and thus one cannot belong.[11]

The god-number has an interesting function. The cardinal rule for alliance is that a Madia person marries a spouse with a different *number* of gods than one's own.[12] It is absolutely binding and non-negotiable that anyone who marries a spouse with the same number of gods as his/her own is considered defiled, will be ostracized and chased out of the village community. Though it is extremely rare, cases like this do happen, and such couples end up as wanderers for the rest of their lives as no village community will accept them as a couple and let them live among them.

The understanding among the Madia is that the people of the clans with the same god-number are one another's *jīva* who are believed to have a common descent and share in the same 'life' or *jīva*. The *jīva* are non-marriageable kin, whereas the clans with a different god-number are considered *eɽmi* or partners in marriage alliance. The *jīva* and *eɽmi* are the two major social categories or "social fields" (Edward 1970) and all of one's relatives fall into either one or the other of these two. The *jīva* and *eɽmi* are the 'us' and the 'them', and these translate into English as 'kin' and 'affine'.

My Madia friends are very surprised when I tell them that the Gonds are the only people known in the entire world with a *number system* on the basis of which to decide marriageability. Their classic response to this bit of information is: "How in the world do those people know *who marries whom*?"[13] This response reveals that the very purpose of the god-number system and the dual social organization as *jīva* and *eɽmi* is to regulate marriage alliances. What we see in the Madia god-group system is the undeniable presence, pervasiveness and purpose of the parity principle.

5.12 *Parity In Birth, Marriage, Death and Beyond*

The kin/affine distinction manifests in Madia peoples' behavior in ways similar to that of the Tamil people I described in Chapter I. Therefore, I will not give any more than just a few short sample anecdotes which indicate that parity is the lifeline of Madia social existence.

The Madia believe that when a boy baby is born, there is much rejoicing in the spirit-world among the departed who are the boy's *jīva* who apparently rejoice saying "a descendent is born unto us." However, on the other hand, when a girl baby is born, then it is the spirits of the girl's *eɽmi* who rejoice saying, "A bride is born unto us!"

When any old man in a family dies, those who are his *jīva* category gather to mourn. But his *eɽmi* groups do not observe the mourning as much. During rituals related to memorial services and death anniversaries, the *jīva* may cry and wail whereas the *eɽmi* will sing and dance to entertain the crowd that has gathered for the feast. One of the songs sung by the *eɽmi* group goes like this:

"What happened to you, old fellow? Rise up, oh rise up from the grave!"

The songs that the *eɽmi* sing are meant to tease and humiliate the *jīva* of the dead. The latter go about cooking and serving the crowd while the former enjoy the hospitality, and even criticize if anything about the feast falls short of their expectations. This kind of ritual opposition plays out even more prominently in a Madia wedding.

I could not believe my eyes when I witnessed a Madia wedding for the first time. There was a lot of commotion as the bride was being forcefully carried by her kin into the groom's house and the groom's kin gathered together to block the bride's pathway, demanding coins as payment. The women who were the bride's kin wailed and wept, just as they do during a funeral, with one hand on their heads. The men who were the bride's kin threw dust and messed up the groom's front yard, apparently to show that, as the bride-givers, they were superior to the bride-takers. The women sang popular wedding songs with which they teased and shamed the groom's kin. (This singing can get ugly sometimes, accusing them of incest and what not.) The groom's kin patiently endure such humiliations, thus accepting their inferior position as the bride-takers. They act as humble recipients of the favor of a bride being given to them by the bride-givers. In another Madia wedding that I attended, the groom's family took their revenge by adding kerosene oil to the curry they fed to the bride's people and pretended to apologize for the 'accident'. In yet another wedding I witnessed, the groom's family threw salt and red peppers into the cooking fires and that gave out a terribly pungent smoke, causing the bride's people, who were congregated in one place, to cough and sneeze. The inferiority/superiority game is reversed in the next generation when the bride-taker becomes the bride-giver, with the reversal of role the very definition of what is involved in a patrilateral cross-cousin marriage. This role reversal means the trouble makers will then be at the receiving end of humiliations. In this particular kind of reciprocity, equilibrium is maintained by balancing the inferior and superior positions.

Witnessing a traditional Madia wedding can be shocking for a first timer; but once I got used to it I started to enjoy watching the 'fun' that the kin and affine are having at each others' expense. Sure enough, all of them get drunk during the wedding rituals. The Madia understand that whatever offense occurs during a wedding ceremony is to be pardoned and let go. If anyone complains about the quarrels at a wedding, the village council that sits to settle conflicts do not take such complaints into consideration.

Not only do all human relations fall in either the kin or the affine category, the parity opposition is also maintained among the Madia gods now dwelling in the spirit realm. The Madia refer to their gods using appropriate kinship terms. And parity works here as well. For example, if a certain god is the *eɽmi* to some people, the same god will be a *jīva* to the affine of those people. And vice versa. Thus, none of the different *dips* or 'realms' in the Madia worldview (i.e., the *dip* of the deceased humans, of the deceased animals and of the gods, and so on) is exempted from the kin and affine opposition.

5.13 *Vertical Parity: Crossness in all Generational Levels*

Kinship analysts in the past have totally depended on the key distinction of the Father from the Mother's Brother (using the well-worn Tamil example) to attest to the principle of opposition. In the Tamil kin terminology, only the two medial generation levels show the cross/parallel distinction, but the generations above or below do not. This is why the Madia kin terminology is comparatively a better illustration for parity because it distinguishes the kin in all of the generation levels as cross or parallel. I refer to this as transgenerational crossness. Those who have a family record of relatives of ten ascending generations identify which relative is a *jīva* (parallel) and which one is an *eɽmi* (cross) in all of the past generational levels, and they refer to those relatives using appropriate kin and affinal terms. The kin and affine distinc-

tion running through all the generation levels is a vertical parity. The marriage exchange is between the two vertical sides. Thus, the parity is forever.

Clark-Decès's accusation that the kin and affine distinction is too "fuzzy" and "fluid" to be of use as an analytical tool does not stand a chance in the Madia kin classification where parity is as clear as daylight. If anthropologists neglect looking at the kin terminology, they would of course miss the distinction.

5.14 *Horizontal Parity: Alternate Generation Merges*

Alternate Generation mergers (or simply, alternation) are not known in the Tamil kinship system, which is why I found the Madia kin terminology quite intriguing and confusing initially. The instances of alternate generation mergers found in the Madia kin terminology are not patchy, as seems to have been the situation in the cases cited in the anthropological literature for examples of alternation. Looking at the Madia terminology (particularly the address terms), the alternate generation mergers are almost complete because they are found in all of the four Generation levels. The odd numbered Generations have the same address terms (i.e., the terms for the G + 3 are found in G + 1 and in G – 1). And so is the case for the address terms for the even numbered Generations (i.e., the terms in G + 2 are seen in Ego's own G level [G + 0] and are also used to address the grandchildren [G – 2]). Thus, the vocative terminology shows that there are essentially only two Generations of kin categories: Ego's own Generation and the rest of the Generations. These two generations are adjacent to each other. They are distinct and there is generally no overlap between them. Let me call this the horizontal parity.

It is significant to note that there is no marriage interaction between these two Generations. Adjacent Generations are non-marriageable. The fundamental interaction, which is the giving and taking of brides, and which has been labelled as reciprocal alliance, takes place *only* within Ego's own Generational level, which is primarily made up of young men and women; that is, the youth. The elders are simply the facilitators of the marriages. We may describe the youth as the *forces* and the elders as the *matter*. Even as the physical universe is made up, at the fundamental level, of matter particles and force particles, the Madia social universe is made up of these two kinds: (1) the elders who interact with each other through alliance exchange of their youngsters and (2) the youngsters who are being engaged in the marriage. This duality, or parity, if you will, is also vital to the Madia kinship system. Parity conservation is one of the basic concepts in quantum physics, and so it is with the Madia kinship. (I plan to write more on this topic in an upcoming paper.)

5.15 *Parity and Symmetry*

There is symmetry everywhere you look in the Madia kinship structure. One kind of symmetry is that the number of constituents in two (or more) different sections is equal. Other symmetries are the male and female symmetry, the parallel and cross symmetry, the symmetry between kin terms that are marked for relative age and those that are unmarked for it, and there is the symmetry between Generational levels. (Vaz 2014: 90).

Another kind of symmetry is what can be called *mirroring*. What I mean by mirroring is that when there is a fluctuation or a small variation in one section, which seems to violate the symmetry that relates to the general characteristics of the Madia kin terminology, the same kind of fluctuation will be found in another section that corresponds to the first one but is of an opposite kind. The variation in the original section may have a function, but the variation being copied in the section that corresponds to it may or may not have a comparable function. However, copying the subtle fluctuation helps maintain the symmetry between the two equal but opposite sections, and thus symmetry is its function. Let me illustrate this with the following example.

There is an avoidance taboo between a woman's Husband's elder Brother (HeB) and a man's younger Brother's Wife (yBW). Thus the HeB - yBW is the avoidance duo, and it is all about restriction on sexual access and widow inheritance. It shows up in the kin terminology. The HeB is same as the category of an elder Brother and the man's yBW is the same category as the daughter-in-law (SW), who is a kin in the adjacent generation and therefore there can be no marital or sexual interaction between them. The terminological equation of HeB to Brother (HeB = eB), as well as that of yBW to a Daughter-in-law

(yBW = SW) has the same function: avoidance. However, this terminological equation based on avoidance (between a woman and her Husband's elder Brother) is mirrored in the equation of a woman's Husband's elder Sister to an elder Sister (HeZ = eZ), and a woman's yBW to a SW. In the latter case, there is no basis for an avoidance taboo because the restriction of sexual access is not applicable here. But still, the terminological equation in the former case is copied in the latter case. The terminological format is maintained even when there is no real function. Such copying of a variation in the kin terminology of one section in another corresponding section is what I call mirroring and it serves is to preserve the symmetry. There are other instances of this mirroring in the Madia terminology.

However, the point to be made here is not about the symmetries themselves but the fact that these symmetries are not possible except for the omnipresent parity. Also, these symmetries are not observable unless, as kinship analysts, we recognize the presence of parity. Because symmetry can be observed at all levels, I consider that supersymmetry is the unique feature of the Madia kin terminological structure. Supersymmetry is not possible without parity (Vaz 2014: 90).

5.16 *Parity as the Deep Structure*

None of the unique features of the Madia kinship system, such as the transgenerational crossness, the alternate generation mergers, and the symmetries will work without parity as their basis. This parity is the foundational concept. The opposition principle is a fundamental principle of organization. That is why I say parity is the deep structure of Madia kinship. It operates at all levels and manifests in the dual social organization, in the reciprocal marriage alliance, in the kin terminological structure, in the joking and avoidance behavior and in the role play in the rites of passage.

5.20 The Meaning of Kinship in the Madia Language

5.21 *General Kinship Vocabulary in Madia: None!*

Clark-Decès has faulted the structuralists for their obsession with the Tamil terms for kin and affine, and instead has ventured into doing the exegeses of "the general kinship vocabulary" in order to get to what she refers to as the local understanding of kinship. Well, she would have been disappointed with the Madia language because it has no general term for kinship. None at all.

After 30 years of living with the Madia and having become fluent in their language, I have not come across a Madia term that would mean 'kinship' and there is no Madia word that could be translated as 'kin' or 'relative'. I have asked people who are bilingual to translate the Hindi word for 'relatives'; i.e., "*rishtedar*", but no Madia could find one term that is the Madia equivalent for the English word kinship. Instead, my informants have invariably given me the most common expression meaning 'relatives', which is " *jīva thalla, eɽmi dhadmi,*" This expression has four words. Let me give the meaning of each of these four words in this expression.

jīva: It means 'life' ,'love', or 'affection'. In the context of kinship, *jīva* refers to the members of one's own lineage. It is also used, in general, to refer to someone who is a non-marriageable relative, and who are *dhādhal-thamox* (literally meaning 'elder Brother – younger Brother). Thus, this is the word for 'us' and 'kin'.

thalla : The literal meaning of *thalla* is 'head' but in this expression it is not used in that sense but as a reduplication made just to make the expression sound rhythmic.

eɽmi: This word means the 'partners in the marriage exchange'; i.e., bride-givers and bride-takers. They are referred to as *ako-mama* (literal meaning is Mother's Father – Mother's Brother). Sometimes, in certain phrases, this word is also used to mean alliance or marriage exchange.

dhadmi: This word means 'shadow'. Like *thalla*, it is not used in that sense but rather as a reduplication to add a ring to the expression.

Thus, there is no single word for 'kin' or 'relative' in Madia. Instead, there is only *jīva* or *eɽmi;* i.e., a kin or an affine. The apparent correlation between the sociological structure and the linguistic struc-

ture is striking. We have seen earlier how the four god-group sections fall into the two social fields as *jīva* and *eɽmi*. Now I show how the language itself does not allow a single term to cover kinship.

In Chapter II, I have shown how Clark-Decès took the word *contam* in Tamil, connected one of its meaning as 'kin' to another to its meaning as 'belonging', but then ignored the sense that people belong together and chose instead to use its sense as ownership of material goods to define kinship as merely a matter of rights. However, in the Madia language there is no room for such manipulations and misinterpretations as there is no general word for kin or kinship, and what is available is but the dual expression, known as *jīva* and *eɽmi*.

The fact that all the relations must fall into either one of the two kinds, *jīva* or *eɽmi*, is proof enough that the Madia kinship is conceived of as the working and weaving together of two opposing principles. The dual kin classification is certainly not a structuralist invention. It is an original and ingenious creation of the Dravidian people.

There are many more examples to show that in the Madia language there are no general terms to refer to many of the kin relations that can be found in the English and/or the Tamil languages. The duality in the Madia kinship cosmology comes through in the following six examples.

1. There is no general term in Madia to mean 'child' or 'children'. These English words can be translated into Tamil, but cannot be translated into Madia in which there are only Sons and Daughters.

2. Unlike in Tamil, there is no general term in Madia to mean male or female 'sibling'. Madia has no words to mean 'brother' or 'sister'; there are terms only for elder Brother and younger Brother. Similarly, there are only elder Sister and younger Sister.

3. Unlike Tamil, there are no general terms in Madia to mean 'parent'. There are only Father and Mother.

4. Similarly, there is no 'grandparent' ,'grandfather' or 'grandmother' in Madia. Instead, these are either Father's Father or Mother's Father, or either Father's Mother or Mother's Mother.

5. There are no general terms, or even specific kin terms, for grandchildren or grandson or granddaughter. Son's Sons and Daughters are distinguished from Daughter's Sons and Daughters.

6. The grandchildren are addressed using the same four terms as for the grandparents (because *alternate generation merger* is at work here).

All of these examples illustrate duality as the fundamental feature in Madia kin classification.

5.22 *The Test of Translation*

Let me do the test of translation that I did earlier in this article with the Tamil word for kinship. Suppose there is an article titled "Kinship in America" and I want to translate the title into Madia. Then I would have to write it as follows: *Americate lokur jīva eɽmi injor bah manthor.* The back translation of this Madia title would be: "How in America people are being *jīva*, *eɽmi.*" From the Madia point of view, kinship is about people "being *jīva*, *eɽmi*" to one another.

If kinship means being either *jīva* or *eɽmi*, and (as I noted in an earlier section in this article) if the *jīva* are non-marriageable and the *eɽmi* are marriageable, it shows that kinship and marriage are inseparable ideas. Like night and day, the one would not make sense without the other. It is the very opposition between the two entities that leads each of them to its meaning. This duality, and more precisely, the opposition of the two entities, is the essential nature of human kinship according to the Madia conceptualization.

Together, *jīva* and *eɽmi* make up kinship; but it is not a simple compound of the two. Rather, kinship comes to life in the interaction of the two opposing principles. What kind of interaction is that? It is the fundamental interaction of marriage.

5.30 The Meaning of Marriage in the Madia language

5.31 *Exchange is the Name of the Game*

If we ask a Madia person how one does a wedding (*marmi*), he or she will describe the wedding rituals. But if you ask how they arrange the marriage of their children, then they will go on to tell you about their *eɽmi kaxsna* 'game of marriage alliance'. The following is a description given by an elderly man about how they go about arranging a marriage.

> When one of our sons becomes a young adult and it is time for us to arrange his marriage, the first people we would go to ask for a bride are the old *eɽmi;* i.e., the very same men who married our sisters. We would tell one of them: *"I gave my sister to be your wife. And she has borne sons and daughters. Now the sons belong to your lineage. But the daughters belong to us, and therefore I have come to take my sister's daughter as a bride for my son."* My sister's husband cannot refuse me. After all, his children are the fruits borne by my sister's womb. It is because of one of our daughters that his lineage is growing. Therefore he should give us one of their daughters to help our lineage grow. A taker should give also, and this is how each cycle of exchange is made complete.
>
> But, what if my sister had borne only sons? That would be very unfortunate. In such a case, it becomes my duty to go searching for a new *eɽmi*. I will search for new alliance partners on the basis of the god-number. We do *eɽmi kaxsna* with anyone who has a different number of gods. I will visit different villages, meet with potential alliance partners, and offer a good bride-price of grain and liquor. If the girl's father so wishes, I will offer my son to do bridal-service in his house for a few years. I must also consult the girl's mother's brother and make sure he is willing to let go of his *puɽuli* claim on the girl. Only then I can take her for my son. This is how we do a new alliance. In the very next generation we will have to *return* a bride to complete the game of exchange.

The above is the precise description of a patrilateral cross-cousin marriage (i.e., the Father's Sister's Daughter or FZD alliance). Note that the informant has used imagery from horticulture as a proof of the logicality or reasonableness of this kind of alliance exchange. Just as we plant a tree and expect a harvest of fruits, a Madia man gives his sister away in marriage to another man with the hope that she will bear a daughter who could be the bride for his own son.

In this way, every new marriage is considered the first part of a two-part alliance game. Part two is to systematically follow through (for it cannot be arbitrary) in the very next generation in order to complete a cycle of reciprocal alliance. This should make it clear that in the Madia view, marriage means alliance. It is not either giving or taking, it is both giving and taking. The bride giver in one generation becomes the bride-taker in the next generation. It is all about exchange.

5.40 Reciprocity is Everything

5.41 *Self-Reciprocal Kin Terms*

Self-reciprocal terms are used routinely among the Madia. Without going into details, I can simply say that the Madia kin categorization works in such a way that two women or two men can address each other self-reciprocally, irrespective of differences in relative age and in generation. For example, when a woman calls me either *akka* (eZ), *kuchi* (MyZ), *ange* (eBW), or *atho* (FZ), it is perfectly proper for me to reciprocate by addressing that woman using whatever term she uses for me. Thus, I am the aunt for my niece, and she is my aunt.

5.42 *Super-Reciprocal Kin Terms*

Dziebel (2007) was perhaps the first scholar to use the term super-reciprocity to refer self-recipocal terms in the polar generational levels. Among the Madia, the terms in the levels G + 2 are also used for the rela-

tives in G - 2. For example, I am a *kako* (maternal grandmother) to my Daughter's Daughter and she will be my maternal grandmother, as well. The terms used for the G + 3 (which is a repeat of G + 1) are also used for G - 3.

5.43 ***Reciprocity in Alliance***

Lévi-Strauss was of the opinion that the patrilateral alliance rule (where the FZD is the bride), being a short cycle, could not have structural implications for the kin terminology, and many authors have followed suit. This has remained unchallenged, so far, mainly because of the non availability of ethnographic cases showing a specific terminological pattern expressing the patrilateral rule. Now the Madia data fill that gap. As I have described in my dissertation, as well as in other articles, the patrilateral alliance is reciprocity par excellence.

Recall the horticulture imagery used by the elderly informant. A man goes to the family where his sister has gone as a bride in the previous generation in order to collect the fruit of her womb: a girl, as a bride for his own son. In the patrilateral marriage alliance, the rule is that the debt of a bride in one generation must be '*returned*' in the very next generation. This means a *reversal* in the direction of the movement of the bride. It means the giver in one generation becomes the taker in the next, and vice versa. If this is not reciprocity, then nothing is.

The patrilateral alliance is reciprocity par excellence. In the horticulture imagery, there is no unreasonable demand or pressure or bargaining. We sow a seed and wait for Mother Nature to do her work and reward us. By contrast, the direct exchange is like trading of agriculture products; there is comparison of value and bargaining. The matrilateral exchange, where the bride-giving clan or family is always a giver and the bride-taker is always a taker, is lacking in reciprocity. In addition, this alliance is associated with the giving of a dowry along with the bride because the giver is considered to be of lower status and the taker is considered to be of higher status, which makes it a symbol of feudalism where there is also entitlement.

The preference for either the patrilateral or the matrilateral cross-cousin (the notion of 'side' dealt with in Chapter II) is something Clark-Decès has described as discriminatory and therefore lacking in real reciprocity. However, the preference for patrilateral alliance among the Madia cannot be seen as a discrimination against the matrilateral cousin. The Madia notion of *puṭul*, as I have already shown, means that every girl is born of, and unto, the Mother's Brother. Even the girl who is the male Ego's matrilateral cross-cousin is born unto her own Mother's Brother who will come to take her to marry his son. Therefore, if every Madia girl is sought out by her own Mother's Brother's Son, where is the discrimination?

5.50 The Madia Mother's Brother

Clark-Decès's ultimate weapon against alliance is a false projection of the uncle-niece marriage that makes a caricature of the Mother's Brother and with which she has been able to scandalize Dravidian kinship. Madia kinship, however, provides no room for such a thing to happen.

5.51 ***Uncle-Niece Marriage is a Taboo***

There is no uncle-niece marriage among the Madia. Period. Among the Madia (as well as the other Central India Dravidian societies), it is a taboo to marry a Mother's Brother, or for that matter anyone from the adjacent Generational level. On the other hand, a Madia woman can marry a classificatory Mother's Father (e.g., MFFyBS) who, by rarest of rare chances, happens to be close to her in age. This marriage is permissible because the classificatory Mother's Father, who belongs in the G + 2 Generation, is, in view of alternate generation mergers, seen as belonging in the same Generation level as the bride. Thus, while the Mother's Father is a marriageable category, the Mother's Brother is absolutely not. (Even in the South Dravidian, as discussed in Chapter III, the supposedly high percentage of the uncle-niece marriages is an invalid datum and Good was simply in too much of a hurry to be able to write off Dravidian kinship when he says "there is no such thing as Dravidian kinship system," based on his faulty understanding of the uncle-niece marriage in the south.)

5.52 *Mother's Brother is Not a Filial Kin*

In the Madia fieldwork, interviews with individuals, more often than not, turn into group interviews because anyone watching it joins in. A group interview can easily turn into a focus group when everyone jumps in to say what they think. At the end of one such interview, the session turned into a focus group on the issue of kin status of the Mother and the Mother's Brother. One of those present, a cultural expert, gave a final verdict on the issue that I paraphrase here:

> It is actually simple. Whoever is my Father's *jīva* is my own *jīva* too. Likewise, whoever is my Father's *eʈmi* is my own *eʈmi*. My Mother's Brother is my Father's *eʈmi*; and therefore he will be mine too. The same would apply to the Mother, if we must put her in one of the two categories. Even though she gave birth to us, she is our *eʈmi* category because she is our Father's *eʈmi*. Otherwise he would not have married her in the first place. How can our Mother be our *eʈmi*'s *jīva* and our *jīva* too? That is not possible. However, the ideas, *jīva* or *eʈmi*, is applied to men because men engage in the exchange.

The above perspective is the exact opposite of what Clark-Decès has said in her critique of Dumont's description of filiation and affinity as transmitted from Father to Son. Clark-Decès has argued for the Tamil child's view of the Mother's Brother as a filial kin because the child sees the kin connection through the Mother and not the Father. She has concluded that the Mother's Brother is in fact a filial kin because the Mother is a filial kin. However, this is not so in the Madia kin classification. The Mother, is a *jīva* of the affine (i.e., the Mother's Brother) and therefore, in the universal scheme of things, even the Mother is my *eʈmi*. (For more details, see Vaz 2014: 33).

Let me illustrate this with an anecdote. Once I witnessed a family quarrel in which the father of a married woman came and took her away from her husband because she had suffered domestic violence. But her father refused to take her young children along saying, "I am taking my daughter who is *jīva* with me. But her children are your *jīva* and they will stay with you". This shows that though a married woman lives and dies in her husband's house, she remains the *jīva* of the *eʈmi* group. (By the same logic, one's Father's Sister who is married and gone to her husband's house is still one's *jīva*.)

5.53 *Madia Mother's Brother is an Affine*

I began this chapter by glossing the two key terms in the Madia kinship vocabulary, *jīva* and *eʈmi*. There I saw that the word *eʈmi* refers to the 'partners in the marriage exchange'; i.e., the bride-givers and the bride-takers. The *eʈmi* are also referred to as *ako-mama* (i.e., Mother's Father – Mother's Brother). Note that the kintype *mama;* i.e., the Mother's Brother, belongs in the *eʈmi* (affine) category. This alone is proof enough that the MB is not a filial kin but an affinal kin.

For additional evidence of this fact, the kin term *mama* for the Mother's Brother is also used for the Husband's or Wife's Father, as well as the Father's Sister's Husband, all of whom are no doubt affinal kin. It is easy to see that the Mother's Brother is in the same kin category as the others:

mama = MB = HF = WF = FZH.

However, in order to differentiate the *mama* who is the MB from the other *mamas*, the Mother's Brother is referred to as the *puʈul mama*. The term *puʈul* means 'place of origin or birth'. For any Madia person, man or woman, the Mother's Brother is his/her place of origin. What is most relevant to point out here is that even though all children, boys as well as girls, are seen as originating from their Mother's Brother, a girl child is expected to return to the place of her origin. The Mother's Brother comes to take his niece (Sister's Daughter) as a return gift in the place of the Sister he had given as a bride to a man in the previous generation. Thus, the MB, who was a bride-giver in the previous generation, comes in the

current generation to be a bride-taker for his son (and never for himself). He is a bride-giver who becomes a bride-taker and thus he is certainly an affine.

5.60 Summary

In this chapter I have shown, first of all, that the principle of opposition is present wherever I look in Madia kinship. Marriageability and non-marriageability are the primary functions of the Madia god-number system. Parity is in their dual social organization as *jīva* and *eʈmi*. Every relative is either a *jīva* or an *eʈmi*. There is no overlap and Clark-Decès has nothing to complain about as being fuzzy or fluid. Parity is the deep structure and it is manifested in the many symmetries found in the terminological structure.

Secondly, we have seen that the Madia language does not have a general term or one single word for relative or kin. Instead, there are two words, *jīva* and *eʈmi*, used in combination (*jīva thalla, eʈmi dhadmi*) to mean 'relatives'. What this testifies to is the fact that in the local view the meanings of kinship and alliance are inseparable. Clark-Decès would have found nothing in the Madia language that could be used to reinterpret the meaning of kinship as anything else. We have seen that the phrase *eʈmi kaxsna,* which stands for marriage and literally means 'game of alliance', indicates that any and every Madia marriage is the first part of a two part game. Thus, marriage means alliance exchange. The meaning of kinship, the purpose of parity, and the function of the social organization all point to one thing: marriage. Thus, I have shown that kinship and marriage are inseparable notions. I have also shown that in the FZD marriage practice, it is enacted like a planter coming to find a fruit. And, therefore, there is only the hope for a return and not so much an entitlement (as Clark-Decès has misinterpreted the Tamil marriage to imply). I have also discussed how the FZD alliance is reciprocity par excellence. I have discussed that the self-reciprocal and super-reciprocal kin terminologies are manifestations of the fact that reciprocity or reciprocal alliance is the fundamental organizing principle in Madia kinship.

Thirdly, I have shown that because of the taboo on uncle-niece marriage among the Madia, none of those authors who have used the case of uncle-niece marriage in the South Dravidian to fault the alliance theory could have done so with the Central Dravidian. I have shown that the Madia MB is essentially an affine, and that affinity is indeed transmitted from Father to Son, as Dumont has claimed.

In conclusion to this chapter, let me reiterate that Clark-Decès could not have found anything in the Madia kinship — neither in its social organization, nor in the language, nor in the kin terminology nor in marriage practice — which she could have genuinely used to attack the alliance theory. On the contrary, there is plenty in the Madia kinship that supports the alliance theory. In fact, every unique feature of the Madia kinship system mentioned in this article can be explained as an expression of the Madia marriage rule that prescribes the patrilateral female cross-cousin (FZD) as the bride. Moreover, the beautifully symmetrical character of the Madia kinship structure only affirms the value of a structural approach in studying it. My study of the Madia kinship system in which I have drawn conceptual and structural parallels between the Madia social organization and the structure of DNA, and also between the Madia categorization of kin relations and the classification of elementary particles in the Standard Model of particle physics, points to the tip of a possible mathematical iceberg (Vaz 2014: 147). The more I pursue research along these lines, the more I have become convinced of the value of the alliance theory and the structural approach to studying the Dravidian kinship system, in particular, and human kinship systems, in general. Once again, I arrive at this conclusion not because I am trained in one particular theory or approach, because I am not. My claims and arguments are based entirely on my own experience of the Dravidian way of life starting from my birth and to this day for it being a part and parcel of my everyday life.

CHAPTER V

6.00 CONCLUSION

6.10 Perspectives and Perversions

Clark-Decès has presented Dravidian kinship and alliance on the altar of her feminist biases. She has claimed that the Dravidian bilateral alliance "does not always work in favor of the South Indian woman," and therefore the women who are "the casualties of bad marriage" conspire together to insist on the practice of uncle-niece marriage because this type of marriage serves "to provide an escape hatch from marriage itself" and helps to "free women from this institution" (2014: 93). This is nothing but a distortion. So are her claims that the great outcome of the uncle-niece marriages is women from three generations (Mother's Mother, Mother, and Daughter) being able to stay home together, and that these women's staying together in this way works "against the very meaning of marriage, which, throughout India, is to send women away to another family." She describes this as a "negation of marriage" itself, and goes on to say that "we even see a condemnation of marriage – the cornerstone of the alliance theory." After falsely projecting the uncle-niece marriage as the commonest and the most favored marriage in South India, she claims that it is a verdict "against Husbands and Fathers" who, she would tell us, are ultimately made to surrender the sphere of kinship to their women. She then interprets this to mean "an absolute rejection" of the idea of "exchange of women by men." As though all of this were not enough, she even claims that "a vast corpus of Tamil myths and rituals" depict the Tamil woman as "resisting [a] conjugal role" and she explains that this is because conjugality "is not her thing" (2014: 94). This is truly incredible! Clark-Decès set off originally to dispel the myth of alliance, to dismiss Dumont's alliance theory and to dismantle the structuralist approach, but she does not hold back from deriding the South Indian peoples' system of kinship and marriage along the way.

She begins with a denial of the parity principle as being fundamental to Dravidian kinship because this principle is the basis for the structural analysis in which the key kin and the key affines are men. Next, by manipulation of selective meanings of shrewdly chosen and insufficiently glossed terms, she makes a case that Tamil kinship is about ownership rights and *entitlement* rather than about mutuality in *exchange*. In her ethnographic descriptions, *conflict* rather than social *integration* is the prominent character of Tamil social life. *Competing* for property, privilege, rank and acquiring a better position for oneself is the cultural intent, rather than *adhering to* the tradition of reciprocal exchange with others who are one's equals. *Bullying* a rival kin, be it a sibling or a spouse, into retreat fits better for Clark-Decès as the name of the Tamils' kinship games (which Clark-Decès says are symbolized by the traditional ram-fights and bull-fights) rather than *networking* with kinship groups. And the ultimate "goal" of the Tamil kinship is "to do *violence*" (2014: 54) rather than *to have alliance*. She ends up ruling that kinship and marriage must bear the blame for the incredible suffering the protagonists in her stories — most of them women — have had to endure. Thus, in Clark-Decès's depiction, a theory of kinship and violence replaces the theory of reciprocal alliance.

Clark-Decès has been quite successful in her scandalizing of Dravidian kinship, the mountainous evidence to the contrary notwithstanding. The evidence to the contrary has either been hidden from her view by the clouds of her own deep biases that she cannot see through, or, more likely, for which she chose to look the other way. Firstly, it is hard to believe that during all those months and years she spent in Tamil Nadu doing her research on kinship and marriage she did not come across a wedding invitation card wherein she could have noticed the separate lists of kin and affine. I called the Madurai Kamaraj University and the anthropology department kindly shared with me two sample wedding cards from their collection, which I have used in this paper. This university is very close to the suburb of Madurai city

where Clark-Decès lived, met her informants and collected her data. Secondly, in her exegesis of the local terms, Clark-Decès ignored the most appropriate word in Tamil for kinship; i.e., *uravu* – a term which came up again and again in her informants' talks. It is a term that would have led her to see Tamil marriage as alliance. Perhaps it is for that very reason she did not discuss it in detail as she did with the other terms. Thirdly, her caricature of the Mother's Brother also seems deliberate given the numerous false premises (listed above in Chapter III) which had to be made in order to justify her false claims. All in all, there is no shortage of spurious arguments while there is very little that reflects a deep understanding of the Dravidian kinship system. According to her, kinship in the structuralist sense does not even exist. Such extremely biased views have rendered the gendered approach a bent one.

It is not an easy task having to say that the emperor wears no clothes. In the four chapters of this article I have presented ample data, covering both the South and the Central Dravidian, to show the problems occurring in every one of Clark-Decès's major claims against the alliance theory, the structural approach and the Dravidian kinship system itself. Clark-Decès had chosen to join a few other scholars who have, in the past, effectively declared to others that the Dravidian kinship system is dead. I hope my response has made it clear that Dravidian kinship is alive and well and it will not breathe its last just because someone willfully chooses to skillfully write an obituary.

6.20 A Few Lingering Questions

I promised my readers at the end of the first chapter that I would address some of the main concerns expressed by Clark-Decès that, according to her, are unaccounted for in the structural approach. I will now address these concerns.

6.21 *First Concern: Female or Male Perspective?*

The significance of the local women's perspectives based on their experiences of their kinship cannot be overemphasized. Most of the life stories that I have been collecting in order for me to understand the Madia way of life are from the women folk. However, Clark-Decès does more than that. She attempts to recast the Tamil kinship not just from a female perspective but from a feminist perspective. She has argued hard, trying to show that the female kin, and not the male kin, provide the core of Tamil kinship. In this view, women from three successive generations form the *atom of kinship*. And the male kin are portrayed as willingly surrendering themselves to these women. Thus, she holds that "the very gender group the French structuralists ignored, prevail" (Clark-Decès 2019: 100). It is, though, lost on me how pitting male kin against female kin is helpful. In addition, it seems totally unnecessary.

Now, since the Dravidians in ages past have conceived their kinship, alliance and social organization in certain ways, bringing modern notions of gender with which to evaluate their classification of kin relations will not help in gaining an emic perspective. Let us take the idea of descent as an example. It is a well-known fact that the Dravidian societies are, typically, partilineal and patrilocal. In the case of the Thanjavur Kaḷḷar, only the men use the clan title. Clan titles stand for the male descent line (patrilineality) and a woman takes neither her Father's nor her Husband's clan title. Would it be accurate or fair if an outsider were to interpret this to say that Kaḷḷar women are of less worth and value in their society due to lack of a clan title? If that were true, wouldn't the modern Dravidian women be fighting to have clan titles? Rather, they understand it as a practical issue having a functional value and not as a moral, political, or purely economic issue. This is a very important distinction and therefore let me explain it further.

The Kaḷḷar women distinguish between *pirandha veedu* and *puhundha veedu* – the first refers to her Father's house and the second her Husband's or Father-in-law's house. (Clark-Decès agrees that this generally is the case in any community in South India as well as in most, if not all, of India.) A woman's life is thus divided between these two homes. There is a clear and definite 'before-marriage' and 'after-marriage' *location* for a woman. This is not the case for a man. Men have only one location, as they can live in the Father's house all their lives (and hence live patrilocally). Brothers stay put while the sisters are given and taken in marriage. The point to be made here is this: patrilocality, along with the patrilineage, as

shown and maintained in inheriting a clan title and the ancestral property (both passed on from Fathers to Sons), gives the Dravidian men the kind of *stability* that the Dravidian women do not have.[14] This stability works in favor of men to have permanent lineage and clan membership whereas women's movement and residence instability make permanent membership impractical for them. A woman who is widowed/divorced and remarried could end up in a third or fourth lineage. (This lack of stability is also the practical reason why women traditionally are not given a share, along with her Brothers, in *immovable* property such as ancestral lands and homes, but instead are compensated with gifts in the forms of cash, jewelry, expensive clothes, furniture and many other valuable items, all of which are moveable.) For the same reason; i.e., stability in locality and lineage, it works for men to have a stable opposition as kin and affine, but it does not and cannot work for women in the same way. It is precisely because filiation and affinity are concepts fully applicable to the male members that it makes sense to study the Tamil/Dravidian kinship from a male Ego's perspective. This is exactly what the structuralists have been doing. Therefore, it is unreasonable that she blames them for doing what they do by following the *emic* perspective.

It should be our goal as analysts to try to see how a kinship system is configured following the *indigenous conceptualization* of it. It is all up to the local kin folk as to whether their kinship classification and configuration is male egocentric or female egocentric. If a Dravidian kinship system is male egocentric, it has to be understood in that way first. In my own analysis of the Madia kinship system, it became clear to me that features such as symmetry, optimal balance, super reciprocity and social integration are the goals or basic themes in the making of Madia kinship. These effects are achieved by using patrilineage for descent, patrilocality for a residence pattern and the patrilateral female cross-cousin for marriage alliance, all of which go to show that the male Ego is at the center of the Madia kinship configuration. Not surprisingly, it is only from the perspective of a male Ego that I seem to be able to observe the many symmetries in the Madia terminological structure because the symmetries break down when we view the structure with a female Ego at its center. If this is the case, shouldn't I study the Madia kinship configuration in the same way it has been conceptualized by the Madia themselves; i.e., from the male Ego's perspective? It is possible to do this without discounting the Madia women's kinship experiences and their emotions? How the women are being treated in the Madia or the Tamil society would make an equally valuable study. I think it would not make the other perspective irrelevant or unnecessary. If Clark-Decès saw that the role and significance of women in Dravidian kinship was unaccounted for in the structuralist view, she should have been able to present her data and her questions on these topics without having to resort to diminishing the role of men and portraying them as emasculated and pitiful, as though doing so would somehow make the women more empowered.

It is my understanding that the women's role in the construction of Dravidian kinship and society is as significant as the men's role and not less, even by one iota. The coming in and going out of women (i.e., wives come in and sisters go out) is how the kinship system is woven and created. Dravidian kin classification and social organization is the direct effect of such a movement of the women without which there can be no kinship system or social structure. Speaking as a Tamil woman, our kinship system is a co-creation of men and women.

As I have already mentioned, there are conceptual parallels between the world of the subatomic particles and the configuration of relations in the Madia kinship. One such parallel can be drawn between the atomic structure and the structure of the Madia atom of kinship. The male kin, being bound to patrilocality and by patrilineality, are like the protons and neutrons being bound by the strong nuclear force in the nucleus of an atom. The strong nuclear force that binds them is parallel to the notion of descent. Now, atoms consist not only of protons and neutrons, but also of electrons. The Dravidian female, being unbound and in movement through exchanges, is comparable to the electron of an atom orbiting the nucleus. Electrons are involved in the bonding of atoms (to become molecules) when electrons are shared or transferred (lost or gained), which is parallel to the different lineages/clans (i.e., descent) interacting through exchange of brides; i.e., alliance. In this view, the *atom of kinship* is made up neither entirely of male kin (the structuralist view exemplified by Dumont, and Lévi-Strauss) nor entirely of female kin (the feminist view exemplified by Clark-Decès), but is made up of both male and female kin. This is not something I devised to use as an amicable middle ground between these opposing viewpoints, but as an understanding that I have gained through extensive structural analysis.

I cannot close this section without addressing the issue of patriarchy. If patriarchy in South Indian societies is a concern of the feminist anthropologists (and the provocation for Clark-Decès's derision of Dravidian alliance), then let me reassure them. The Tamil women, now more than ever, can and do raise their voices whenever and wherever something seems to work to their disadvantage and, as a result, every successive generation is witnessing more and more positive changes. More often than not, the leading activists for women's emancipations have been men: Sunramanya Bharathi, EVR Periyar, Annadurai, and Karunanidhi to name a few; thus, both Dravidian men and women have been working together on this. The point I wish to make here is that revolutionary changes have been made and more may still be needed, but mainly in the area of patriarchy.[15] On the other hand, no Tamil, male or female, feminist or otherwise, seems to have ever suggested that we throw away our kinship system, our kin terminology and our kin categorization. An equivalent of the English idiom which says "throwing the baby away with the bath water" is not known in the Tamil language. Yet, that is what Clark-Decès seems to have advocated that the Tamil women should do. Her evaluation of Tamil kinship on the basis of her deep feminist biases, though done in the name of championing for the female perspective, ends up in pitting the women against their men, which is unjustifiable and unhelpful.

6.22 *Second Concern: Child's or Adult's Perspective?*

Clark-Decès rejects the structuralist view of the Mother's Brother as an affine (the bride-giver to the Father) and instead sees him as an avuncular figure, "someone tied to the child through its mother." She concludes her exegesis of the Tamil word for the Mother's Brother by saying that "from the perspective of a Tamil *child*, the mother's brother is associated not with affinity but with kinship, particularly filiation...." However, Clark-Decès's support of the *child's* perspective is problematic.

The stories from my childhood presented in Chapter I are intended to show how my own understanding of our kinship and social organization grew and changed with age and maturity. A child's perspective on kinship is very different from an adult's perspective. Young children are not yet fully members of a Dravidian form of social organization. Full membership is given following the change of one's kin status after marriage. We refer to the bride and the groom, even on their wedding day, as we have until then; i.e., as 'boy' and 'girl'. Marriage is synonymous with becoming an adult (even like getting a driver's license may be in the western world). It is very rare among the Tamil for grown men and women to remain single. Recruitment into adulthood and into filiation or lineage happens through marriage and by bearing children. I know this because only as an adult does a man start using his clan title. If you look at the wedding invitation cards, the names of young males appear *without* the clan title, just like the girls' and the women's names do. Only the married men's names are given along with their clan title, which goes to show that only married men are actually members of their lineage, clan, and the wider social organization.

Therefore, it is an adult's perspective that must be taken into account while considering the kin status of the Mother's Brother, especially since it is all about deciding whether he is a kin or an affine. It is only in our adult lives that issues such as marriage alliance, clan system and social structure come into our full view. Any Dravidian man would be able to see how his Mother's Brother belongs in a group that is different and opposite to his own. It is only as an adult that I can analyze and understand that the uncle-niece marriage cannot, and does not, do anything to hinder or weaken the bilateral reciprocal alliance that is the basic assumption underlying the Tamil kinship system. Therefore, while it is important to include the child's kinship experiences, even as I have done in this article, we should also recognize that a child's view of kinship is subject to change and that it is eventually replaced by an adult perspective. A child's perspective is no substitute for, and is never more significant than, the adult's perspective.

The Dravidian kinship system was not created by a group of high IQ children. Kinship and social organization is not child's play. It must have been devised by adults as a strategy to survive and thrive as

an organized society in the face of incredible challenges which are now hard for us to imagine. Therefore, insistence that how a child perceives the category for the Mother's Brother is truly its category in the Dravidian kinship system only betrays childlike comprehension and not real understanding.

6.23 *Third Concern: Cultural or Structural Perspective?*

The significance of the social structural perspective should be clear from my discussions of the Kaḷḷar wedding invitation card. Equally significant is the cultural study of what becomes evident through the individual] life stories and personal experiences. I have included both kinds of data in my arguments throughout this article.

There is no shortage of Tamil literature that depicts the characteristics of our kinship relations and what individual people go through. The characters in this literature are always people living in some sort of a community and are shown weaving their 'webs of significance' by means of kinship relationships. Life stories are, I suggest, a great way to do cultural studies. Therefore, what is problematic in Clark-Decès work is not highlighting Tamil people's kinship experiences through life stories and detailing conflicts in the family and the heartaches it brings, but rather her use of these data to dismiss the structural aspects of Tamil kinship as though the latter are less real or less relevant. Moreover, her ethnographic descriptions suggest that Tamil kinship, marriage and social organization are harmful to individual wellbeing, and especially so for the women.

Once again, it is my view that cultural data and structural data need not be pitched as being in opposition. It does not have to be either/or, because it is both/and. The adverse effect of such a false dichotomy is exemplified throughout Clark-Decès's work. Clark-Decès calls the structuralist focus on the kin terminologies an unhelpful obsession that must be eliminated. But, in my opinion, what the structural approach can do the cultural approach, alone, can never do. My own study of the Madia kin terminological structure has led me to see things I would never have seen otherwise. For me, it is mind blowing to observe that how the Madia kinship is structured and how it works is strikingly similar to how the DNA works (Vaz 2014: 63-77). The key structural features of the DNA, its function, its dynamics and its organization or packaging are all comparable to the structure, function and social organization of the Madia kinship. In an upcoming paper I lay out the parallels between the Madia kin term classification and the classification of elementary particles in the Standard Model of modern physics. Each key concept in Madia kinship finds a match in modern physics. All I can say at the moment is that in the Central Dravidian kinship system we may be looking at the tip of a mathematical iceberg that, when we work it out, may help answer some of the as yet unanswered questions, and not just in the field of social anthropology.

7.00 APPENDIX I

7.10 PUBERTY ANNOUNCEMENT IN SOUTH INDIA



Figure 7.1: Banner in front of the hotel where puberty celebration was held.



Figure 7.2: Welcome banner for puberty celebration.

8.00 APPENDIX II

8.10 THANJAVUR KA||AR WEDDING INVITATION CARD



Figure 8.1: Title page.



Figure 8.2: Content page.

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Figure 8.3: Lists of the affine and the kin.



Figure 8.4: Lists of the affine and the kin (continued).

9.00 APPENDIX III

9.10 PIRAMALI KA||AR WEDDING INVITATION CARD



Figure 9.1: Lists of kin and affine in a Piramali Ka||ar wedding invitation card.



Figure 9.2: Lists of kin and affine in a Piramali Kaḷḷar wedding invitation card (continued).



Figure 9.3: Lists of kin and affine in a Piramali Ka[[ar wedding invitation card (continued).

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[1] The Piramalai Kaḷḷar, to whom Dumont (1983) and Clark-Decès (2014) have referred, are considered a subgroup different from the Thanjavur Kaḷḷar to whom Indira Arumugam (2011) has referred. They both fall under the Mukkulathor caste group. I am a Kaḷḷar from Thanjavur.

[2] Not to be mistaken as an endorsement of casteism and prejudices associated with it.

[3] Variously known in the literature as Abujhmadia, Hill Madia, Maria, and Maria Gond.

[4] The views I express in this paper are based on my lifelong experiences as part of living with both South and Central Dravidian societies, as well as on my continual study of Dravidian kinship. None of my views are meant to be political statements, neither on kinship and gender nor on the notion of being Dravidian, and therefore should not be taken as such.

[5] There are two or three other clans in my village, Thennavanadu, who are also considered to be sibling clans or kin groups because they share the same clan deity, or family of deities.

[6] Here it is relevant to recall a point made previously, which is that the term *murai* is combined with '*uravu*' and not with '*contam*'. The term *uravumurai* is sometimes used as two separate words, as in *uravin murai*, where the '*in*' functions like the English preposition 'of'. Thus, whether it is used as a single word or two words, the meaning remains the same.

[7] In her discussion of the uncle-niece marriage, Clark-Decès uses yet another local term, *urimai,* that, in the context of kinship and alliance, would mean a special right or privilege to marry a cross-cousin or a niece. Here, again, she maneuvers the interpretation in such a way as to claim that Tamil marriage is not about exchange but about entitlement. She begins well by connecting the meaning of *murai* (which she has glossed as 'the right thing to do') with the meaning of *urimai* (i.e., the 'right to marry'), and then goes on to describe it as a moral and legal prerogative. Eventually, though, the idea of 'rightness' takes the backseat while the 'right' (as in legality) to marry becomes central. Thus, *urimai,* which she describes as an individual's quasi-legal right to marry a particular kin, takes precedence over *murai,* which stands for a socially acceptable and prescribed marriage alliance. This maneuver makes it convenient, I suggest, for her to later write off the Tamil marriage as being about entitlement and not really about exchange. Then she goes overboard to describe how this sense of entitlement is used by people as a means to control, coerce and bully others to get what already and legally belongs to them. Thus, she portrays kinship in Tamil Nadu as a violent game.

[8] Anthropologists consider Madia as one of the Gond family of tribes. The Madia, however, do not like to be counted as part of the Gond tribes and they refer to the latter as '*mokasir*'. The Madia call themselves Gaitha and believe they are a separate group who are even more ancient than the Gonds.

[9] Other Central Dravidian tribes include the Muria, Bisonhorn Madia (also known as Dandami Madia), the Dhurwa, the Raj Gond, Koya, and Kolami.

[10] The Madia *penk* or gods are their clan-deities, possibly the founding fathers of their society or even their cultural heroes or powerful personalities who were feared and honored. Fürer-Heimendorf (1979) translated *penk* as 'brothers', though there are female as well as male *penk*. His translation emphasizes the 'siblingship' among the clans with the same number///.

[11] This is true of all Gond societies (Fürer-Haimendorf 1979: 80-81; Grigson 1938: 239).

[12] The only exception is the five-gods group (the number of clans in this group is as many as the rest of them put together) in which people can sometimes marry within provided their respective gods are different.

[13] As my family started living among the Madia as part of their village community, my husband and I were eventually assigned a different number of gods (*penk)* so that our marriage is right from the Madia viewpoint. Since then I have belonged in the five-*penk* group andvmy husband in the six-*penk* group. Everyone in the community knows how to address us with the correct kin terms.

[14] Rare exceptions to this generalization do exist due to lack of a son in a family, in which case the daughter may be allowed to own her Father's house and live there with her husband and their children. But even so, neither she nor her sons can ever inherit her Father's clan name.

[15] It has been held by many social activists that patriarchy was not even a character of ancient Dravidian societies but was something introduced later on by the same people who brought in the detrimental and cruel caste system. Irrespective of whether patriarchy was original or adopted, it is an area where changes still need to be introduced.